The Debate and Forensics Team has brought home dozens of awards from a host of competitions held nationwide, from Louisiana to New Hampshire.

The team has ranged from six to twelve members who participate in the tournament against students from such well-known universities as Rice, University of Texas-Austin, Xavier, Louisiana State University and Louisiana Tech.

Sandra Washington, director of the ODU Debate and Forensics team has stated that throughout the team’s competitions we they have made a good showing throughout the years and intend to continue to do so.

Speech Chorus was in Demand on and off campus

By James Lidington

It's been a busy year for the Old Dominion University Speech Chorus, the on-campus and community performance arm of the forensics team.

The 20-member group, which performs dramatic interpretations of literature not originally written for the stage, gave eight shows this year in addition to competing in several forensics tournaments.

The chorus recently performed a program titled "Warning: No Whiners Need Apply!" in honor of Women's History Month, which included readings of a prose piece by storyteller J. California Cooper and poet Lucille Clifton's "Homage to My Hips." Before that, the students participated in the university's Martin Luther King Jr. Day observance.

For Black History Month, the chorus performed a program based on the spiritual song "We Are the Rainbow People," which included a reading of the song's lyrics and Langston Hughes' poem "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." It was performed off campus at a local church and at the Norfolk Naval Base.

On April 11, the chorus performed at a screening of the Academy Award-winning film "No Man's Land" as part of the university Film and Video Festival.

As members of the forensics team, the students also compete at tournaments in such categories as Lincoln-Douglas debate, prose, poetry and after-dinner speech.

And, between the performances and the tournaments, are the practices, although practice time is scarce due to the students' class and work schedules.

"The total forensics program shows that intellectual pursuits are as exacting as athletic pursuits," said Sandra Joe-Washington, a senior lecturer in the Department of Communication and Theatre Arts and director of the forensics program.

"The students have to keep up the quality, and that takes a lot of energy and discipline. They are every bit as energetic about their pursuits as athletes."

Funding for the forensics program has been a perennial problem, according to Joe-Washington, who said that it has not had a budget increase in six years. In addition to receiving more consistent financial support, she would like to see students get academic credit for their efforts.

Joe-Washington noted that Dana Burnett, vice president for student services, recently allocated funds to help send five students to a national competition in Rome, Ga., April 18. Previously, members of the forensics team had a good showing at a prestigious competition in February at George Mason University, where eight students qualified for the national competition.

Sandra-Joe Washington