



Junior State of America

Founded in 1934, sponsored by The Junior Statesmen Foundation

Junior State of America - Annual Census Findings


By: Surbhi Godsay, CIRCLE Research Analyst

Contents

Major Findings:	2
Civic Knowledge.....	4
Civic Skills.....	5
Civic Behaviors.....	7
Beliefs and Efficacy	9
Respondent Characteristics	11
Program Activities & Satisfaction	13

This report presents the findings of CIRCLE’s analysis of the Junior State of America Census Survey data. Analysis is based on 1708 respondents. The JSA “annual census” survey was deployed in May and June of 2013 to all students who were registered in the JSA participant database as a 2012 Summer Programs student or 2012-13 School Year Program student. According to JSA, the survey went out to about 10,000 students.

First, we outline the major findings from the study. Following that, we present findings related to the influence of JSA programs on the development of student civic knowledge, skills and efficacy. We also include representative quotes from the open-ended questions of the survey in each section. Finally, we present demographic information of the sample, as well as data on participant activities, satisfaction with program activities, and a short summary of students’ perceptions of potential improvements of the program (based on open-ended data).



The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement conducts research on civic education in schools, colleges, and community settings and on young Americans’ voting and political participation, service, activism, media use, and other forms of civic engagement. It is based at the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University.

Major Findings:

- Over three-fourths of JSA members reported that their JSA participation improved their knowledge of how government works domestic issues and foreign affairs.
- Over two-thirds of JSA members said JSA participation improved their skills in writing research papers and conversing with adults. Over half said they've improved their skills for speaking up in class.
- Data show that JSA programming is beneficial, especially for groups that are underrepresented in civic or political life.
 - Students who are eligible for reduced school lunch were the most likely to say that JSA improved their knowledge of geography and other cultures.
 - Female students were more likely than male students to report increasing knowledge and skills because of JSA programs.
 - Male and female students both reported benefit of the JSA program participation but in different ways: While female students were more likely to report past and future intent for civic and political engagement than males, male students were more likely to say that they enjoy political discussions and showed stronger interest in political career than female students.
 - Black students were the most likely to report gains in civic skills compared to White and Asian counterparts. They were also the most likely to report feelings of efficacy to do political organizing activities, and most likely to report participating in boycotts or protests in the future.
 - Hispanic students were more likely to report gains in civic knowledge and skills compared to non-Hispanic students.
- Years and level of involvement with JSA are critical to student's civic learning, skill-building, efficacy, and likeliness to perform behaviors in the future.
 - We found that longer program participation was related to stronger effect. Participants who were involved in JSA for three or four years were more likely to feel like that JSA helped to improve their civic knowledge and skills compared to those who were involved for one or two years. They were also more likely to feel like they "definitely can" perform civic and political engagement behaviors such as creating a plan, get others to care about a problem or issue, ability to run a meeting, ability to express views. There is evidence that there is a positive relationship between the numbers of years participating in the program and stronger beliefs in student's ability to do civic behaviors.
 - The more involved with JSA activities students are, the more likely they are to report feeling like JSA increased civic knowledge and skills, and higher levels of civic efficacy. However, the students who are the most engaged with JSA programming was more likely to report being civically engaged in other ways in the past. They are also significantly more likely to report engaging civically and politically in the future. Students who receive reduced school lunch were slightly more likely to participate in 4-5 activities compared to those who do not receive reduced school lunch.
 - The data suggests that students in JSA benefit in the first year but still, more enduring participation in JSA is related to stronger outcomes.
- Our analysis suggests that opportunities for political engagement in the community are related to strongest perceived impact on knowledge and skills.¹ . Political action activities like political

¹ As noted earlier, we cannot make a causal claims. Instead, findings rely on students' report of perceived learning and benefit.

service projects and voter registration drives, and political voice activities like letter writing campaigns were most strongly associated with respondent's feelings that JSA improved civic knowledge and civic skills. The students who are doing these activities are the most highly engaged in JSA (and are most likely to be doing 5 or more JSA activities).

- The students appreciated meeting students who were different from them, being in a supportive and safe environment to share their opinions, and gaining friendships. The open ended data conveyed a sense of community within the JSA cohort.
- Five students explicitly said that JSA impacted their major in college.
- Seventy-five students had references to developing friendships (did not include students who said "meeting new people" was most valuable to them); 25 referenced JSA being a "safe, trusting, respectful, comfortable" environment or JSA feels like a "community or family."
 - *"Participating in JSA has taught me so many unspeakable lessons. I have become a more open minded individual from my experiences of meeting other statesmen. Listening to their opinions that may be the complete opposite of mine and then going off and having lunch with them has made me more welcoming to individuals. JSA has taught me that just because someone does not share the same opinion as you, does not mean that they are a bad person."*
 - *"I just had fun socializing with people my age who also were interested in politics and having the ability to be able to politely disagree with others about current political and economic issues."*
 - *"I learned that there is a caring and committed community of teens my age who actually care about politics. Honestly, I thought I was the only kid at my school who cared about political issues, but then I came to Overlake and joined JSA as soon as I found out it existed. Now, instead of ranting to my friends about how LBJ was an amazing president and we should all try to emulate him, I can debate about it."*
 - *"I tend to act tensely in spaces where opinions are vast and have the potential to clash, but in JSA, the atmosphere radiates support, acceptance-- I've become more comfortable speaking publicly, making my political presence more developed and my sense of self stronger."*

Civic Knowledge

Over three-fourths of students in JSA reported that JSA participation helped to improve their knowledge in domestic issues, knowledge of how government works and foreign affairs. Students positively reported that JSA improved their knowledge in other cultures, economics, geography and history, but not to the same extent as domestic issues, government, and foreign affairs.

Table 1: Improvement in Knowledge on Social Studies or Civic Topics

JSA improved knowledge in:	% who said "A moderate amount or a lot"
Domestic Issues	79.5
Knowledge of how government works	76.6
Foreign Affairs	76.5
Other Cultures	66.4
Economics	59.9
Geography	50.2
History	48.1

We found that the responses varied by students' backgrounds:

- Female students were slightly more likely than male students to report improving knowledge "a moderate amount or a lot" compared to male students on all topics, except for economics.
- Female students were significantly more likely to say JSA improved their knowledge of other cultures (70.6%) compared to male students (62.8%).
- Hispanic students were significantly more likely to report improving knowledge "a moderate amount or a lot" in: how government works, geography, history, and other cultures, compared to students who identified as non-Hispanic.
- White students were slightly more likely to report improving knowledge in economics, domestic issues, foreign affairs, geography and history than Black or Asian students. Black students were most likely to report improving knowledge in how government works, geography and other cultures.
- There were a couple of significant differences based on the student's household income status (students responded "yes" or "no" to being eligible for reduced lunch). Students who were eligible were significantly more likely to say JSA improved knowledge "a moderate amount or a lot" in geography (59.9% versus 47.3%) and about other cultures (74.6% versus 54.5%). The students were on par with one another for other topics we tested.
- Similarly, students whose parents have less than high school experience were significantly more likely to say that JSA helped improve their knowledge of geography, history and other cultures.²

Below are select and representative quotes indicating how JSA has improved knowledge:

"I've become so much more cultured and informed about the political world. JSA has made me so much more knowledgeable about world or state events, and it helps me apply the things I learn in school and real, adult life."

² Under 100 respondents in the sample for less than HS, and HS graduate

“I am not an American citizen, so this program completely enlightened me on how the American government is run. It is very beneficial to me as I hope to become an American citizen in the near future and become a healthy citizen who participates in her country's politics.”

“The most valuable asset I gained from JSA was a stronger awareness of both national and international politics. Generally, in public high school education, there is little opportunity to get away from the textbooks and discuss current events. However, JSA provided that perfect outlet.”

Civic Skills

Students in JSA also reported improvements in their civic skills. The three skills students report improving are all related to their ability to effectively communicate thoughts or ideas. Three-fourths of students said JSA programs have helped in their improving their ability to write research papers, and nearly three fourths said it has improved their ability to converse with adults.

Table 2a: Improvement in Civic Skills

JSA improved skills in:	% who said “A moderate amount or a lot”
Writing research papers	75.8
Conversing with adults	73.3
Speaking up in class	60.1
Reading about and understanding current events	47.2
Leading a group project	41.9
Managing my time	34.2

We also found that there were differences in skills students gained based on various demographics:

- Female students were significantly more likely to report improving civic skills “a moderate amount or a lot” compared to male students (except for leading a group project, which was on par for males and females).
- Female students were 10 percentage points more likely to report improving skills to speak up in class (65.3%), compared to male students (55.4%)
- Hispanic students were significantly more likely to report improving all the skills listed in table 2, compared to non-Hispanic students.
- Black students were most likely to report improving all skills (with the exception of “managing my time”) compared to White or Asian students.
- Students who are eligible for reduced lunch were significantly more likely to report that JSA improved skills in conversing with adults, speaking up in class, leading a group project, and reading about and understanding current events.
- Similarly, students whose parents have less than high school level education were the most likely to say that JSA improved their skills in speaking up in class, leading a group project, and reading and understanding current events.³

³ Under 100 respondents in the sample for less than HS, and HS graduate

Table 2a: Improvement in Civic Skills by Demographic

	Speaking up in Class	Leading a Group Project	Reading and understanding current events
Female	65.3%	42.7%	49.7%
Male	55.4%	42.4%	44.9%
White	59.0%	39.9%	43.2%
Black	61.5%	45.8%	58.3%
Asian	56.7%	37.1%	43.0%
Hispanic	71.8%	54.1%	61.9%
Non-Hispanic	58.9%	40.4%	44.6%
Parents have no college experience	69.2%	52.5%	63.0%
Parents have college experience	64.8%	43.4%	48.7%
Students who Receive Reduced School Lunch	69.2%	48.0%	57.9%
Students who do NOT Receive Reduced School Lunch	58.5%	41.1%	44.8%

When asked what the most valuable takeaway from JSA, students overwhelmingly said that their ability to communicate ideas improved because of JSA. Below is a representative list of quotes from students.

“Don't be afraid of your opinions. Or that you have to look at every angle of a problem--sometimes (usually) two sides aren't enough to fully explain an issue. JSA also helped me find my voice and realize that when I talk, someone will listen. They may not agree, but that doesn't mean you're wrong or that your opinion is less important--on the contrary, it means it is all the more important that your ideas be heard.”

“I learned that public speaking is nothing to be afraid of and that politics and public speaking go hand in hand at times. With this lesson I learned to be more open and more outgoing so that I may be comfortable speaking publicly. Debating is one way my practice of public speaking was further developed and through such an experience I am now able to articulate my speaking much better and go up in front of a crowd to speak or give my opinion.”

“The ability to speak publicly about my opinions without fear of people viewing me in a bad way. This increased my self-confidence and allowed me to speak well at JSA conventions as compared to other debates.”

Civic Behaviors

In this survey, students were asked if they were somewhat or extremely likely to participate in civic or political behaviors in the past few years. This was used to assess student's level of involvement previous to their participation in JSA. Students were most likely to report being somewhat or extremely likely to participate in extra-curricular clubs, community service activities, and reading the newspaper when thinking about the past few years. They were less likely to report attending or speaking at a public meeting, volunteering for a political party and participating in non-electoral political activities in the past few years.

Table 3a: Civic or Political Participation (Past Few Years)

(% said "somewhat or extremely likely")	Thinking about the past few years
Participate in other extra-curricular clubs	90.3
Participate in community service activities	84.5
Read the newspaper (in print or online)	75.3
Participate in student government	64.3
Attend or speak at a public meeting	62.2
Volunteer for a political party or campaign	49.2
Participate in political activities such as boycotts, protests, marches, or demonstrations	46.0
Write a letter to a public or authority figure with purpose of expressing your views	45.8

Students of different backgrounds appear to have brought different levels and types of experiences. For example:

- Female students in the program were more likely than male students to participate in community service activities (89.8%) compared to male students (78.5%). Female students were also more likely to report participating in student government in student government (68.3%) compared to male students (60.6%).
- Asian students were the most likely to report participating in extracurricular clubs in the past few years, whereas Black students were most likely to report participating in student government, compared to their counterparts.
- Hispanic students were significantly more likely to report participating in student government (75.6%) compared to non-Hispanic students (63.0%) and participate in boycotts, marches and demonstrations (52.8% versus 45.3%).

The second set of behavior questions asked about student's participation in the future. This data could indicate that JSA is influential in future political behaviors among youth who participate. Ninety-six percent of students said that they would be somewhat or extremely likely to vote on a regular basis in the future, and 93% see themselves participating in volunteer work in the future.

Table 3b: Civic or Political Participation (Thinking About the Future)

(% said “somewhat or extremely likely”)	Thinking about the future
Vote on a regular basis	96.0
Do volunteer work for charity	93.2
Donate to a charity	92.8
Sign an email or written petition	88.2
Attend or speak at a public meeting	86.8
Contact or visit someone in government who represents your community	79.0
Volunteer for a political party or campaign	74.3
Participate in political activities such as boycotts, protests, marches, or demonstrations	72.4
Contact a newspaper, radio, or TV talk show to express your opinion on an issue.	68.6

These behaviors differed based on various demographics:

- When thinking about the future, female students were more likely than male students to respond that they could see themselves participating in volunteering work for a charity (women: 97.3%, men: 88.5%)
- Female students in the program could also see themselves doing more civic or political behaviors in the future. For instance, young women were significantly more likely to say: they would volunteer for a political party or campaign (77.9%) compared to male students (71.0%); participate in political activities such as boycotts, protests, marches or demonstrations (76.1%) compared to male students (69.0%); attend or speak at a public meeting (88.7%) compared to male students (84.9%)
- White students were more likely to report participating in future political behaviors (like contacting a public official and volunteering for a political party or campaign) compared to Asian or Black students.
- No significant differences by students who receive reduced school lunch.

Students who were new to JSA (a year or less) were less likely than those who have been part of JSA for four years to report participating in civic behaviors, like attend or speak at a public meeting, volunteer for a political party or campaign, or participate in political boycotts, protests, marches, and demonstrations.

Table 4a: Civic and Political Behaviors in the Past Few Years by Years at JSA

(% said “somewhat or extremely likely”)	Past few years (1 year at JSA)	Past few years (4 years at JSA)
Attend or speak at a public meeting	55.0%	75.8%
Volunteer for a political party or campaign	41.1%	74.2%
Participate in political activities such as boycotts, protests, marches, or demonstrations	37.7%	63.6%

Students who have been involved with JSA for four years were more likely to report participating in behaviors in the future compared to students who were new to JSA. Still, nearly 85% of students who were part of JSA for one year report being somewhat or extremely likely to attend or speak at a public meeting in the future – six percentage points less than students who have been involved for four years. The data suggests that students in JSA benefit in the first year but still, more enduring participation in JSA is related to stronger outcomes. It is possible that students who came in with a low level experience may take a little longer than the kids who came in with strong civic experiences to benefit from JSA programming.

Table 4b: Civic and Political Behaviors in the Future Years by Years at JSA

(% said “somewhat or extremely likely”)	Future (1 year at JSA)	Future (4 years at JSA)
Attend or speak at a public meeting	84.9%	90.8%
Volunteer for a political party or campaign	69.6%	80.3%
Participate in political activities such as boycotts, protests, marches, or demonstrations	67.9%	83.3%

When asked what the most valuable part of JSA was, many students indicated that it has influenced how they think about their civic and political engagement in the future. Below is a representative group of quotes by students related to future civic behaviors:

“I started off my JSA experience at the summer program at Stanford last summer. At the time I wasn't sure if I was interested in politics although I knew I had a passion for debate. Being able to discover my interests and ultimately decide a career path through the knowledge I gained of myself after participating in JSA is definitely the greatest benefit I have received.”

“JSA essentially got me interested in civic engagement. In college, I hope to pursue a path in governmental affairs, and such a course would not have happened if not for JSA.”

Beliefs and Efficacy

Overall, students in JSA have strong civic beliefs. Nearly 90% of the students in JSA believe that it’s important to challenge inequalities in society, and believe in their ability to make a difference in their community. However, only half of respondents said they would be interested in a career in politics and government. Students also indicated that they feel they are able to do many civic behaviors. Eighty-eight percent of the students reported feeling like they have the ability to express views (which connects back to JSA programming improving communication skills), and 84% believe they could identify groups or individuals that could help with a problem or community issue. Students were the least likely to report feeling like they were able to organize a petition, with 69% reporting they could do so. Yet, over three

fourths of students do feel like they can take leadership roles, like being able to run a meeting (76%) and are confident with their skills in persuasion by feeling like they are able to get others to care about the problem (83%).

Table 5: Civic Attitudes and Beliefs

	% said agree or strongly agree
I think it's important to challenge inequalities in society	89.4
I believe I can make a difference in my community	89.3
I enjoy talking about politics	85.3
Being actively involved in community issues is my responsibility	84.5
I am interested in a career in politics and government	50.1

Table 6: Civic Efficacy

Indicators of Efficacy	% "I probably or definitely can"
Ability to express views	87.7%
Identify groups or individuals that can help	83.3%
Get others to care about the problem	82.7%
Ability to run meeting	76.0%
Ability to write letter to a newspaper	71.9%
Ability to create plan	71.4%
Contact public official	71.4%
Call a stranger to ask for help on a problem	70.0%
Organize a Petition	68.6%

There were some differences by gender and race:

- Female students were more likely than male students to agree or strongly agree that being involved in their community is their responsibility (87.6% vs. 81.1%), and that it's important to challenge inequalities in society (91.6% vs. 87.1%). Female students were also significantly more likely to say they "probably or definitely can" get others to care about a problem (85.4% vs. 79.7%), and ability to run a meeting (78.0% vs. 73.4%) compared to male students.
- Male students in JSA were more likely to say they enjoy discussing politics (89.2%) compared to female students (82.0%).
- Students of color (Black and Asian students) were the least likely to feel like they would be interested in a career in politics (by nearly 10 percentage points) compared to White students.
- Asian Students were the least likely to report that they probably or definitely can have the ability to conduct behaviors in Table 6, however they were most likely to agree or strongly agree that it's important to challenge inequalities.

- Black students were the most likely to express efficacy around political organizing behaviors (identify groups or individuals that can help, call a stranger to ask for help, and organize a petition). They were also the most likely to say that they would participate in boycotts or protests in the future compared with their White or Latino counterparts.
- No significant differences by students who receive reduced school lunch.

The skills and knowledge developed through JSA were related to students' motivations, beliefs, civic efficacy and confidence. Below is a selection of representative quotes that represent how students felt JSA was most valuable to them.

"My self-confidence has boosted infinitely while being a part of JSA. I am now able to stand in front of a group of strangers and speak my mind, a feat that seemed impossible to me freshman year. The experiences I've had and the friends I met are unparalleled to any other club I've been a part of."

"I have learned the importance of accepting and understanding other's opinions, and why it is pertinent we do so. I have also learned the importance of the individual's voice."

"The most valuable lesson I learned is the importance of Civic activism, particularly for the youth, who's voices go unheard far too often."

Respondent Characteristics

Among the 1708 respondents, 53.3% identify as female and 46.7% identify as male. The sample is predominantly White students (41.7%), while 20.1% identify as Asian, and 5.7% identify as Black. Fifteen percent identify as Hispanic. The sample is not as diverse in terms of student's socioeconomic status: only 88 students out of the entire sample had parents with no college experience *and* had no college experience. However, 20.6% of students said they receive reduced school lunch. Almost all students (94.1%) went to public school, and students were a range of grade levels (with 36.7% in class of 2014, and 27.5% in class of 2015).

Table 7: Demographics of JSA Annual Census Sample

Total Respondents = 1708		
Gender	%	
	Female	53.3%
	Male	46.7%
Race		
	White	41.7%
	Black	5.7%
	Native	1.8%
	Asian	20.1%
	Pacific Islander	1.9%
	Latino/a	9.7%
Ethnicity		
	Hispanic	15.0%
	Non-Hispanic	85.0%
Eligible for Reduced Price School Lunch Program		
	Yes	20.6%
	No	79.4%
Parental Education		
	Did not complete high school	4.4%
	High School Graduate	6.8%
	Some College	5.7%
	Associate's Degree	5.3%
	Bachelor's Degree	27.7%
	Graduate Degree	50.2%
# of Years Involved with JSA		
	1 year	49.9%
	2 years	31.0%
	3 years	13.9%
	4 years	5.1%
High School Type		
	Public	94.1%
	Private	5.9%
Projected High School Graduation Year		
	2013	18.7%
	2014	36.7%
	2015	27.5%
	2016	17.1%

Program Activities & Satisfaction

Overall, students in JSA felt JSA lived up to their expectations. Forty-four percent of students said JSA “exceeded my expectations’ and 33.4% responded that JSA ‘met all of my expectations.’ On average, students were satisfied with their activities, especially those activities beyond the activities at their school. Students were not as satisfied with the chapter activities at their school, as they were with other activities.

As two students explained:

“In my four years of JSA, I found that JSA activities fell short on the chapter level. More than CPs should be included in CP Meetings because, believe it or not, not all CPs are motivated. Guides should be given out to chapter advisers as well in an attempt to secure minimum requirements for each chapter.”

“I think that moderator instruction should be better. I would say at least 40% of the debates I attended were less valuable because of the poor moderation.”

The students in the sample are very highly engaged in JSA (only 13% do only one JSA activity). Tables 10 & 11, and Figure 1 give further description on how respondents are participating in the program.

Table 8: Satisfaction with JSA – All Programs

Overall, how did JSA live up to your expectations?	
Did not meet my expectations	1.5%
Met some of my expectations	20.9%
Met all of my expectations	33.4%
Exceeded my expectations	44.1%

Table 9: Satisfaction of JSA by activity

Activity*	Average (1 = not at all satisfied, 10 = extremely satisfied)
Chapter activities at my school	6.83
Fall State Convention	8.37
Winter Congress	8.47
Spring State Convention	8.34
Summer School	8.89
Summer Institute/Symposium	8.31

Table 10: Participation in JSA Activities

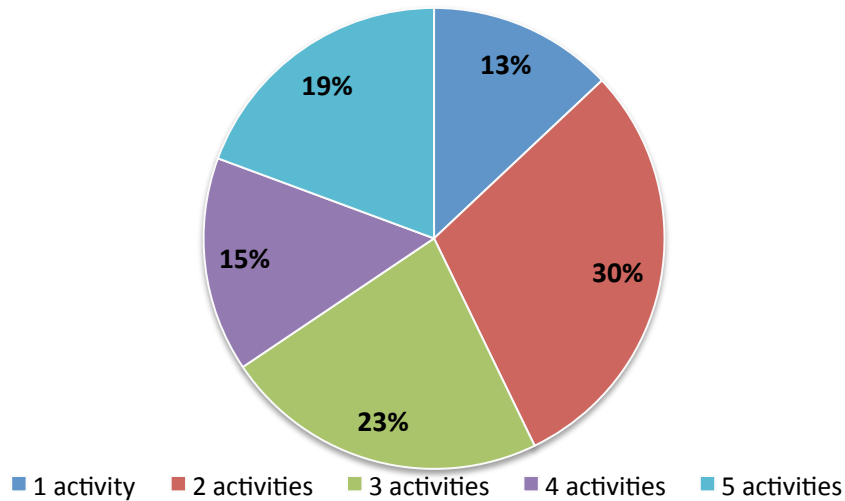
Activity*	
Debates	85.6%
Thought Talks	74.5%
Fundraising	41.4%
Community Service projects	23.4%
Hosting Elected Officials	18.3%
Political Service projects	17.9%
Voter registration drives	13.1%
Trips to City Council, School Board, or Gvt Meeting	11.8%
Letter writing campaigns	8.0%

Table 11: JSA Offices and Positions Held

JSA Offices / Positions*	
State or regional elected officer	5.5%
State or Regional Cabinet Member	13.7%
Chapter President	14.8%
Chapter Officer	34.3%

* Could select more than one option

Figure 1: Number of JSA Activities Students Participate in



Lastly, students were asked about potential improvements to the program. A few reoccurring suggestions include:

1. Broadening marketing, recruitment, and messaging; increase inclusiveness to the program

"I think more publicity would help because JSA is a great program, and more people could learn a lot more if they were involved."

"expanding to inner-city schools and growing. Also connecting chapters together to help with events, one-days, and other social events."

"Reduce the rhetoric around the worth of summer-school; those students are not 'more loyal' or 'more worthy' to JSA than other students are; make scholarship proceedings FAR more transparent; recognize institutional challenges that lower-income chapters have that continue to inhibit their growth and inhibit a wide diaspora of views at JSA events (keeping JSA very firmly and overwhelmingly middle and upper-middle class)."

"Improve the name recognition so that many other students will be inclined to participate."

2. Developing Connections between State Chapters

"I think that as a whole, JSA states need to be connected more. I think that not enough of the people in my state knew about the other states."

"I think that to make JSA better we can broaden the connection to each chapter in different schools to strengthen the communication between chapters."

"Have more regional activities so that more JSAs can get involved in these programs. By having these activities, it will help create more JSAs and it will help gain support for the club"