

National & International Public Speaking Competitions

On February 8, the English Speaking Union hosted a national public speaking competition for the second time in three years. The event was once again hosted at Lower Canada College in Montreal. This year, we had a total of nine competitors. Most came from within Montreal, but one did travel from Toronto. They all presented speeches on the theme "Mapping the Global Future". The speeches were presented twice, before the top five were selected for the final round. The talent level was impressive, and the speeches engaging. The top two speakers were **Niqui Kohli** from Lower Canada College and **Miranda Thyssen** from Trafalgar School for Girls. Both will be off to represent Canada at the International Public Speaking Competition to be held at Dartmouth House in England this May. Congratulations to both, and best of luck in England!

Chris George

Graham and Katie Booth (Ottawa Branch) were in England at the time of the competition and were able to attend the finals. These are **Graham's** comments:

"An especially encouraging experience - 60 young participants from 34 countries from Argentina to Yemen and Moldova to Mongolia competing on May 17th in the ESU's 26th Annual International Public Speaking Competition Finals at Dartmouth House, the global headquarters of the ESU in London, England. Representing Canada were **Miranda Thyssen** and **Raunaq (Niqui) Kohli** from Trafalgar School and Lower Canada College respectively. In Heat 1 (of four), they were competing against very strong opposition from the eventual overall runner-up and audience choice, **Vikram Joshi** (Australia) and best non-native speaker, **Xing Chen** (China). The winners (two from each heat) competed in the finals which were held at the U.S. Embassy in Grosvenor Square, the overall winner being **Ali Hussein Saleh Mohammed** of Yemen as was determined by an eminent panel of judges led by **Sir Brian Fall**, currently, amongst other distinguished appointments, the Director and Acting Chairman of the United Kingdom Foundation of the University of British Columbia. A most well organised event under the sponsorship of HSBC and a particular pleasure to see the camaraderie and friendships engendered amongst the participants during the four day programme of events that culminated in "homestays" for many as guests of UK ESU members. It was indeed a pleasure to have been in London at the time of this important ESU competition and congratulations to **Miranda** and **Niqui** on their fine performances in a very challenging event."

Raunaq Kohli wrote to us about the London experience.

Upon arriving at the Hotel President in Russell Square, London, I received a very warm greeting from the British ESU representatives; **Robert Hastie** and **Katie Brock**. Both of whom were extremely pleasant and devoted organizers. I had arrived on the May the 13th, and was planned to speak on the 17th. In the meantime, all 60 of the participants, from over 34 countries, were taken on various captivating tours and experiences; these trips were truly amazing. From the House of Commons, to the magical "Theatreland," my trip was filled with activity and excitement. I was also fortunate enough to participate in various debating and public speaking workshops; these were very informative and helpful. Before I knew it, it was "speech day," and Dartmouth House was abuzz!



A vacationing Graham Booth (Secretary, Ottawa Branch) centres Niqui Kohli and Miranda Thyssen, and two proud parents.

This year's theme was *Dynamic Earth*; a theme which could be interpreted in many different ways. I chose to talk about how the institution of school itself is essentially handicapping global development, progress and change because it promotes and reinforces conformity on every level. I spoke first in the first heat and felt as though my presentation was well received. The other speeches in my heat were extremely good; well-written and captivating. Later that afternoon, we all went to the American Embassy to watch the grand finals, which were fabulous. The caliber of the speeches at this level was truly mind-boggling. In the end a boy from Yemen took first place, with his speech on water shortage. It was truly a great experience!

I would like to thank the English-Speaking Union of Canada for their generosity and support in this venture. Without the help of the ESU I am quite sure that such an opportunity would never have been available to me.

Thank you very much, **Raunaq Kohli**.