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High school students to join in international Arabic debate

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 1 hr ago

Four students from Gatton Academy at Western Kentucky University will go head-to-head in an upcoming international Arabic debate championship against native and non-native speakers from around the world.

Alexa Thompson of Bowling Green, Sarah Yaacoub of Lexington, Lindy Sipes of Hickman and Maggie Lewis of Shepherdsville have been preparing to compete in the International Schools Debate Championship in Qatar next month.

Lhousseine Guerwane, an Arabic instructor at WKU, has been working with the group of three high school seniors and one junior.

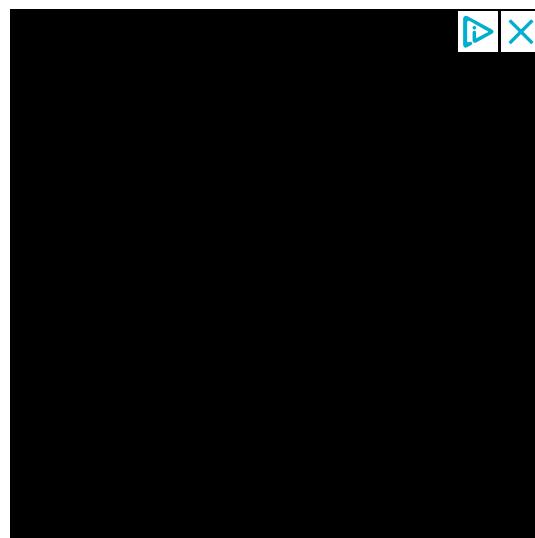
Along with taking advanced Arabic courses, students have been honing their language skills for months by working with native Arabic speaking students through the Arabish Club in WKU's Department of Modern Languages and the Debate Club.

Guerwane said he's a confidence boost for his students, who are more comfortable looking him in the eye.

"I can see the difference already," he said.

Beginning April 6, the event will test their skills against teams made up of high school students from around the world in a weeklong event. The teams have been given 15 topics to prepare, but only eight will be chosen in the first two rounds.

Guerwane has been working with the students to brainstorm arguments and counterarguments, and he described the students as “very smart and very committed” to doing well.



Guerwane took university students to compete last year, but this year is only for high school students. He’s also prepared by traveling to Qatar last spring to get a crash course in becoming a debate coach.

The event will be carried on Al Jazeera and broadcast on national television in Qatar.

The trip isn’t just about competition, however. Students also get the chance to engage with Arab culture through museum visits and seeing Qatar’s desert environment.

Guerwane also sees the trip as an opportunity to build bridges and foster understanding between countries. He said university students who participated last year still keep in touch with the friends they made.

He described it as “a great opportunity for (the) Gatton Academy, WKU and our whole country.”

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