



2020 NEWSLETTER

Vol. 5, 2019-2020

Welcome to the 2020 Climb Newsletter covering the past year of events.

The Newsletter offers a glimpse into what we are doing and highlights the stories of students, coaches, and Climb staff that are reaching for the highest levels of excellence in speech and debate. A big thanks to Nico Roshau who put together the initial draft of this newsletter and to all the participants that shared their experiences.

As you can imagine, our biggest challenge was shifting from In-Person to Online Debating to assure the safety of our students and staff. Thank you to everyone who made this work so well.

Enjoy and please feel free to contact me, Jim Hanson at jim@climbthemountain.us with ideas, edits, omissions, thoughts, etc.

Click on individual stories to read about Climb the Mountain!

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Rainier Scholars has big tournament success

Climb has begun working with the Rainier Scholars program! Rainier Scholars is a program that “offers a pathway to college graduation for hard-working, low-income students of color by providing access to transformative educational opportunities.” On several Saturdays, Jim and J. Anthony Tedpahogo with Sarah Salame and Parker Davidson, debate coaches extraordinaire, met with students at South Shore PK8 to teach debate lessons. J. Anthony said the experience was great and noted:

I learned that as instructors we have to figure out creative ways to keep kids engaged. That can be anything from altering lectures or changing topics to grab the attention of students. I came to understand that all students learn and adapt to lessons differently, so it's our duty as instructors to bridge that gap with inventive ways.

I am very proud and honored that Climb has decided to work with Rainier Scholars and with brilliant students from marginalized communities. My experience with Rainier Scholars has allowed me to work with kids that come from similar backgrounds and neighborhoods that I grew up in. Climb gives these students a chance to show their brilliance and strive to achieve excellence.



These Rainier Scholar teams went 3-0 and 3-0! J. Anthony, Parker, and Sarah helped coach.

Jim was equally impressed. “These kids are amazing. They caught on so quick and had really sophisticated and compelling arguments.” All of their hard work paid off. They placed Second overall as a squad and had two 3-0 teams (Meron Woldetensae and Yedidia Alebachew; Nuani Santiago, Gabby Donaldson and Lydia Amareat) at the Seattle University February tournament—a remarkable feat for a brand new team. At the March Middle School Public Forum tournament, Meron Woldetensae from Rainier Scholars was a top 25 speaker and the Team Muhamed Abdulahi and Edwin Duong received honors going 3-1! We look forward to continuing to work with these gifted students.



Edwin continued debate into the summer along with two other Rainier Scholars for our camp.

New Climb Elementary programs

This year Climb offered its first ever Elementary Debate program! It was held afterschool at Somerset Elementary School in Bellevue, Washington and had 24 students. Jim said that the kids debated really well! Jim noted "I was impressed at how well 4th and 5th graders could reason and respectfully disagree with each other."

They used scripts to make it easier to remember what to say in each speech and the kids learned quickly how to make good arguments. Staff member Thadeus Smith says:

The kids debated whether we should launch earth's trash into space, and seeing the creativity in their arguments was really cool whether they were saying that our trash in space would destroy the sun or that it would form another moon for colonization."

Not only did the kids come up with creative ideas for arguments, they also kept the Climb staff entertained! Staff member and college student Kailey Wilson says that one time, kids tried to guess her age with one student guessing that she was ten, and another guessing fifty! Another Climb student asked her if cell phones existed when she was a kid.

Many students competed all year and some even went to our summer debate camps. This successful program already has multiple requests for new students to participate this coming year!



Kunqi is just one of many students who participated in our brand new elementary school debate program. We were concerned but the elementary students had very few problems switching to online.



Along with Jim, Hatcher Chapman, Thadeus Smith, Alyssa Gaston, Kailey Wilson, Sarah Salame and Parker Davidson all instructed the elementary school debaters.



Climb middle school debaters showing off awards at the Seattle University tournament and debaters at the Explorer West Middle School camp. Both pictures taken in 2019.

The Debate Camps

Over the summer of 2019, Climb hosted their debate camps at Newport High School, Pacific Lutheran University, and Explorer West Middle School. We had over 95 students participate. Climb helped students prepare for and engage in speech and debate in the upcoming school year. There was a lot of learning and also fun!

Camp Assistant Ethan Phillips fondly remembers the fun and inside jokes everyone shared including Jim's grouchy criticisms of things making his life difficult:

The portable we were working out of had a large whiteboard that we could write things on. On the first day, the school's internet was being difficult so Jim jokingly told us to write a reminder on the whiteboard to sue the school district! Basically, whenever something frustrating would happen that could be associated with a certain brand, product, organization, person, etc. we'd add it to the whiteboard "List of people/organizations to sue."

When Jim was asked for comment on this, he grumbled "The List was not long enough."



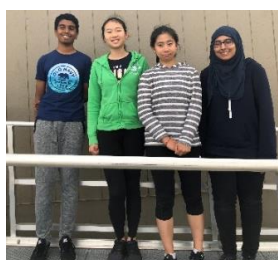
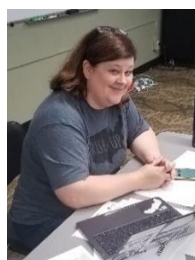
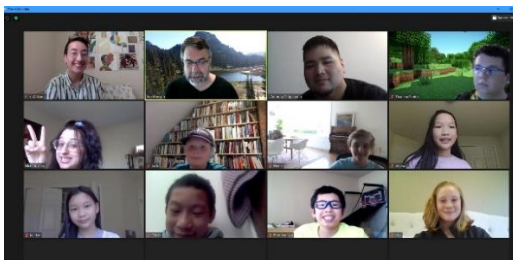
The Pictures tell the story. The 2019 in-person camp at left. Part of the 2020 online camp at right.

Still the huge participation numbers of the 2019 camps showed how much Climb was growing. Then, Covid-19 hit as we were announcing our 2020 summer camps. Jim very early on cancelled in-person camp. Jim said "I just knew it wasn't going to get better and I didn't want Climb to be part of something that would hurt kids." With the afterschool program switching to online during the spring—Climb announced that its camp would also happen entirely online. We definitely had a drop in numbers but we had 52 students attend during the three weeks we offered our camp in July in August. And students were happy with the program. One middle school coach noted:

I heard from one student's family who was involved in your summer camps this summer that they had an absolute blast and it was one of their top experiences in remote learning this whole year!

Sounds like you created some awesome experiences for your debaters this summer! :)

Jim's background in running online tournaments as well as our use of online training in our afterschool program gave us the heads up on how to do online right for the camp—even though students did the camp for 7 hours a day in July!



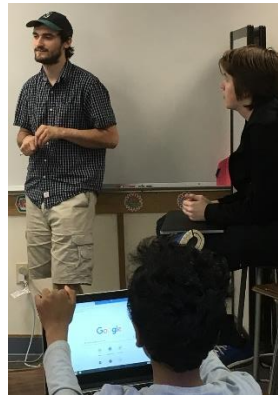
On the left, a Zoom session at the 2020 camp. The three pictures on the right are pictures from the 2019 camps.

Growth of the afterschool program

Climb has grown from its previous years; over 40 students attended our fall/winter middle school afterschool programs and right before Covid hit, Climb was serving over 80 students! With more students, there was more learning going on, but there was definitely also more fun! Instructor Alyssa Gaston says that "My time with the middle school kids can be wholly defined as memorable. My favorite moments are during the practice rounds when the kids get fired up on debate. Seeing their passion for competition is really admirable and fun when the topic is one the students truly care about such as captivity of animals, banning phones in school."

Climb also offered an elementary after school program this year for the first time, and had over 20 students! The elementary program was a success and the students got their first taste of debate.

The spring program started in person, but with the rise of coronavirus, Climb quickly switched to teaching online. Instructor J. Anthony was asked how the two different teaching environments compared. He said that "You can't compare the two. Teaching in person allows instructors to really connect with students and allows all groups to work on the topics "hands on." The shift to online has been a challenge, but our goal as instructors is to bring that same experience to the students and be just as effective as we would in person."



Climbers at our summer camp, with coaches Tiffany Wilhelm, Alex Williams, and Tyler Julian, and student Andrew who won many awards.

Fall 2019 Bellevue clinic

The start of a new school year can be hard for a lot of reasons, from having new teachers to making new friends: but for a debater, the hardest part is writing new speeches! Climb worked at Newport High school with students from different high schools and middle schools to help prepare them for the upcoming debate season. We offered lessons from individual events speaking to multiple debate formats. Our main goal was to help our students get ready for the first tournament, whether that was helping to find a good script for a speech event, learning about a new style of debate, or researching for a new topic. All along, we were there to give guidance! Alyssa Gaston had the opportunity to work with new parliamentary competitors, Alyssa states "It was so fun to work with students in the very beginning of a debate season, seeing them compete and succeed at tournaments throughout the year made me so happy!"

Climb success at the Seattle University Tournament

Jim wears multiple hats—two of them being Climb and Seattle University director of debate. So, it is no surprise that Jim is running huge 240+ middle school student tournaments and that Climb the Mountain was pleased to attend the Seattle University tournaments.

Despite the stiff and very large competition, Climb's students have excelled. We look forward to seeing how our students grow and succeed next year at these tournaments.

May Tournament

Brandon And Dylan Semifinals Experienced Division; Brandon Also Won 1st Speaker Award, And Dylan Won 2nd. Alexander 4th Speaker And Advait, 9th Speaker, Caleb 11th Speaker, Anushka 14th Speaker, Abby 16th Speaker, Mingmei 17th Speaker, Anshul 19th Speaker In The Young Division.

March Tournament

Brandon And Dylan Experienced Semifinalists; Akshay And Andrew Received Honors In Experienced Division

Amelie And Abby, Alexander And Caleb, Jayna And Nikhil, Aliya And Addison Honors Teams In Young Division

Amelia 5th Speaker, Abby, 9th Speaker, Michael S 13th Speaker, Caleb 14th Speaker, Maddie 19th Speaker, Nicole 20th Speaker, Alexander 23rd Speaker In Young Division

Akshay 7th Speaker, Fiona 9th Speaker, Andrew 11th Speaker, Dylan 13th Speaker, Brandon 15th Speaker, Katelyn 16th Speaker, Arya 17th Speaker, Daniel 18th Speaker, Alana 19th Speaker, Experienced Division

Feb Tournament

Laszlo And Alexander 5th Place Experienced Team; Laszlo 3rd Speaker Experienced

Brandon, Dylan, Caleb 1st Place Intermediate Team; Fiona, Alana, Mya 10th Place Intermediate Team; Dylan 1st Speaker; Brandon 2nd Speaker

Nikhil 10th Speaker Inexperienced

November Tournament

Laszlo Top Experienced Speaker; Arya 7th; Brandon Top Novice Speaker; Dylan Was 3rd Speaker Novice Andrew Won Top Team Award Experienced; Daniel Won Top Team Award Novice-Mixed; Amelie, Abby, Katelyn, And Fiona Who Were Very Close To Top Team Novice-Mixed

October Tournament

Brandon Luo Top Speaker, Intermediate; Caleb Li, 7th Speaker, Intermediate; Michael Sun, 10th Speaker, Intermediate; Brandon, Caleb, Nathan 3-0 Intermediate Team

Laszlo, Pranaav, Ronit 3-1 Experienced Team

Alana, Fiona, Mya, 3-0 Novice Team; Amelie, Katelyn, Abby, 3-0 Novice Team



Just some of the great climbers we had in our programs.

The Last Weekend of In-Person Events



Overlake PF debaters and coach at the last in-person Climb Clinic.

In early March, Jim was becoming increasingly concerned about the Covid virus. We did an in-person clinic on March 7 that we had planned months in advance with Overlake school public forum debaters and coach Robin Monteith. What a talented group! Jim and Thadeus Smith led up the instruction. We did some social distancing but we were in the same rooms and obviously, students were speaking; so little did we

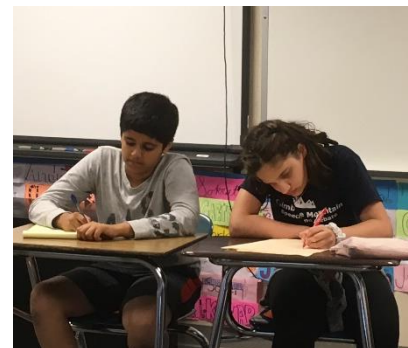
know then. Sadly, these debaters weren't able to show off their talents at tournaments because they were cancelled shortly after the clinic. As far as Thadeus and Jim were concerned these top notch debaters are still award winners!

As the clinic finished, Jim was hearing from more and more parents that they would not be meeting in person and instead were opting for debating "online." The next day, Jim ran a large middle school tournament that was both in-person and online. Jim called it "one of the worst tournaments I've ever run." There were many technology issues, it was difficult to do both in-person and online together, and we ran short of computers when a number of participants showed up without computers. Jim tried to keep students 6 feet apart but they often weren't following that guidance.

Jim did not want to do anymore in-person events and learned his lesson. He changed plans for the summer camp to be online exclusively and then he ran two large (40+ participant) online college tournaments in March and April and an even larger middle school tournament in May. They went off nearly flawlessly—running on time and with few technical problems. Jim noted

We sent out concise but complete instructions—including tips for solving the problems we had experienced. We added a required practice round at the beginning of the tournament day that gave us time to solve initial tech problems and make sure people were ready to participate. These helped immensely.

Further, as we noted in the previous article on our camps, Climb used Zoom and Yaatly and infused much of what we learned in our previous events to create more social space including playing games, using breakout rooms, and having the kids talk with each other more.



Climb speakers and debaters at our 2019 summer camp.

Afterschool Program: Too Much Food, Too Little Food!

Debate is hard work! It takes a lot of energy to stand and argue for an hour plus especially after a long day of school. With Jim in charge, getting the students and staff food is priority 1 and so obviously the best part of every debate clinic we did in person was the food! Every Monday and Wednesday, the afterschool debaters and coaches would get a meal from places like Jimmy Johns, Chipotle, Panda Express, Domino's and more!

The wide variety of food itself sparked debate among the staff and kids as to which food was best! Staff favorites were tied between pizza and Panda Express whereas the majority of students preferred pizza or Chipotle. Either way, pizza still remained everyone's favorite! Despite all the yumminess, there were some issues with the food deliveries. Students had bigger eyes than their stomach! They would tell Jim their orders of what they wanted in advance and it always wound up being too much! Jim ordered four large chicken teriyakis based on student requests when in reality only one would be eaten! Jim was heard muttering "They say they want teriyaki chicken but they actually eat the orange chicken! Ugh!" Nearly every time we ordered pizza there would be one to three full pizzas left!

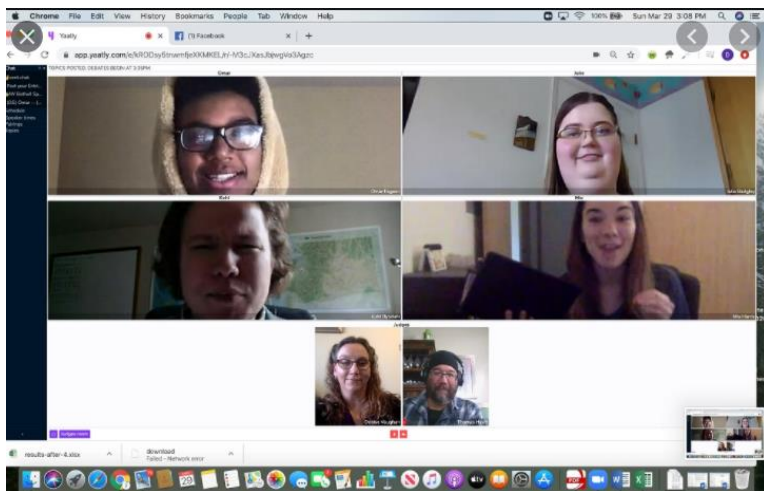
Finally, Jim vowed to stop ordering too much food. He ordered an amount of food based on what the group had actually eaten--no extras would be left over. Unfortunately, on the same day that he gave this a try, a handful of new students who hadn't registered showed up and every single regular student showed (usually 1 to 3 can't make it) and suddenly there wasn't enough food! In order to make it work, staff members gave up their meals and other students shared with their fellow peers. Jim was heard saying sadly, "The sharing of the food to handle that shortage was really nice. People need their food. I can't let people go without food. I will get more food again in the future." And so he did and leftovers started up again—but no worries—it helps feed hungry staff who take it home.



Climbers at the 240+ debaters Seattle University debate tournament. Climbers won multiple awards including first place speakers in the advanced and intermediate division along with several 3-0 records.

The New Online Experience

2020 brought many tough changes: schools closed, businesses closed, and people got infected. While debate was put on hold in many areas, Climb adapted to the pandemic by hosting and teaching lessons online via Yaatly. Yaatly is a site developed by tech savvy Dane Schoonover, with the help of UW Bothell Denise Vaughan and U Alaska Steve Johnson. Climb was one of the site's first users, so Jim provided a lot of feedback that helped shape the site to fit Climb's and other program's needs. Jim had used Yaatly for several years for tournaments and experimented with teaching a few lessons online during the fall and winter which was great practice for what happened in the Spring.



yaatly

The UW Bothell team showing off their Yaatly online debating chops!

Staff member Kailey Wilson found teaching online to be convenient because there was no commute! However, she explained that "I liked it better at school because it was easier to keep the kids engaged and there were also no tech issues." She says that with the new normalcy of teaching online, keeping the students engaged is a harder task and that she has had to adapt some of her teaching techniques. Instead of doing a warm up/ice breaker, Kailey had to jump straight into the debates because sometimes there were tech issues at the beginning of lessons eating up time! Despite these troubles, she said the chat feature was very helpful in communicating effectively to solve problems.

After school lessons were not the only thing to be moved online though, tournaments were also done through the computer! While, tech issues were prevalent, the more tournaments held, the smoother they seemed to run as people got used to it. Judge for the Seattle University tournament, Ellison Roycroft, explained that at the first tournament he judged, he used the Safari browser (even though Jim said to use Chrome) and nothing worked at all. He states that "it's important to listen to Jim and follow the instructions correctly!"

By late spring with instruction and tournaments and then in summer with our camps, online debate began to work well with very few tech problems. As we move into our fall debate sessions, we at Climb have learned a lot and adapted to online teaching in order to provide fun and engaging education for our students, and we look forward to helping our students grow in the online environment!

Climb Highlights July 2019 to August 2020 . . .

- Hosted speech and debate camps at Newport High School, Pacific Lutheran University, and Explorer West School. 90+ students and coaches participated.
- Worked with BC Academy providing instruction in public forum debate leading to multiple winning awards at fall tournaments.
- Held a clinic for middle and high schoolers preparing for the 2019-20 year.
- Fall, Winter, and Spring, instructed 90+ students in debate and speaking in our afterschool program.
- Worked with the Greater Seattle Debate League—helping the GSDL board as they build up a new debate league for students from less privileged backgrounds.
- Held six online tournaments for college students.
- Initiated the Rainier Scholars debate program providing instruction to 12 students. Those students wow'd the middle school circuit with a second place as a squad showing at the huge Seattle U tournament including having two 3-0 teams.
- Provided feedback and insight for future development of the online debating platform Yaatly. Yaatly has taken off hugely in the Covid era.
- Did updates to the Climb web pages.
- Initiated an elementary debate program at Somerset elementary school in Bellevue with 30+ students participating in the fall, winter and spring.
- Jared Phillips, our Chief Executive Officer, helped provide guidance for Climb and handled accounting for all of our activities.
- Tutored three students from BC Academy who won several awards.
- Separately, Jim hosted 5 middle school debate tournaments at Seattle University with Climbers attending who won many awards.
- Answered dozens of emails asking questions about speech and debate.
- Assisted coaches in finding judges for tournaments.
- Hosted online debate camps in July and August bringing instruction to 50+ students amid the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Updated the national speech and debate contact list.
- Began a North Bellevue debate program providing instruction to 12 students. Unfortunately, just as we got going—the Covid 19 crisis hit and we've been on hiatus for this program since. Hope to reboot it in the future.
- Did the traditional late December debate clinic with BC Academy debaters on went on to win multiple awards at national tournaments.
- Provided guidance for high school programs in using Yaatly and doing online debating.
- Connected coaches to hire assistant coaches for their programs.
- Developed PowerPoints and Scripts for middle school 3 on 3 parliamentary debate, elementary debate (climb format), and public forum debate. The scripts show young debaters how to give their speech so they can focus on the content of their arguments. For elementary school debaters, they've made a HUGE improvement in the students' quality of argumentation.

To get the latest news, be sure to check our Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/258436737697090/>

We are climbing with your help and support!

Contribute to the Climb!

For anyone interested in helping us continue our mission, please visit <https://www.climbthemountain.us/support-us> to donate a gift of money or your time.

Donors keep us Climbing!

We are incredibly grateful for the support of so many people. People have donated money. People have donated their time. People have reached out to others to bring them into the world of speech and debate. We thank everyone for their efforts including these donors below (donations from July 2019 to August 2020). **Did we miss you? We are very sorry for the omission and we want to correct it!** Please email Jim at jim@climbthemountain.us and tell him. :)

- Alicia Hunt
- Char Main and Chris Dunlap
- David and Shari Barsky
- Eddie Lee
- Geoffrey BrodakSilva
- James Rydberg
- Jared Phillips and Loan Lam
- Jim Hanson
- Michael Bartanen
- Rowland Hobbs and Angelo Boccia Cedeño

Thank you to these great Climbers who volunteered help at our clinics and camps:

- Ethan Luo
- Michi Okahata
- Mike Bartanen
- Ronna Liggett
- And to all of the people that have helped our community grow!

With thanks to the Voices Foundation for helping provide scholarships for students attending our debate camp.

Thank you to staff who worked over the past year including:

Alex Lindgren-Ruby, Alex Williams, Alia Memon, Alyssa Gaston, Angie Tinker, Decker O'Donnell, Derek Hanson, Ethan Phillips, Gavin McCormick, Hatcher Chapman, J.Anthony Tedpahogo, Kai Daniels, Kailey Wilson, Kinny Torre, Lucas Watson, Michael Bartanen, Nick Julian, Nico Roshau, Parker Davidson, Ronna Liggett, Sarah Salame, Sarah Sherry, Serena Fitzgerald, Thadeus Smith, Thomas Garvey, Tiffany Wilhelm, Tyler Julian

[Click here to donate and make a difference](https://www.climbthemountain.us/support-us)

We are climbing the mountain!

