

Barlow Debate Completes Three-Peat of First-Place Finishes in May



Fresh on the heels of being #1 in the Debate Association of New England Independent Schools and the Ronald Reagan Great Communicator Debate Northeastern Regional, this past Saturday Barlow speakers came out on top in the final event of the Connecticut Debate Association season.

Facing competitors from 22 schools, Barlow dealt another smackdown from lockdown, winning first place in both the varsity and novice divisions. If that were not enough, the varsity final was a Barlow v. Barlow contest between co-captains **Greg Coleman** and **Claudia Meyer** against junior **Jason Brannan** and sophomore **Ian O'Reilly**, who emerged from the preliminary rounds as the two top-seeded undefeated teams. In novice, sophomores **Leighton Schur** and **Ben Cerbin** took the first-place team award, with Schur finishing as the third-place individual speaker and Cerbin in fourth.

The question of the day was whether or not college and university programs should be taught primarily online. It was his first varsity final watched online by a large crowd of spectators, and O'Reilly's opened the debate with a remarkably witty and clear speech, framing the current crisis as an opportunity to fix a broken education system. He made the case for online college by talking about increasing affordability, as well as creating environmental and public health benefits.

On the final point he explained, “If you’re a virus, you like nothing better than a traditional classroom. People are in an enclosed space, packed in tightly. One cough or sneeze, and the infection is free to migrate from the room to the ventilation system, and from there to the dorm or the home, and from there to the parent’s workplace, and on and on. By keeping college kids at home learning online, we can make that a lot less likely to happen.”

In cross ex, he briefly stymied the Barlow captains into silence when asked about what would happen to unused dormitories. “There’s a shortage of affordable housing in many communities, so colleges could easily repurpose them into apartments.”

Junior co-captain Claudia Meyer’s speech was a layered discourse of 12 impactful arguments. She offered six reasons why online learning was measurably worse than traditional college instruction and then explained six harms it would cause the colleges as institutions and to the communities in which they reside. She ended the speech by turning the affirmative’s metric against them, arguing that the agreed standard of accessibility could be achieved better by increasing financial aid to students in need.

Undaunted, junior Jason Brannan gave a bold speech, spending all his time tearing down Meyer’s case arguing that online education, “is not just a substitute, it can be better than what we had before. Our teachers remade school with just a week to prepare for it. With more practice and lower costs, we can bring the benefits to more people than ever before.” He showed his wit with a meta-analytical moment in the debate. “My opponents say we lose social interaction when we’re online. But look at what we’re doing right now. We’re having a debate right that is conducive to learning. These are social interactions. If we can do it, so can colleges.”

Senior co-captain Coleman’s constructive speech was rapid-fire tour-de-force, avalanche of arguments loaded with the pithy turns of phrase that have become his trademark. On the issue of whether or not online college can match the quality of in-person instruction, he observed that “doctors can’t click their way to learning how to provide real care for

real patients. You need to be in the room.”

When challenged in cross examination on the question of how the country could afford to pay for college in the middle of a crisis, Coleman parried with his superior understanding of economics. “Interest rates are under one percent and I can guarantee you that we’ll get a greater than one percent return on any college degree a person earns. It’s an investment we’d be foolish not to make.”

Meyer framed her rebuttal around the headings of “access, quality, and community.” On the final point, she delivered the most memorable line from the round: “You can’t make friends on zoom because everyone is on mute.”

In his final rebuttal, Coleman hammered the idea that the quality of online instruction cannot match what you get in person. “So far in its history, online learning has merely been an attempt to simulate what an actual classroom is like,” he said. “It’s been around for years, and if it were actually better, most of us would have switched to it by now.”

Brannan’s final rebuttal sealed the deal with his impassioned delivery and knack for simplifying complex questions. “This debate is about school. It’s about getting people the training they need to make the most of their future. We can bring education to wherever it is needed while protecting our environment and our health like never before.”

In the end, the panel of judges awarded a 2-1 upset win to O’Reilly and Brannan over their captains. Other Barlow speakers each picked up at least one win from the day including sophomores Ben Fligelman, Graham Litz, and Anya Gorder along with freshmen Catie Gutowski, Quinn Speck, and Judah Friedman.

Among the eight previous Barlow speakers who have earned state titles are **Nicolò Marzaro ’13** and **Evan Streams ’09**, both of whom were among the judges at the event. Marzaro was also the world champion impromptu speaker, winning the title in Durban, South Africa in his senior year.

Two weeks prior to that, a quartet of Barlow sophomores, **Ali Siddiqi and Ian O'Reilly along with Ben Fligelman and Ben Litz** were the first-place four-person advanced team at the first online parliamentary tournament hosted by the Debate Association of New England Independent Schools. They had a combined 5-1 record against pairs from elite preparatory academies like Hotchkiss, BB&N, the Groton School, and Winsor. Fligelman & Litz were undefeated, finishing as the second-place, two-person team overall. In parliamentary debating, pairs have just 10 minutes to plan cases on unannounced topics ranging from public health, universal basic income, and religion in the classroom, to the electoral college, feminism, and civil disobedience.

All told, **14 Barlow students earned at total 34 awards during the 2019-2020 season:**

Greg Coleman (co-captain) - 2nd four-person advanced team at Loomis-Chaffee, 4th varsity speaker at Greenwich, 2nd varsity team CDA May Open

Claudia Meyer (co-captain) - 2nd four-person advanced team at Loomis-Chaffee, 2nd advanced team at Hopkins, 2nd varsity team CDA May Open

Jason Brannan - 1st varsity team CDA May Open

Zac Shortt - 2nd four-person advanced team at Loomis-Chaffee

Kyle Murray - 2nd four-person advanced team at Loomis-Chaffee

Graham Litz - 2nd novice team at Roxbury-Latin, 3rd novice speaker at Hotchkiss, 3-0 varsity team at Fairfield Warde, 3rd novice speaker at Choate-Rosemary Hall, 2nd novice speaker at Hopkins, Northeastern Champion of the Ronald Reagan Great Communicator Debate Series, 1st advanced four-person team & 2nd advanced parliamentary 2-person team at Hotchkiss parli online

Ben Fligelman - 2nd novice team at Roxbury-Latin, 3rd novice speaker at Loomis-Chaffee, 3-0 varsity team at Fairfield Warde, 2nd advanced team at Hopkins, 3rd after-dinner speaker at Northfield Mount Hermon, 1st advanced four-person team & 2nd advanced parliamentary 2-person team at Hotchkiss parli online

Ian O'Reilly - 1st advanced four-person team at Hotchkiss parli online, 1st varsity team CDA May Open

Ali Siddiqi - 1st advanced four-person team at Hotchkiss parli online

Leighton Schur - 1st novice team at Greenwich, 1st novice team & 3rd novice speaker CDA May Open

Ben Cerbin - 1st novice team at Greenwich, 1st novice team & 4th novice speaker CDA May Open

Quinn Speck - 4th novice speaker at Oxford, 2nd novice team and 3rd novice speaker at Fairfield Warde

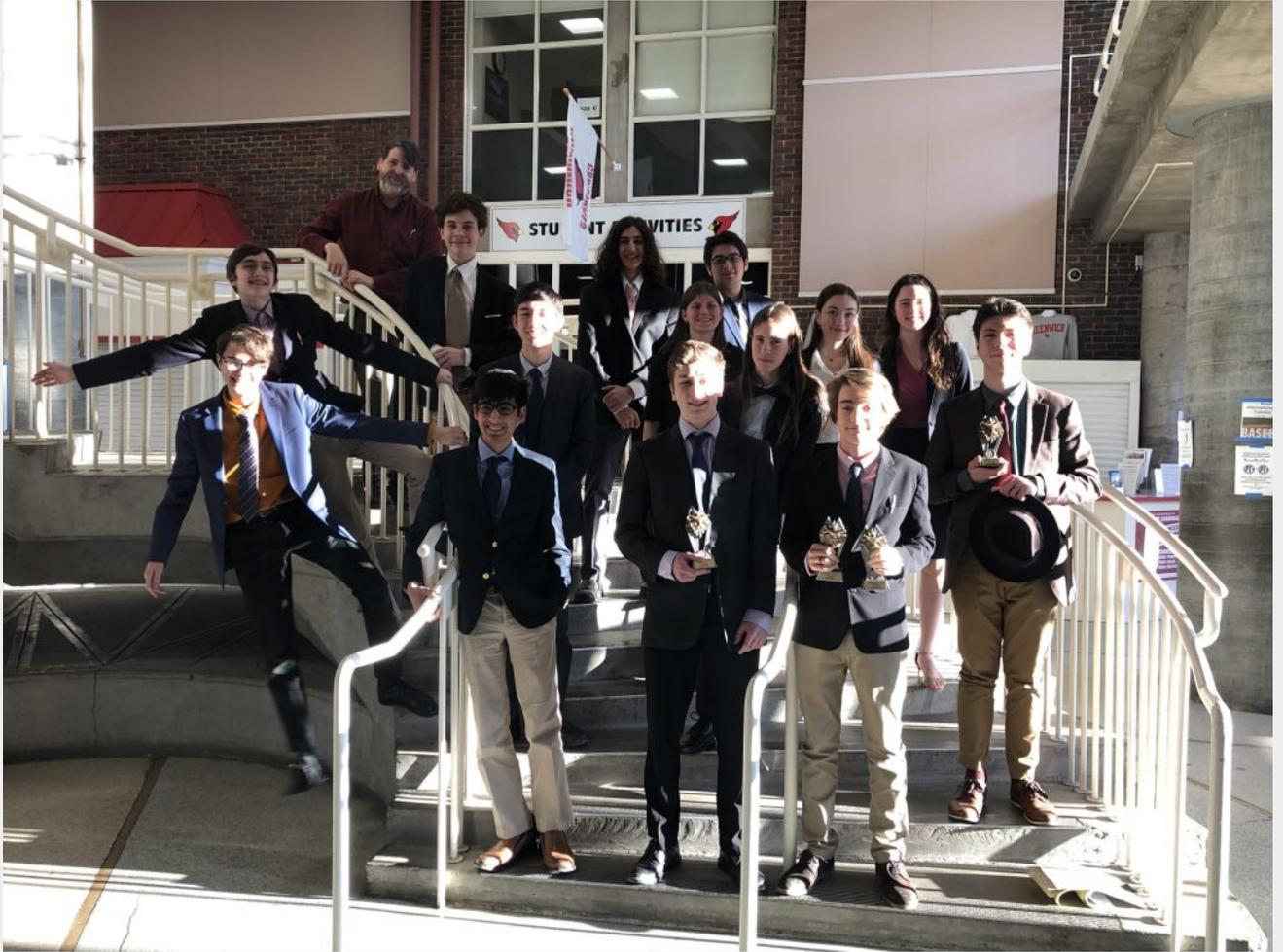
Judah Friedman - 2nd novice team at Fairfield Warde

Tyler Lakin - 3rd after-dinner speaking at Kingswood-Oxford

Photo at top: Left to right, front: Emma Downey, Christina Roby, Kyle Murray, captain Claudia Meyer, Ali Siddiqi, Anneliese Siedman, Quinn Speck, Judah Friedman, Ben Fligelman, Graham Litz, Melissa Colasante, Madalyn Migiorino '19, Katie Gutowski; rear L to R: Kiera Schoenberg, Jason Brannan, captain Greg Coleman, Santiago Calerón, Tyler Lakin, Anna Laske, Ian O'Reilly, Mr. Smith, seated Joseph Redmond '19



Barlow Debate at Hopkins School



Barlow Debate at Greenwich High School



Joel Barlow student Graham Litz wins debate championship



The debate team at Joel Barlow High School had another stellar year taking home 34 awards and several first-place finishes.