

Learning Report: World University Debating Championship 2020

In January this year I attended the World Universities Debating Championships (WUDC), which is an annual tournament which took place in Bangkok, Thailand this year. The tournament is composed of 9 preliminary debate rounds where over 350 teams competed, followed by breakout rounds, in which only 48 teams are qualified to debate in each category, culminating with the Grand Finals. WUDC is the largest tournament available to debaters, both in scale and prestige and debaters from almost all countries in the world participate. It is widely regarded that the biggest achievement a team can make at WUDC is to qualify for the “open break” and be one of the 48 qualifying teams. The HKU English Debate Team had previously been very close to achieving this but had never been able to jump the hurdle. This year my partner and I aimed to work hard to be able to break this ceiling for HKU and we were successful. Though I am proud of our success and hard work, our awards and achievements were certainly not the most important takeaways from WUDC.

WUDC was an incredibly formative learning experience for me in many ways. On an intellectual and academic level, I was able to engage in pressing and controversial debates on a range of subjects from climate change, security and the global economy to freedom of speech, feminism and religion. Being in an environment with people who had such a diverse range of opinions and depths of knowledge, I learnt so much even in areas I thought I was already well-informed on. One of the biggest and most valuable lessons I learnt was that there is always more to learn and understand, and the value of learning from your competition. The tournament has encouraged me to spend more time trying to understand better the problems that our societies face and how these issues impact different people. Though the intellectual stimulation that WUDC provides is extremely valuable the opportunity for learning is not restricted to the exchange of knowledge within a debate. Having had almost a thousand participants, WUDC was an opportunity for immersive inter-cultural exchanges. The ability to discuss global issues with the people who are directly impacted by them, and the opportunity to connect with such a diverse group of people was one of the highlights of the experience.

WUDC also opened my eyes to the extents to which university debating in Hong Kong has the potential to rise to. The tournament consisted of workshops and lectures by seasoned debaters and coaches on the techniques and skills required to excel at the sport. This was a valuable opportunity to be able to take the tips and advice I learnt from them and other debaters back to the training sessions of the debating team at HKU, which my teammate and I are currently in the process of conducting. Furthermore, speaking to people from some of the strongest debating unions I gained insight into how to better organize and run our own debating team, and what factors we need to focus on to continue to grow. Without the support of the university in aiding us fund our participation in these tournaments through scholarships like the Chui Excellence Scheme we would not be able to develop debating at HKU, so I am extremely grateful and feel privileged to have been able to attend this event and continue pushing HKU's debating up.

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