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Bloomingdale, left, and Fritch stand before some debate trophies while taking some time out from preparing for this weekend's debate tournament.

Debaters prepare for meet

By Ad Hudler
Night News Editor

The words will fly this weekend at UNL, when teams from around the region come to Lincoln to compete in the Cornhusker Debate Tournament.

John Fritch and Dan Bloomingdale, two UNL debaters, will be there to strut their stuff.

Fritch, Bloomingdale and other UNL debaters have spent up to 40 hours a week preparing for the competition. But that's nothing new — debaters spend that much time preparing all season long, Fritch said.

It's the research that makes the job so time-consuming. Debaters pour over magazines, text books and government documents to find supportive evidence for their arguments.

The long hours of work pay off, Fritch and Bloomingdale said.

"You do really get a lot out of it," said Bloomingdale, a senior political science major. "For one thing, you learn how to use a library...how to research, and you really learn how to think on your feet."

Fritch, a junior speech communications major, said debating "teaches you not to accept statements at face value."

The topic for this season and for this weekend's debate is space exploration and development. The tournament, which will be Friday, Saturday and Sunday at Oldfather Hall and the College of Business Administration, will draw teams from Wisconsin, Minnesota, Colorado and other North-Central plains states. The University of Iowa and the University of Kansas, two regional debate powerhouses, also will compete in the tournament.

Just because a school is big doesn't mean its debate team is good, Fritch and Bloomingdale said. Some of the best teams come from smaller private colleges, they said.

Nebraska doesn't boast one of the country's best debate teams, they said. But it did send a group to the national championships two years ago. UNL earned a 4-4 record there.

"We do pretty good really," Fritch said. "We are in a tough region."

Oldfather Hall 410, the forensics lounge, is plastered wall-to-wall with trophies and plaques that UNL's speech and debate teams have won.

Fritch and Bloomingdale said debating experience should help them get accepted into law school, should they decide to pursue a law career.

"A lot of law schools are starting to look more and more at students' extra-curricular activities," Fritch said.

Participants in UNL's debate team earn two credit hours per semester. Students who want to join the debate program must be undergradutes enrolled in 12 or more credit hours.

"And we don't cut anybody," Fritch said.

Professor Jack Kay of the UNL speech communications department coaches the group.

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