



Journal of the International Public Debate Association
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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

In Defense of Topic Disclosure, Again

Michael T. Ingram¹

There continues to be a variety of perspectives on the role of topic disclosure in IPDA. Ingram (2017) argued for topic disclosure using three case studies and responses to arguments critical of the practice posted by Duerringer & Adkins (2014) and Richey (2015). Ingram (2017, p. 18) argued that disclosure “can significantly increase the quality of informed argumentation in a round.” Welch (2018) responded in a Forum essay to Ingram’s arguments and analysis of three case studies, taking the position that topic disclosure ought not to be used except in rare occasions, and as “a final resort, not the first.” Welch offered thoughtful questions on an important topic. This essay will review the definition of the term, respond to the central arguments offered by Welch, and defend topic disclosure as a helpful tool for fairness, both from a practical and an ethical viewpoint.

Definitions

The definition of topic disclosure is still key to this conversation. Ingram (2017, p. 18) offered a definition and analysis:

The affirmative providing the negative with one or two sentences that accurately describe the affirmative approach to the topic before five minutes have elapsed in the preparation time. This definition is similar to Key’s use of the term as “the affirmative debater disclosing the general direction of the round to the negative” (p. 10). This combination of definitions is less proscriptive than Duerringer & Adkins (2014, p. 4) use of “the practice of declaring the affirmative’s resolitional analysis before the beginning of debate rounds” and Richey’s (2015, p. 7) “disclosure can mean letting a debater’s

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This manuscript was submitted to JIPDA while Dr. Christopher Duerringer was the journal’s editor. To order to ensure rigor, he oversaw the blind review process for this essay.

opponent know the definitions the debater plans to frame the round with.” Certainly topic disclosure does not mean the affirmative gives away the coming arguments or reveals its best strategies before the round. Disclosure simply identifies the framework of the round or whether the affirmative is going to run metaphor topics in the abstract or in an identified and applied context.

Consider how Ingram uses the term “approach” and Key uses “direction.” Together they are not ‘giving away the store’ by revealing all the affirmative arguments, definitions, evidence and strategies. Disclosure simply provides the scope and direction for the coming debate. It often indicates if the round will have a broad or narrow focus, or be presented as a fact, value or policy round.

Welch (2018) objects to this definition on a few fronts, claiming debaters might not achieve a common and accurate meaning in the first five minutes of preparation time, arguing it is “impractical.” But this conflates case building with defining a scope for the round. Consider a sample resolution “The United States needs educational reform.” The affirmative debater can indicate if she is going to argue the topic broadly, or narrow it to an age group (primary, secondary or undergraduate focus), or zoom in on a topic area like foreign language, sex education or math education. Both debaters will still have over 20 minutes to develop their cases. More often than not, this disclosure is succinct, truthful and provides a helpful direction, especially with a statement like “the round will be about secondary education.”

Welch (2018) wonders what happens if the affirmative changes her mind about the resolitional analysis during preparation time. The simple answer is to disclose only when debaters have a clear idea in mind. It is helpful for affirmative teams to say something like “let me think about this for a few minutes and get back with you.” Students at regional and national tournaments have done this successfully for years. A second answer is to let the negative debater know you have changed or refined directions. That is simply professional courtesy. The affirmative can say “hey I was focusing on secondary education but I have added primary as well. See you in 20 minutes.” It is quick, fair and easy to do. If further reflection leads the affirmative to a slight change in the disclosure it is better to share that second bit of information, then to not share it, and appear to have shifted ground without warning in an unfair fashion.

Next, Welch (2018) asks what happens when the topic disclosure is not received as helpful by the negative, and might even lead the negative to make claims about misdirection in the round, believing that would only add confusion. Again, when affirmative teams provide clear concrete information on the direction of the round (not specific arguments or evidence), this concern is mitigated. Teams may argue over the affirmative interpretation regardless of topic disclosure. Negatives might be unhappy about the direction of the round, or even run topicality or similar arguments, but they have been informed about the coming direction.

Welch (2018) concludes by wondering how disclosure discourages pre-prepared or canned cases, stating that judges “should be skeptical about the organic nature of a case when a debater can make this leap within five minutes of receiving the resolution.” But in fact some resolutions are rather “straight up” and disclosure can quickly clarify them, like verifying a round “NATO promotes peace” will stand for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and not some other entity like the New Atomic Tomatoes Operation. Some resolutions, including metaphors and quotations, might project a central thesis or idea, like Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “The only thing we have to fear, it fear itself.” That might also yield an immediate direction for the affirmative.

Some debaters will frame metaphor rounds into their knowledge base, or into their academic major, and may be able to do this quickly. This essay posits most debaters will develop a focus in the first few minutes in order to maximize their preparation time. (Though not all affirmatives do this, as some may indeed struggle with the approach, arguments, evidence or framework all during their preparation time). Thus sharing that framework of the round with the negative does not lead to canned cases. (And debaters might use canned cases regardless of disclosure status so this argument seems non-unique). Disclosure and using canned cases are two very distinct practices.

Defense of three cases studies as proof for topic disclosure

Next this essay responds to Welch’s arguments concerning the three case studies used as proof, claiming they were used in a flawed fashion. The first 2017 case study referred to an October 2011 debate resolution “The primary season is already over.” The affirmative debater argued that summer was the primary season, and now that season was past. The negative debater spent a few minutes defending the probable framer’s intent of the resolution, suggesting that likely Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney had already sewn up the party’s nomination, and then spent the rest of the time defending fall and winter as good seasons.

Welch (2018) suggests the negative debater could have run a topicality argument and also claimed the affirmative had run a tautology. Welch believes the negative debater should have run debate theory based arguments, and that disclosure would have not been helpful.

However there are a few issues at hand. First, IPDA continues to give broad latitude to affirmative debaters to define the round. Topicality arguments may or may not be successful here, apart from whether they have merit. Moreover, does the IPDA community desire to see more topicality based arguments, as is the practice in some other debate formats? IPDA values lay judges and desires their use in rounds. Why then might IPDA want to promote arguing debate theory when disclosure could solve? Some debate theory can become complex in a short amount of time. If the goal

is to argue a position in front of a lay judge, it seems the position should be clear from the start on its own merits, and disclosure promotes that view.

While Welch's analysis of this resolution as a tautology is plausible, it is not clear that all judges, especially lay judges, will understand that concept. A negative debater making these arguments would have the burden to explain the concept and hope the judge understands it. Teaching debaters about logic and preparing them to identify tautologies is a valuable skill and a desirable goal. If disclosure had revealed the affirmative direction, the negative could have prepared to make the explanation of tautology more clearly.

A key assumption here is that many college debates center on news and current social and political events. College debaters have argued such topics for decades. In the fall prior to a presidential election year, when daily newspapers and weekly magazines contain many stories of political campaigns, it is entirely reasonable to deduce this topic could (and perhaps should) center on politics. A political focus also yields more debatable ground. And American political history is full of examples of "leading contenders" months before the Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary, who do not end up with the nomination. A debate on whether Mitt Romney would actually win would be interesting and have plenty of room for both sides to argue. An affirmative debater choosing a framework otherwise could simply disclose this in a sentence after the strike and prior to round to promote clarity in the debate round. Thus disclosure would, in Welch's use of policy debate language, solve a harm of ambiguity by identifying the direction of the round in advance. That solves for the problem of negative teams being surprised by unusual interpretations of the resolution. It leads to the advantage of more negative preparation time to make a clear response, using debate theory or not.

The second case study referred to a March 2015 tournament where the resolution was "America should drink less Koch." Welch (2018) asserts the particular debater in question was inexperienced, and followed top Google searches to the name of Jim Koch, who founded Samuel Adams beer. However, Welch does not address the claim that disclosure would greatly help prevent a misunderstanding in round. Further, topic disclosure can promote a more informed debate. If the negative had asked "may I ask how you will approach the debate" and the affirmative responded, "I will discuss Samuel Adams beer," that could have led to a more informed round and allowed both sides the same amount of time to prepare. The negative could have then studied Adams and beer, instead of political fundraising. Whether the topic choice is an honest one, a flawed one, or an evasive one, topic disclosure helps to solve misunderstandings or devaluing the preparation time of the negative. (Note Ingram in 2017 claimed the approach seemed like "employing tricky definitions" but he did not render a judgment that the debater was "maliciously attempting to employ tricky definitions." There seems no intent to impugn the character of any debater.)

Next Welch (2018) makes the argument that college debaters do not have the knowledge that coaches do, and points to several Google searches that could lead an affirmative debater to discuss Samuel Adams in this resolution. Adams and beer might well be good topics for students to know about and argue over. Yet this claim seems to sidestep the observation about the prevalence of political news and political topics at IPDA tournaments, and their selection as many a subject for debates. This essay argues well over half the topics at this particular tournament were overtly political in nature. Moreover, the Koch family has been in the news for a long time for their wealth and political activity. An affirmative student may interpret this topic as beer centric, but the argument still stands that the topic could also quite likely point to a political topic, especially in the context of tournaments. Again, disclosure solves for this potential ambiguity.

Welch (2018, p.34) argues we must recognize “the pressure of researching and developing one’s case in a limited amount of time.” This observation sidesteps the claims regarding topic disclosure. The time pressure of researching and composing good argumentation is the burden all IPDA debaters face. Some debaters know how to conduct research and find relevant figures, facts and sound argumentation better than others in the allotted time. This ability level is always a factor in debate rounds. What topic disclosure can do is create a more level playing field between the affirmative and negative in giving both the same amount of time to approach the affirmative’s interpretation of the resolution. This honors the preparation time of both sides and promotes fairness.

Welch (2018, p. 35) notes that some teams have “the luxury of a coach and/or multiple experienced teammates contributing to one’s case.” While this is true, it does not negate the rationale for topic disclosure. From the *Star Wars* movies, Yoda declares “size matters not.” Perhaps that is true in this IPDA instance. The quality of one’s argumentation is not entirely dependent on the size of one’s team. Students may be on small or solo teams and still come up with brilliant arguments. Or disclosure might particularly help debaters on smaller teams who do not have multiple teammates to help them research all possible affirmative arguments or cases. Again, disclosure helps to solve problems and promote fairness for both sides.

Welch (2018, p. 35) concludes commentary on this example by arguing “a skilled debater could still easily identify arguments against drinking less beer, less Samuel Adams in particular...” It is true that skilled debaters can respond quickly on their feet, as the negative debater did in this round. But would the debate have not been better and more informed by disclosure? Both teams could have brought developed thinking and researched findings to the round. When the affirmative informs negative of the scope of the round, there is a more equal playing field, and a greater chance of a better debate.

Perhaps a comparison to individual events is in order. The student in extemporaneous speaking gets 30 minutes to prepare, and to consult paper or online

resources to search for analysis, arguments and evidence. It is reasonable for judges to expect fluid speaking, reasoned analysis and specific examples to establish arguments from this speaker. The student in impromptu has only a minute or two to prepare without any external resources. When an affirmative debater (the extemper in this illustration) selects an unusual or unexpected interpretation of the resolution, the negative is forced to respond in an impromptu fashion. To be sure, there is great value in developing competent impromptu speaking in IPDA. Yet it seems not quite fair to compare the extemper and impromptu speaker inside the same round. Disclosure allows both affirmative and negative debaters to have the advantages of the extemper's preparation. Had the affirmative debater in this illustration shared the Samuel Adams focus of the round, the negative debater could have responded from a more even playing field as a fellow extemper.

The third case study refers to a January 2012 tournament where the resolution was "Christian Bale is best Batman." After the affirmative debater disclosed he would run the topic literally, he showed up to the round declaring "by 'Christian Bale' I mean 'Mitt Romney' and by 'the best Batman' I mean 'the best Republican candidate for president.'" The affirmative debater had lied to the negative debater. Ingram (2017) argued that lying like this is incongruent with the spirit of IPDA.

This essay appreciates Welch's concurrence that the deceit of the affirmative debater was harmful to fairness and ethical practices. This essay also appreciates Welch's claim that disclosure alone will not dissuade a dishonest debater from cheating. Rules or practices alone may not change the hearts and minds of dishonest debaters not committed to truthful inquiry. But perhaps disclosure can help coaches get students to be men and women of their word. Disclosure might help them to think if they disclose a position they must be willing to stand by it, and that it must be fair.

It is unclear how this case is an argument against disclosure. Welch's second argument that there are rules to fight abuse, like running topicality, do not quite seem to apply here. The affirmative debater in question could have run Batman as a metaphorical topic and appropriately arrived at Mitt Romney. IPDA gives the affirmative wide latitude to frame the round and that prerogative is not in question here. What is in question is the deceit (which all authors in this thread seem to condemn) and how disclosure might help guard against it.

If the affirmative in this case wanted to talk about Romney, then he could have indicated that in disclosure. He could have made the best case for Romney, and allowed the negative enough preparation time to also prepare arguments against Romney, and/or for other candidates. Does the IPDA community want a world where affirmative debaters are free to show up with "a-ha, gotcha, you did not see this unusual interpretation of the topic coming" types of arguments? Or would the IPDA community value debaters taking their best ideas up against the best ideas of others? Disclosure helps promote both quality of argumentation, and it remains about fairness. It provides both sides a fair amount of time to research in the same area.

Further analysis

Interestingly Welch (2018, p. 38) does not conclude all disclosure is harmful to IPDA but that it should be quite limited in scope, offering the example of “Elizabeth is a proud one” in a November 2014 round. Elizabeth could mean an historical figure, the Queen of England, or Senator Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts. Welch said disclosure in this case focused the round on Elizabeth Kemp, a debater at Louisiana State University at Shreveport. The benefits described from this disclosure would apply to other cases as well. The ambiguity of the noun in the resolution, and the potential problem of teams bypassing each other, is solved by disclosure. Disclosure did not deprive the affirmative or negative debaters from accessing or researching arguments. Disclosure indicates the direction of the round. And in this case Welch said it pointed toward a “fun round” as opposed to a political or policy based round. The negative debater was treated fairly to know about that focus in advance. Negative debaters should receive such consideration in rounds across IPDA.

The importance of the definition of topic disclosure is seen once again, and this essay argues strenuously for affirmatives to share the framework or direction of the round, and not the specific arguments or evidence. Welch posits “disclosure of the affirmative’s position before the round begins is akin to sharing the questions of an exam to the student who is preparing to take the exam shortly!” This is a faulty comparison. Disclosure is not giving away the exam questions right before the exam. It is more like a study guide where professors indicate “the exam will be on chapters two, three and five but not chapter four.” Students still must have read the chapters and be prepared to answer questions about them on the exam. This study guide simply directs them away from wasting time on chapter four that will not be covered. Or perhaps the chemistry professor uses a study guide that clarifies the exam being on either the entire periodic table or only the portion concerning inert gases.

A key rationale for topic disclosure is announcing if the round will have a broad or narrow focus, which creates a more fair debate. Imagine the resolution is “The United States Federal Government should increase domestic energy production.” If the negative asks for disclosure and the affirmative provides oil and coal, or renewables, or all types of energy, it provides the negative fair warning and room to prepare either broadly or narrowly. That is preferable to the affirmative refusing to disclose, and the negative must prepare an overarching case, and yet have specific evidence for each type of energy production. This unfair burden is easily remedied by the affirmative saying “we will talk about solar and wind” for example. That gives the negative fair opportunity to research in depth just as the affirmative will.

Disclosure is especially helpful with metaphors and quotations, to provide some direction for the negative in preparation time. The national tournament has adopted a practice that one in every five topic choices will be a metaphor or quotation.

Most such topics can have multiple meanings. The 2012 topic “Life is better with Starbucks” saw some affirmatives argue straight up how the Starbucks culture and organization helps the lives of everyone, while some argued for drinking coffee and others argued for caffeinated beverages even more broadly. The 2019 IPDA National Tournament asked students to debate the quotation “In this present crisis, government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem” by Ronald Reagan. At the same tournament students were also asked to debate “There are too many cooks in the kitchen.” Both topics allow affirmatives expansive room to argue. Disclosure helps the affirmative crystallize a direction and gives the negative fair opportunity to prepare for a more informed debate.

Perhaps a final rationale for disclosure can be found in a Kantian framework. Richey (2016) offered “Tips for ethical debating in IPDA” and suggested “The golden rule: Do not do anything in debate that you would not like to happen to you!” Ingram provided this analysis in 2017:

Duerringer and Adkins (2014) use an example of the affirmative disclosing the resolution “We should work smarter not harder” being interpreted as an oil policy topic. Then they argue how this disclosure gives the negative an unfair advantage and time to research oil policies. However, disclosure means the negative gets to do some research into oil and comes to the round better able to offer substantive arguments related to oil, instead of having to guess about a very wide range of philosophical positions that “work harder” implies.

If the individual students were to change places, might the affirmative debater, now finding herself on the negative, believe that disclosure would be helpful and fair in preparing to debate working smarter not harder? Richey (2016) refers to Kant’s Categorical Imperative and his notions of universal laws and duties. Would the IPDA community wish for affirmative debaters to conceal their intentions of a broad or narrow topic, or conceal the interpretation of a metaphor round? Or would the community be better served by disclosure, giving both debaters a more equal and fair chance to prepare informed arguments for a round? This essay argues Kant’s principle of reversibility should influence student choices in disclosure.

Summary

This essay reviewed the definition of topic disclosure, responded to Welch’s (2018) evaluation of the three case studies in Ingram (2017) and offered other fairness based arguments for disclosure. Welch offered thoughtful objections which certainly serve to advance the conversation on this practice. Hopefully other IPDA researchers and scholars will join the conversation. Topic disclosure rests on the value of informed debate and a principle of fairness for both sides. IPDA is well served when both affirmative and negative debaters have a clear sense of what the debate is going to be about. Whether the focus is on policy, values, metaphors or facts, a more informed debate is almost always a better debate. Disclosure does not tip the scales or

cause ruin to the affirmative positions. It helps create opportunity for a more informed and honest debate to occur.

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FORUM

Editorial Note: In 2014, this journal began a Forum feature in hopes of stimulating a productive, reflective discussion among the members of our association. As ever, addresses to the forum are reprinted here without editorial intervention beyond copyediting and proof-reading.

The Philosophical Foundations of the International Public Debate Association: Reflections from the Ghost of IPDA Past

Jack E. Rogers and Nicole P. M. Freeman¹

This manuscript includes excerpts from the original meeting notes and discussions between the founders of IPDA, Dr. Alan Cirlin and Dr. Jack E. Rogers. It is intended to give the reader access to the concerns, analysis, decision-making process, and resulting policy implications that underpin the formation of the organization from the founders' point of view before that information is lost to future generations of student competitors and coaches. Additionally, the authors offer insights regarding the potential impacts of current antithetical practices, how these practices undermine the foundational principles of the activity, and how they might be addressed.

The Philosophical Foundations of the International Public Debate Association:

Reflections from the Ghost of IPDA Past

"I come to warn you that you have yet a chance and hope to escape the fate that awaits you if you but have the strength of will to grasp it. Do not take lightly the lessons of the

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past but use them to procure your future.” Jacob Marley, *A Christmas Carol*, Charles Dickens

The genesis of this manuscript lies in an NCA panel, *IPDA at the Crossroads: Speed, Jargon, and other Challenges*, presented at the 2020 virtual National Convention in Indianapolis, Indiana. As the only surviving member of the duo that created public debate, which later evolved into IPDA, and its founding President, I was asked to serve in the role of respondent to the panel members’ reflections regarding the changing landscape of IPDA and certain antithetical practices that seem to be insinuating their way into the activity. In subsequent discussions, I was encouraged to both address the process through which Dr. Alan Cirlin of St. Mary’s University, and I created “public debate,” shedding light on the philosophical underpinnings and history of the organization, and to offer commentary regarding what many might perceive as a “drifting away” from those foundational principles.

Now to begin, I must start by confessing that Alan and I occasionally had differing recollections on some of the specifics. After all, it has been more than 25 years, so I will refer to the extensive notes taken during those seminal meetings and the first few seasons. Our recollections may differ at times, and we sometimes did not agree on the finer points of policy and procedures, but we never disagreed when it came to matters of philosophy or our commitment to pedagogic debate. Second, I have neither actively coached nor entered IPDA competitions in almost two decades. However, I have kept in contact with present and past Board Members and competitors – now coaches – so I hope that my comments remain both cogent and germane.

The Genesis of Public Debate

“...met Dr. Alan Cirlin from St. Mary’s University today. Had a couple of drinks after dinner. We talked about the state of CEDA debate and how crossovers from NDT are ruining it with the typical bad habits that seem to infiltrate all forms of debate. He proposed a new format of debate. What else is new? Initial impression: eccentric, gregarious, personable, slightly crazy. Wants to continue discussions. We’ll see.” Excerpt from journal notes taken in November 1995 at the Speech Communication Association, San Antonio, Texas.

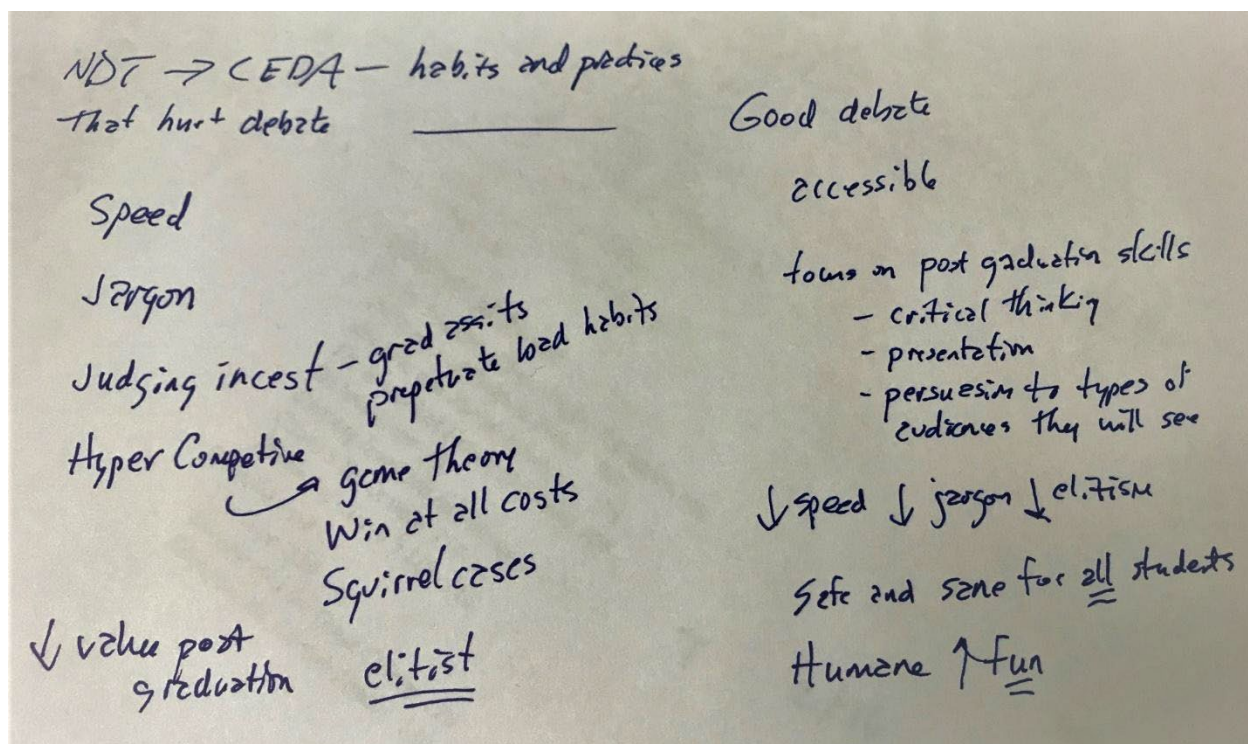
I returned from the national convention to the University of Texas at Tyler where I was serving as the Director of Forensics coaching CEDA-LD and individual events. Two weeks later, the phone rang. It was Dr. Cirlin. Several of the topics and concerns that we discussed while at the convention were re-hashed and Alan tried to convince me to return to San Antonio to engage in what he referred to as “*a series of discussions to explore the viability of creating a more accessible, student friendly, skills oriented, format of debate*” over the Christmas break. Still a bit leery, I declined.

Alan was not to be discouraged, so he entered his team in the *Patriot Games Tournament* we hosted at UT-Tyler. During a lull on Friday night, Trey Gibson, Alan Cirlin, and I started talking about debate pedagogy and philosophy. According to Alan:

The name “Public Debate” first came up as part of our discussions. I’m not sure how Trey heard about this, but that fall, at a business meeting at Jack Rogers’ tournament, Trey proposed Jack and I start a Public Debate Association. — I thought the idea was nuts. But Trey’s enthusiasm was contagious, and a number of other coaches jumped on board. Before the meeting broke up Jack and I found that we had agreed to give it a try. The next morning, Jack and I looked at each other like a couple of drunks recovering from a serious bender — What had we committed ourselves to? But we had said OK, so we agreed to give it a try. (Cirlin, et.al., 2015, 15-16)

Of course, Trey heard about the idea from Alan and Alan did not think the idea was “nuts.” Alan was always the master persuader who liked to believe he operated from behind the scenes. However, anyone who really knew Alan also knew who was really “pulling the strings” His enthusiasm and gregarious nature were contagious, so after several phone calls and discussions, I agreed to meet with Alan in San Antonio. In May of 1996, Alan and I began a week-long collaboration, the result of which would lead to the conceptual birth of the Public Debate Association.

At the conclusion of the first day of our retreat, we found that the more we commiserated and shared our disappointment and outright disdain for the problems that seemed to be inherent to academic, competitive debate, the more we discovered a common philosophical vision. Alan was the ‘idea man.’ He was always “the dreamer.” My role, according to Alan, was to be “the practical, the organizer, the one who would give structure to his ideas.” At the close of our first day’s discussions, we had assembled the basic philosophical foundation of what Alan termed “public debate.”



Picture taken from journal notes, May 1996, transcribed from a napkin while at dinner.

Our discussions could be summarized by our observations that the habits that had made NDT inaccessible and incomprehensible to most of the debate community and the wider external academic community, had slowly infiltrated CEDA as the NDT circuit continued to lose popularity, and those NDT programs began drifting into CEDA looking for a place to compete. Though CEDA was founded in an attempt to both address the bad habits of NDT and create distance between the two formats, even back then, they had slowly begun to become one.

For those new to debate, and thus unaware of the history of competitive debate in the U.S., CEDA (Cross-Examination Debate Association) did eventually merge with NDT (National Debate Topic). They maintain separate National Final Tournaments, but it is almost impossible to distinguish one from the other as they often co-host and cross-enter one another's tournaments. In response, many in the academic debate community fled to the newly founded NPDA (National Parliamentary Debate Association), founded on many of the philosophical principles held in common with the principles that launched IPDA. However, as the number of CEDA and NDT programs and tournaments dwindled, they infiltrated NPDA, bringing speed, jargon, and outlandish case positions with them. NPDA has suffered over the last few seasons, with many academic debate programs fleeing to NFA-LD (National Forensics Association – Lincoln-Douglas Debate) which was included as an individual event with a focus similar to IPDA, CEDA and NPDA as originally envisioned. Now, despite specific rules expressly forbidding both spread and speed, and limiting case positions, infiltrators leaving a dwindling NPDA circuit have brought speed, spread, outlandish case position, and poor in-round behavior with them. Thus, the more things change, the

more they have stayed the same. The late Harold Lawson (1997) offers a very detailed account of the history and evolution of intercollegiate debate in “Does the Forensics World Need Educational Extemporaneous Evidentiary Debate?”

Because of this evolution in competitive debate, it had become unintelligibly fast, reduced in many instances to breathless mumbles. Complicated jargon accessible to no one outside of a select few insiders and practitioners controlled the dialectic. Often bizarre interpretations of the narrowest scope were offered as justification for a much larger topic set. All of this was, in our opinion, done as a race to the bottom because of the pressure to win. Debate had become hyper-competitive and had little, if anything, to do with pedagogy. All of this was kept firmly in place by a cadre of highly specialized, so-called expert judges, many of whom seemed content to teach and reinforce these competitively successful behaviors. Those who disagreed with these trends in behavior were ostracized and treated with disrespect and even hostility. The result was a format of debate that was of, by, and for a very narrow slice of competitors and coaches that outsiders neither understood nor valued. The common assessment seemed to be that competitive debate lacked pedagogic value and was ineffective in teaching any of the skills necessary for post-graduation success.

In contrast, what we envisioned was a type of debate that was accessible to *every* student and coach. One that focused on teaching the kinds of post-graduation skills sought by employers, such as critical thinking, the formulation and organization of effective arguments, superior presentational skills, adapted to and persuasive for the types of audiences that they would encounter in their post-graduation, personal, and professional lives. In short, much like the British style of debate, which we had both experienced, we believed that the real test of academic debate was not found in a student’s win-loss record, but in their ability to apply what they had learned through their debate experiences to the undergraduate and graduate classroom, and in their personal and professional lives and careers. We also believed that the worth of a forensics program was not in its competitiveness, but the value of what it taught – its educational legacy. Subsequently, while Alan and I never made the argument that competitive excellence was inherently bad we did agree that when competition and competitive success becomes a program’s sole focus, the quality of pedagogy declines. We believed that a student coached correctly would, with few exceptions, find success. How a student defines that success, whether through competition or pedagogy, was an individual journey.

Alan summed up our intent when he wrote, “Sociological sub-culture, academic debate would indeed become a training ground where the specific oral communication skills students learn would in fact, be transferrable to the larger business, legal, and political worlds” (Cirlin, 1997, p. 265).

To create such an environment would require the suppression of speed, while encouraging the practices of using accessible language, keeping arguments concise, logical, and directed towards common sense arguments designed to persuade a wide

variety of audiences, the use of humane, thoughtful, and polite discourse, and a strong sense of equality of access to the inexperienced. Above all, we wanted students, judges, and coaches to enjoy the learning environment.

The Inherent Evil

We began day two recognizing that the challenge was to create a format of debate that was highly resistant to the gradual infiltration of the bad habits that seemed to always find their way into the competitive debate community. To do so would require an admittedly rigid devotion to our philosophy and a rule-based process that was resistant to outside interference. We, therefore, set about addressing each behavior that we felt was antithetical to pedagogic debate. What follows is our thought process for the changes we wanted to encourage and how to enforce them.

From the beginning, Alan and I knew that the only way to address what we considered bad behavior was to discover what motivated that behavior in the first place. Simply put, what fueled this incessant return to ruinous behavior? We came to the inescapable conclusion that the inherent evil was the drive towards winning. This hypercompetitive drive state inexorably led to the development of strategies designed to win by placing your opponent at a disadvantage. Talk faster than they can flow or follow, and in many cases, even understand. Use specialized language and jargon designed to obfuscate the clarity of your argument. Develop case interpretations that no one would ever think of, thus catching them without a logical response or the evidence to back it up. If all else fails, refuse to debate the resolution by offering obscure, mostly off-topic diversions arising from extremely narrow definitions.

But if this drive towards hyper-competitiveness was at the core of the bad behavior, how was it so firmly entrenched and recurrent no matter how other formats tried to discourage it? Why wasn't the CEDA revolution successful at keeping the infiltrators from hijacking their organization and returning it to the 'dark side' despite all their good intentions? More importantly, for Alan and myself, how could we break the cycle and prevent it from happening to our newly envisioned "public debate"?

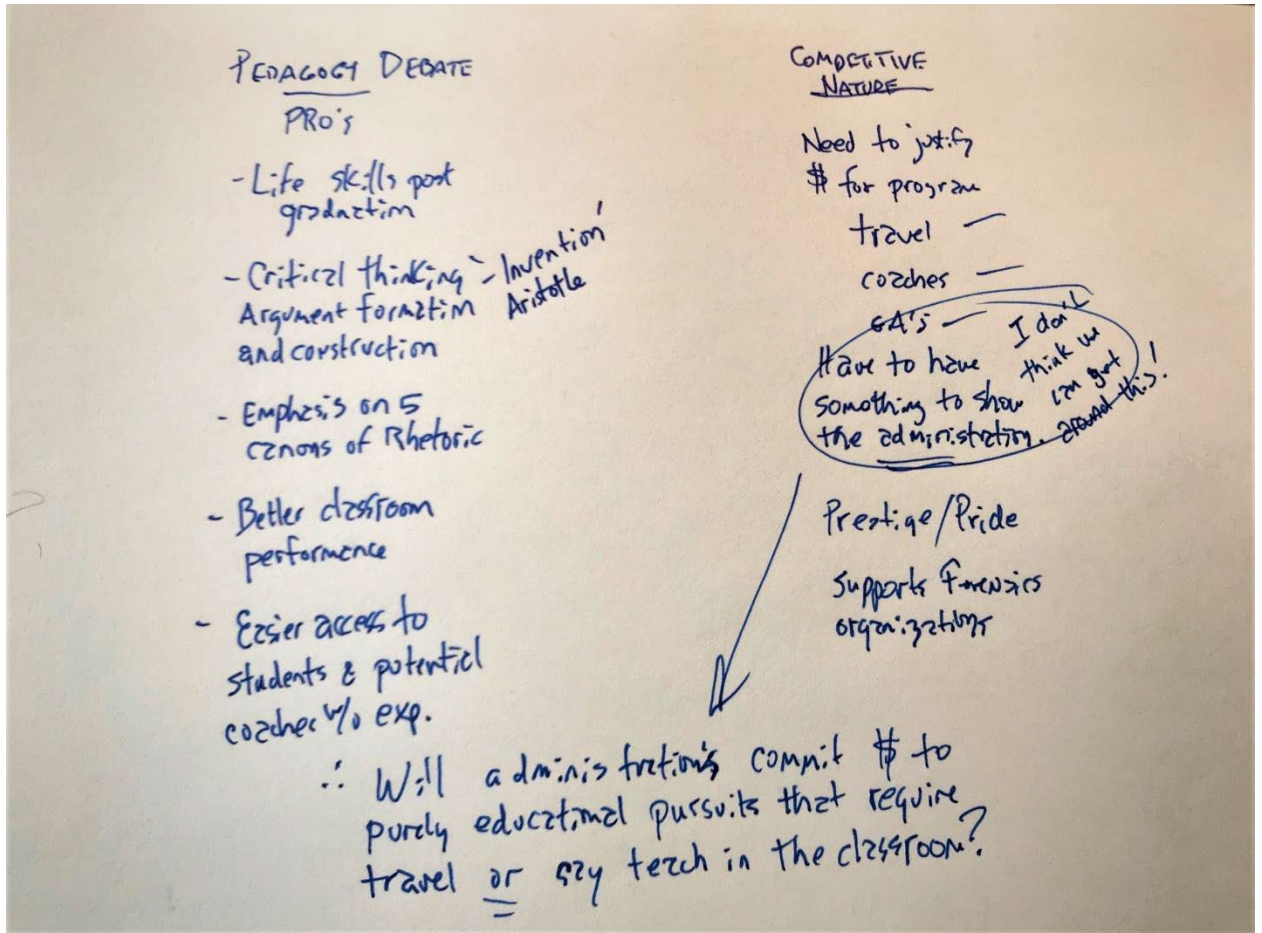
The Dialectic Tension of Competition vs Pedagogy

We began with a discussion – more of a debate, really – between Alan and I over the question: is competitiveness even necessary to academic debate that is pedagogically motivated? Could "public debate" survive organized around a festival model where there were no winners or losers, but the successes of every student and program were celebrated equally? Alan seemed to think it might be possible. He believed that if there was nothing to win or lose, then the temptation to adopt hypercompetitive attitudes would be moot.

I disagreed. I was concerned that administrators and faculty members would not see a need to go beyond the classroom to achieve this pedagogic vision. With no need to travel, administrations would be only too happy to cut funding and resources to forensic

programs. Without winners and losers what was the point? How would we entice naturally competitive students and faculty members to engage in this new format of debate? Perhaps, most important, how do we justify our existence to administrators and fellow faculty members in a resource scarce environment?

Alan advanced pedagogy while I defended competitive academic debate.



Picture taken from journal notes, May 1996, pedagogy vs. competitive academic debate.

In support of the pedagogic side of academic debate, Alan identified several critical goals that would eventually become our “learning outcomes” for public debate. First, pedagogic debate would be focused on teaching life skills useful in a post-graduation world. As a result, we would need to focus on sound, rhetorical principles, such as critical thinking, argument formation and construction, something Aristotle referred to as invention, with an emphasis on the five canons of rhetoric. Second, this should lead to better classroom performance by the debate student. Finally, pedagogically centered debate should be easily accessible to potential students and coaches without previous experience. Alan believed this was what was inherently lacking in the drive to “win at any cost” that was competitive debate. To be clear, Alan did not make the argument that there was nothing to learn from other formats of debate, which were competitively centered. Instead, Alan argued that the benefits to the students gained through

pedagogic debate far outweighed the costs that hyper-competitive debate inherently extracted.

I pointed out that debate programs required resources: coaches' salaries, reassigned time, graduate assistantships, scholarships, and travel funds. If we wanted our public debate programs and students to benefit from the experiences of travel and engaging students from other colleges and universities, we would have to justify those costs to administrations. Trophies, titles, and winning records were at least something to show for the administrators' commitment of resources. With little or nothing to show for their commitment of resources what was to prevent administrators from saying "why do you have to travel? Why can't you just teach this in the classroom? In fact, how is it different from the classroom education that we already provide the student" In addition, competitive success translated to a sense of pride and prestige – bragging rights, if you will – for those same faculty and administrations who might incorporate them into positive PR and recruiting strategies. Again, dollars in terms of potential students and donors were attractive to administrations. Finally, many of the competitive forms of debate were well-established within forensics organizations and the various communication associations. The paper and panel presentations at conventions and publications in forensic journals were often tied to specific, well-established forensic organizations. I argued that this new format of debate would be hard enough to justify without further estranging itself from the norms of established forensic organizations.

We went back and forth for most of the day, but finally arrived at the inescapable conclusion that if we wanted the benefits of pedagogic debate, we would be forced to justify our programs through some type of competitively based success. The challenge was how best to control for the natural competitive nature of our members. How could we empower educational debate while controlling for the competitiveness that always seems to creep in and take over?

The Coaching / Judging Conundrum

"We have met the enemy, and he is us!"

The political cartoonist Walt Kelly is credited with creating this phrase for an anti-pollution Earth Day poster in 1970. Alan and I thought his parody of Oliver Hazard Perry's famous summary of the Battle of Lake Erie during the War of 1812 perfectly captured the human tendency to be its own worst enemy, too often creating its own problems. This was the moment that the collective lightbulb began to shine upon a solution.

Returning to the first day's discussion, The inherent evil was not competition in and of itself, but the hypercompetitive drive state that motivated a "win at any cost" mentality. That mentality, in turn, fueled the drive towards the debate strategies that we identified as inherently antithetical to *educational* debate. Those most responsible for exhibiting this mental drive state were the coaches and judges who taught, encouraged, and rewarded these behaviors – and, in many ways, who could blame them? Their academic

careers and programs' existence were often dependent upon maintaining a winning record. Students were only emulating what they were taught, they observed as successful, and they saw rewarded.

In almost every format, intercollegiate competitive debate was increasingly co-opted by a small clique of "experts" motivated to perpetuate practices and strategies that better assured success. As the critics in the back of the room, they held dominion over the controlled evolution of argument strategy and presentation. Newcomers or outsiders who offered alternative styles or strategies were quickly isolated and ignored. This not only created an epistemic bubble, which no outside information could penetrate, but an echo chamber, where those inside the bubble came to openly distrust outsiders and their ideas because they threatened to upset the "winning quotient." We concluded that any arguments for returning to a more rational, educational type of debate would fall on deaf ears.

Now please do not misunderstand, we readily agreed that debate, centered in argument and not discussion, was an inherently competitive activity. Whether in a classroom, a courtroom, a boardroom, or a committee room, advocates wanted to "win" their arguments. Most of the skills necessary to do so were not being taught, encouraged, or practiced within the current hypercompetitive debate community. How to foster and teach these skills within a *balanced* competitive educational format of debate became our challenge.

Our solution was innovative though not really all that unique: use only lay judges. Now by *lay*, we did not mean ignorant. Within "public debate," coaches and graduate assistants would be discouraged from judging. Instead, tournament host institutions would be encouraged to use: 1) upper division students from relevant programs, such as communication, political science, theatre, and philosophy, 2) graduate students not affiliated with the forensic program, 3) faculty volunteers from relevant programs, and 4) local community volunteers, with an emphasis on businesspeople, lawyers, judges, pastors, and other professionals. In short, we encouraged a diverse, reasonably well-informed and educated judging pool made up of the same "critics" that our debaters would face in their personal and professional lives post-graduation.

This pool of lay judges would not tolerate speed, impolite behavior, or narrow argument strategies, but would respond to the articulate, persuasive delivery of well-reasoned, accessible, and intelligent argumentation. Would it be a perfect solution? Of course not, but this pool of judges represented the types of people that the debater would need to be able to engage with and persuade in their personal and professional lives. We felt this was a better way to teach them the skills of persuasive debate adapted to post graduation expectations.

Mark Lowery (2010), in his editorial on lay judging quoted one of Alan's earlier works:

Alan Cirlin wrote in "The Origins of the International Public Debate Association" that he felt the use of lay judges was the most critical

element of curbing the “lemminglike drive toward the excesses of NDT and CEDA”. The fledgling debate association was committed to “using real world, lay judges as the fundamental audience for our tournaments.” Cirlin “felt that having relatively untrained students, faculty, and community members judging would force the competitors to adopt effective oratorical strategies” (p. 3).

I still agree. I have perused the *Journal of the IPDA* and talked with several former associates and coaches who continue to have concerns over using students and non-advancing students, as well as the difficulty of finding volunteers for their judging pools. The same issues that confronted us in the early years of hosting tournaments continue to challenge tournament hosts today. I will say that as a DOF with 38 years of experience who has hosted and traveled to literally hundreds of tournaments, your complaints and concerns are no different than any other format of debate. Every student out there worries whether the judge is following their arguments, whether they are flowing correctly, what level of experience they have, and ultimately make the excuse that if they hadn’t had a lay judge, they would have won that round.

What IPDA seems to have avoided are the widespread use of the practices that we identified as antithetical to pedagogic educational debate. Again, talking with coaches and former associates and perusing the journal, I do see evidence of those practices and argument strategies beginning to rear their ugly head and it is deeply concerning. I would caution the organization to carefully consider the original intent of using trained, reasonably well-educated, and intelligent lay judges. I am both excited and gratified that IPDA is gaining popularity and momentum. Alan and I knew that growth would bring new ideas. Change is as inevitable as growth, but we felt that using lay judges would nurture that “progress” in a manner which kept the philosophy of educational academic debate secure.

My suggestion would be, while it is healthy to encourage programs that have in the past or continue to compete in primarily other formats of debate to participate in IPDA tournaments, be careful that you do not let complaints about judging expectations carried over from their previous experiences alter your commitment to using lay judges. They should understand and adapt to IPDA: not the other way around.

What Right Looks Like / Teaching by Example

Questions arose, both during the panel presentation at NCA and in subsequent discussions with Michael Ingram from Whitworth University, on the logic and process of creating what is now referred to as the “*professional division*.”

One question that came up during the panel discussion at NCA and in subsequent discussion with panelists was how what is currently referred to as the professional division came about. It was simple, actually. We believed that the best way to teach our students better debate practices was to model what right looked like. That isn’t to say that Alan and I were the best of models - far from it, some would argue - but we wanted

the students to see exhibition style debates between coaches, graduate assistants, and upper division students that were intelligent, thoughtful, solidly on-topic, displayed critical thinking, a balance of evidence and persuasive delivery, polite, and humorous when appropriate.

We began by making the Open Division available to anyone who wanted to enter. We decided to award points because at that time, students were still involved in the open division. When the Board moved to create a division for professionals, I was in favor of dropping any points towards tournaments or season long awards. I still favor exhibition style debates amongst the “professionals” for students to see solid academic debate modeled. We usually held ours as everyone waited on the awards assembly.

In the early years, both Alan and I were successful in encouraging community professionals to enter tournament competition. Professors, lawyers, pastors, and businesspeople were represented. For the most part, students seemed to enjoy the opportunity to debate against debate community outsiders. In several cases, internships, graduate assistantships, and jobs resulted from the exposure of our debate students to the larger academic and professional community.

Collaborative Preparation and Limiting Resources

Public debate was designed around a model of collaborative preparation. That is, everyone would go through the topic selection process in one large space and then groups of students debating the same side of a resolution – regardless of team affiliation – would prep their cases together. This environment of collaboration stimulated critical thinking, brainstorming, stronger and more varied arguments, and gave the coaches a chance to teach argumentation and strategy. It also built comradery amongst the larger IPDA community. Team affiliations weren’t seen as paramount goals. Strong, pedagogic debate emerged as groups took ownership of the ideas and arguments that they had created. Competitors shared information and ideas and built upon previous frameworks of argument to perfect both themselves and their craft.

Now, I am told by several coaches, students huddle down in small groups of teammates, or even in isolation, with their computers frantically searching for the most recent evidence to provide warrants for their claims. True, up to the minute, accurate, evidence is an important consideration in supporting one’s case, and a computer linked to the internet has certainly made accessing information easy. However, and I think Alan would agree with me, I believe that the reliance on computers to create and support arguments is a case of losing more than we have gained.

First, debaters tend to work towards more evidence rather than a few, well-informed pieces of evidence from experts. After all, locating that kind of evidence takes time. Too often, it becomes a case of any evidence will do, so long as it supports the argument. And let’s face it: almost anyone can find someone who will say exactly what is needed to support their case without regard to the validity of its content. This perpetuates the acceptance of faulty reasoning and the blurring of the lines between fact and opinion.

Isn't using this type of evidence to persuade Sophistry in its worst form? I don't think Aristotle would excuse the argument that "I didn't say it. I only read it in support of my claim" as a valid justification.

Second, it is too tempting to rely on the recency of the evidence to "win" the day. Rather than a time consuming, deep analysis of what the evidence says or where it came from, it is easier to argue that my evidence post-dates, and thus, must be superior. There is also the temptation to evidence stack. Too often, as critics we are asked to evaluate the claim, "I have more pieces of evidence than my opponent, so I win the argument," or "my opponent didn't respond with a piece of evidence, or it doesn't post-date my evidence, so I win." As critics, we aren't asked to evaluate the quality of the evidence or the credibility of the source. This results in lazy argumentation and a lack of critical thinking - neither of which will serve the debater in the classroom or post-graduation world.

Do people make up "facts" or rely on "fake news" from so-called "experts" to support their claims in the world outside of academic debate? Certainly. However, perhaps we shouldn't mirror the world in this instance, but should teach our debaters how to deal with such Sophistry in an effective manner.

These observations are not new. Alan and I discussed these trends in the CEDA and NDT debate communities in May of 1996. Even back in 1996, David Grassmick observed that the complications brought about by the introduction of LEXIS/NEXIS were profoundly shaping the debate community. He suggested "Debaters need to rethink how they deal with 'proof' in debate" and argued that current practices in how debate evidence was used made "evidence and source credibility debates nigh impossible" (Grassmick, 1996, p. 214). We concluded that when winning was more important than the quality of the evidence and arguments one used to win, the pedagogy of debate was in peril.

To resist the temptations and problematic behaviors of computers and the internet, Alan and I worked very hard to instill in our students the need to remain up to date on the news and a wide variety of topics. We discussed and outlined potential positions on current affairs. We developed files of information and evidence from respected experts in their fields and discussed them at length. We participated in deep, philosophical discussions of not only the "what" they thought, but "why" they thought that way. We encouraged critical thinking and evaluation. In sum, we wanted our students to be able to intelligently discuss and debate a wide variety of topics: serious, philosophical, and even humorous.

To reinforce these pedagogic goals, we did three things: 1) we came up with the five topic system that mixed mostly general knowledge policy, value, and fact resolutions, and even tried to incorporate topics that engendered creativity and humor; 2) we allowed nothing to be taken into the round that was pre-printed or "canned;" and 3) we

tried very hard to keep the resolutions within the realm of that which one might expect a reasonably well-educated and informed lay judge to have at least some knowledge of.

Did it solve for every instance of Sophistry? Certainly not. However, most of the time it encouraged our students to engage in a thoughtful debate within a topic or field in which they had a reasonable understanding of the key issues and could argue them well (topic selection was key).

To disclose or not to disclose? That seems to be the question.

In the 2014 and 2015 issues of the *Journal of the IPDA*, the question of affirmative disclosure seems to be at issue. Adam Key (2014) posits, “Disclosure is perhaps of the touchiest subjects within current practices of the International Public Debate Association” (p. 10). He predicates his position by advancing the argument that “the simple truth is that all arguments against disclosure boil down to one premise: it provides the affirmative debater a competitive advantage” (p. 10). In the same forum section, authors Duerringer and Adkins (2014) argue the downside to disclosure, stating, “it is our position that disclosure, which is founded upon a well-intended but misguided conception of fairness, is not only antithetical to the spirit of competition but, more significantly, robs students of one of the most valuable educational aspects of public debate” (p. 14). They seem to advance their theory predicated upon two practices: the widespread use of the negative strategy of topicality, and the success of canned cases. Nakia Welch (2014) seems to support these conclusions when she observes that disclosure, “opens the door for abuse (topicality) and presentation of ‘canned cases’ in debate rounds” (p. 22). These practices are attributed to, as Duerringer and Adkins (2014) observe, “reformed (or failed) policy and parliamentary debaters and coaches filtered into the IPDA” (p. 15). They argue that disclosure robs students of the educational value of debate, because it does not require them to think on their feet, develop their knowledge, or respond to unexpected arguments or developments.

In a follow-up article Richey (2015) observes:

The author instead suggests that disclosure should be viewed from an ethical vantage point. If the affirmative debater feels her or his definitions are reasonable, there is no need for disclosure. The negative debater can justly assume the topic will be debated in a straightforward manner with reasonable and predictable definitions. If not, the negative has the option to call abuse. However, if the affirmative finds him or herself in an ethical dilemma because he or she wants to squirrel the topic, then the debater and the coach must determine if disclosure is a fair scenario to insure a competitive and educational round (p. 12).

Ingram (2017) and Welch (2018) continue the disclosure debate, with Ingram arguing that the definition and intent of affirmative disclosure is key to its practice, and Welch responding with concerns over “telegraphing” too much information, the accuracy of

said information, and being “locked” into a strategy that cannot change if the affirmative changes its mind upon conducting further research.

I cannot speak for Alan, but I think he would agree that all of the authors have valid points, however we would tend to agree with Professor Richey’s (2015) summary. During preparation for the round, Alan and I would most often disclose our affirmative strategies to our opponents. We would even help the negative to prepare her or his arguments. For us, it was an opportunity to teach and to expand the knowledge of our opponent. We also encouraged others to follow this practice, but we never compelled anyone to do so.

From the beginning, we believed this to be an educational activity. A student competitor learned very little of value if they had no idea how to respond to the opponent’s arguments. Counter to Duerringer and Adkins’ analysis, we believed that, in the real world, more often than not, you had at least a pretty good idea of what your opponent would argue. In a court proceeding, both the prosecution and defense file a list of evidence, potential witnesses, and briefs of their major arguments. In a boardroom, you know the likely arguments against your proposal, and you prepared for them. In a school board meeting, it was most often public knowledge what would be argued. Hence, why would disclosure not teach “real life skills?” If the opponent decided to squirrel the topic, as Richey (2015) points out, there are accepted practices to challenge and defend your counter interpretation. I would tend to agree with Professor Key (2014) that unless there are unusual circumstances, there may be competitive advantages, but “there are no educational or pedagogic advantages to a lack of disclosure” (p. 10). However, Alan and I would never compel a debater to do so.

Maintaining a Consistent Leadership

One of the issues that Alan and I had witnessed in the wider debate community was the gradual takeover of leadership by outside influences. As the old leadership lost its controlling interest, the new leadership began to assert its influence over the philosophy and direction of the organization, which in turn, changed the very nature and practice of the type of debate offered by the organization. Much like a virus, hyper-competitive models were “introduced into the membership” which gradually changed the health of the “body” as a whole, subverting, in our opinion, its pedagogic focus. To prevent infection of the “public debate” organization, Alan and I created a closed model of leadership.

At the close of our meeting in May of 1996, Alan decided that he would serve as Executive Secretary and Treasurer, and he decided that I would be the organization’s first President. At first, I declined. I believed that the CEDA and IE programs and organizations that UT-Tyler was already a part of would not see it as a favorable action. He mistakenly thought I would be a stronger figurehead for getting the wider community to take us seriously. He finally persuaded me by asking me who else was crazy enough to do it. We then set up a Board by asking a few of our philosophical

confidants if they would like to serve. When an officer stepped down, the Board would nominate and elect a replacement. When a board member stepped down, a replacement was sponsored by a board member and elected by the board. The member programs were not allowed to vote on policies, procedures, or the leadership. In this way, we could ensure that the leadership remained true to our philosophical foundations and principles.

Michael Ingram of Whitworth University informs me, in an email dated March 22, 2021, that this model has remained primarily intact. I believe that the election of one board member by the membership is different. Professor Ingram (2021) writes “The three-person Executive Committee appoints its own members, the president, tournament manager, and exec-secretary. Each year at nats, the GB meets to discuss proposals that go to the EC for approval/rejection.” Alan and I believed that the guiding presence of a leadership committed to the founding principles of IPDA was essential – and I believe continues to be essential – to the overall health of the organization.

Open Membership / Commitment to Philosophy

From the beginning, Alan and I knew that, in order to control for the risk from the gradual incursion of outside philosophies, we would have to maintain a closed / open membership. That is, we would openly embrace any program that wished to join us so long as they exhibited a willingness to adhere to the philosophies of “public debate.” Dabblers were welcome to enter our tournaments, but they were observed very carefully before we extended membership. If they attempted to bring in hyper-competitive behaviors, we would attempt to have an in-depth discussion with the coach or program director. If there was no change, there was no offer of membership extended. We kept our experiment restricted to the 10-12 programs that we shared a deep philosophical connection with for the first several years.

We knew that people would accuse us of being academically xenophobic, and I guess in some ways we were guilty as charged. In the early years, coaches representing the wider debate community often dismissed, even ridiculed “public debate” as an “eccentric” activity being run by the “blissfully ignorant,” who couldn’t compete with the big dogs in CEDA or NDT. However, we were also confident that we would grow in both size and popularity. Now that growth has been realized with over 100 programs from across the United States being represented in IPDA competitions. The challenge that the organization faces as it moves forward is what kind of changes will it tolerate.

The Gradual Loss of IPDA’s Unique Identity

The intent of this manuscript was both to discuss the historical formation of the IPDA and to address concerns over what many perceive as the gradual “drift” away from the foundational principles that give the organization its unique place within the competitive academic debate community.

Alan and I foresaw a time when IPDA would become popular. Others would become increasingly frustrated by the hyper-competitive exclusiveness of other formats and look for something more suited to the pedagogic goals and student outcomes their programs needed. Still others would find that a lack of NDT/CEDA tournaments and dwindling budgets forced them to look for more easily accessible competitive outlets. Either way, membership would swell. To be clear, Alan and I never feared growth or progress. We were concerned that, as others joined the ranks of IPDA, they might bring their old habits and behaviors along with them. After all, we had seen it happen to other organizations too many times. Again, the question seems to be: how much the organization is willing to tolerate?

After numerous discussions with active coaches, former competitors, NCA panelists, the editor of the organization's Journal, and old "has-beens" like myself, long-since retired from active coaching or competition, there are two behaviors that concern me, and I believe would concern Alan even more.

The emergence of hyper-competitive behaviors and strategies - What is worrisome is that "squirrels," the use of canned cases, the practice of always arguing topicality and screaming abuse, negative spread (which inherently necessitates the use of speed in delivery), the description of the activity as a "competitive game," and a concern for finding a competitive edge, have found their way into public debate as seemingly common occurrences. These practices are antithetical and serve to validate our concern that, if we were not careful, to quote Duerinnger and Adkins (2014), that the "dog would return to its vomit" (Prov. 26:11) through "reformed (or failed) policy and parliamentary debaters and coaches filter[ing] into the IPDA" (p. 15).

Regional differences which have caused a drift away from foundational practices – It has become clear to me that different regions "practice" public debate differently. Now, part of that, is to be expected and one can witness regional differences in every other forensic organization's competitions. However, when those differences include abandoning the dependence upon, and in some cases even the use of, a lay judging pool and the five resolution/strike format, those are not just preferential differences. They are significant differences that seriously deviate from the principles upon which IPDA was predicated.

Of the differences, the non-use of a lay judging pool probably presents the more serious threat. One active coach described regional differences in judging pools by saying, "IPDA in the South continues to use many classroom students (non-debaters) as tournament judges, whereas most of us across the nation require judges with BA or BS degrees. I think the Southern IPDA folks think this element of true lay judges contributes to preventing speed etc. from taking root." I would agree with the coaches and tournament directors representing the South. In addition, another coach commenting on differences wrote, "We (the West) tend to rely a lot on coaches, graduate assistants, and former debaters to make up our judging pool." And he continues, "We also compete in tournaments that don't use the five-resolution format."

Our concerns with depending upon a quasi-expert judging pool made up of coaches, graduate assistants, and former debaters should be clear to the membership. Alan and I both felt that the use of lay judges was absolutely critical to avoiding the “lemming-like drive towards the excesses of NDT and CEDA.” Using lay judges was designed to force competitors to abandon hyper-competitive behaviors and argument strategies in favor of developing sound, effective oratorical strategies. The critic in the back of the room has control over how our students debate because they have the power to reward and reinforce performance on the ballot. The critics determine who will or will not advance. Once they advance, they become the blueprint for success and other debaters begin to emulate what won. Coaches reinforce and coach towards what wins. This relationship has always been critical to the propagation of behaviors and argument strategies that become “accepted practice” within an organization.

What evidence do I offer that the use of a non-lay judging pool is antithetical to the intent of the IPDA? Please re-read the first paragraph of this section on the emergence of hyper-competitive behaviors and argument strategies. How do you suppose these practices have found their way into the IPDA? I seriously doubt that lay judges (a lawyer, a businessperson, a professor from political science, a local mayor, a pastor, or a student) would put up with, let alone reward, speed, rude behavior, bizarre interpretations of the resolution, complicated topicality shells, or intricate disads.

One last comment and issue to consider. If your tournaments routinely use coaches, graduate assistants, and former competitors as the critics in the back of the room as they watch two students debate the single resolution that they were given, how is IPDA uniquely different from an NPDA tournament?

A loss of checks and balances –

So, what do we do about the emergence of these antithetical practices and behaviors?

Alan and I designed a strong governing leadership. First, the role of the President, the Board, and the Executive Committee is to step in where necessary and reassert IPDA’s unique identity. The leadership should be the “keeper of the foundational principles” and encourage adherence and sanction deviance.

Second, as Professor Ingram observed in his email of March 22, 2021, “At present, I perceive a mood against speed, jargon, etc., but that depends on having a critical mass of directors and judges to enforce that.” Tournament directors must be encouraged to adhere to the Constitutional practices of IPDA. The Board must be willing to withhold sanctioning to those tournaments that refuse to adhere to the philosophical practices of the organization. I understand that tournament directors want autonomy in the tournaments they host. I have hosted, tabbed, and attended literally hundreds of tournaments in my career. Every single one of them had to adhere to the rules and procedures of some forensic governing organization, be it CEDA, NDT, NPDA, NPTE, NFA, PKD, or AFA. Deviating meant your tournament couldn’t be sanctioned, thus no points would count towards season-long sweeps awards or as qualifying legs to the

various national final tournaments. There was no discussion. There was no vote. Memberships meant adherence.

Third, return to requiring a judging pool of which the majority of judges are reasonably well-educated and informed lay people. Alan and I occasionally used coaches or non-advancing competitors from the open division to judge, but the majority of our judging pool was lay. If you want to stop the spread of the win at any cost strategies and behaviors that Alan and I identified as antithetical to competitive academic debate with a pedagogic mindset, using the lay judge is absolutely fundamental to that process.

Parting thoughts

In conclusion, I find that I miss Alan more and more as I grow “more experienced.” Alan and I were not perfect. We did the best that we could to create something that would resist sacrificing pedagogy for pure, unadulterated competition. Flawed or not, if IPDA is to continue to be an organization that has learned to balance competition and pedagogy, it must remain strongly rooted in its foundational principles. I cannot caution the organization strongly enough that the hyper-competitive behaviors and argument strategies that have begun to creep their way into the organization are the very practices that have undermined the pedagogic focus of many other formats of academic competitive debate and the very reason that Alan and I created “public debate.” There is yet time for the organization to adjust its course and to return to its unique identity.

We began the manuscript with a warning taken from Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol*. Perhaps we should return to the writing of Dickens to conclude. “Men’s courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead,” said Scrooge. “But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me.”

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Potential Impacts of Lay Judges Scarcity

Megan Smith¹

I can still vividly remember the day I walked into Trey Gibson's office at Louisiana Tech University to ask him about joining the debate team. When I walked into his office, I had very limited debate experience. In high school, I was briefly part of our Model UN team, where I researched and practiced but never traveled to a single competition. I was very shy, except when it came to arguing with my mother, which I enjoyed. I joined the team with the hope that Trey would let me research and practice. I dreaded the idea of speaking in front of people. I avoided public speaking like the plague. That hope was never realized, and I am grateful every day to Trey because he made me compete.

Once I started competing regularly, my fears were assuaged a bit because, in the competition room, it was typically my competitor, the judge, and me. This set-up seemed less daunting, especially because, most of the time, I didn't know my competitor or judge. I felt that, if I made a fool of myself, it was only in front of a few individuals who probably couldn't care less. This seemed especially true if I had a lay judge in the back of the room. It did not take long for me to see the positionality of a lay judge. Someone who is judging for extra credit or for service hours probably does not want to hear debate jargon and theories. During my novice year, I was happy to

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see a lay person was judging my round because I also didn't know anything about debate theory or jargon. IPDA felt like a safe place, where I could grow in my knowledge of debate and compete with my fears limited. Even in those rounds where I was judged by a non-lay judge, I learned how to adapt my speaking style and vocabulary to meet the challenge over my novice year. Although there is no set number of lay judges tournament hosts are required to use during a tournament, the lack of lay judges during the last two seasons has been apparent. This scarcity of lay judges brings to light some impacts that warrant further discussion for novice competitors, upper-division competitors, and programs.

Being judged by a variety of judges, including lay judges, is part of the experience for those competing in the novice division. It is also woven into the way I coach my novice competitors, as I am sure is true for other coaches. The experiences the novice competitors have during their first season will shape their debate experiences going forward. I hope the scarcity of lay judges in virtual tournaments will not shape future IPDA rounds in a way that moves the focus away from real world advocacy to rounds inaccessible to lay judges, especially if the virtual platform is necessary for future debate seasons. The feedback a novice debater receives on their ballots is instrumental in their growth in the IPDA format. Whether a novice competitor is judged by a competitor, coach, community member, student, etc., this feedback will shape how they debate in future competitions. The reduced number of lay judge ballots means novice competitors are missing a voice that we value as a community and that is intertwined into the set-up and execution of this format of debate. Novice debaters are missing the chance to put these skills into practice if they do not have regular access to lay judges.

For those competing in advanced divisions, I have heard competitors discuss how happy they are not to be judged by lay judges this season. I think everyone can relate to the feeling of losing a round on the ballot that they feel they should have won on the flow. The lack of lay judges may feel like a relief for some, but it should be viewed in a larger context. Outside of debate tournaments, competitors will be “judged” by a variety of people, and I doubt those judging them will regularly be prepared with multi-color pens and a flow pad. Even the practice some coaches have suggested of an experienced debater acting as a lay judge is insufficient. We cannot erase the years of exposure to debate.

It is not in vain; as a coach, I have appreciated reading the ballots for my debaters from judges who have encouraged them to not use jargon and to remember IPDA should reflect real-world advocacy. However, these comments do not replace a ballot from a lay judge. I don’t believe two seasons erase the previous experience competitors have with lay judges, but I do believe it has the potential to discourage some programs from using lay judges or to work as diligently to recruit lay judges. Not recruiting lay judges is a missed opportunity for programs.

I have been lucky to be able to pull from a large pool of lay judges at Louisiana Tech University. Between my classes, my communication colleagues, and the university community at large, I have found welcomed support for helping us recruit lay judges. When I hosted Southern Forensics Championship, I was taken aback when I saw the sheer number of entries. I scrambled quickly for additional judges. My colleagues and university community answered my plea. Other programs may not have this type of support, but from that experience, I realized the multiple benefits that came from my pitch for more judges.

The IPDA Constitution describes one of the goals of the organization as being a debate platform program leaders can be proud to showcase to their community.

Recruiting lay judges for tournaments has given me an opportunity to promote our debate team. I discovered through these recruiting endeavors that groups across the university did not know our team existed before I sent out my plea. Lay judges also afforded me an exceptional opportunity for recruiting students to my team. I recruit many of my debaters from my classes or from other communication colleagues because we offered extra credit for judging. Recruitment during this pandemic has been a challenge for our team, and I am sure we are not alone in this challenge.

Recruiting lay judges for the virtual tournament we hosted in 2020 was not an easy task, but it was also rewarding for our program in terms of recruitment and showcasing the team and platform to my colleagues and student body.

Lay judges are not only a useful recruitment tool, and as a chance to put the idea of judge adaptation into action, but also to help us realize the IPDA principles of accessibility and inclusion. Students do not need debate experience from high school to be successful in IPDA. A larger discussion of the importance of lay judges in virtual tournaments should be a discussion we are having regularly and with the purpose of finding solutions that can help programs. It should not be a discussion we table because of these extraordinary circumstances. Even if the recruitment of lay judges is a value embraced only on a regional level, it is part of the foundational principles of IPDA, and one I believe should not be overlooked even for one or two unique seasons.



IPDA at the Crossroads: A Structuration Approach

Tomeka M. Robinson and Trent Webb¹

Founded in 1997, the International Public Debate Association (IPDA) format of debate is one of the fastest-growing competitive debate formats in the United States. According to the IPDA (2020), “our mission is to provide an opportunity for individuals to develop their advocacy skills in a forum that promotes appropriate and effective communication.” However, as with other debate formats, unwritten rules have started to infiltrate the format and have fundamentally shifted the ways in which debaters engage in the activity. The responsibility of informing forensic competitors of the rules, norms, and regulations of any forensic activity falls into the hands of coaches and educators involved in the activity (Bonader & Marsh, 2015). Numerous studies have noted that “unwritten rules” will always find their way into competition spaces (Robinson et al., 2016; Compton, 2004; Cook & Cronn-Mills, 1995; Jensen, 1998). And while there has been considerable discussion focused on the changes in practices within IPDA, a thorough investigation into the ways and means that certain practices have changed from a theoretical standpoint has not been conducted.

Therefore, this essay will utilize Giddens’ (1979) structuration theory as a theoretical

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foundation for exploring the ways in which IPDA debate has evolved. Second, we will offer some suggestions for preserving the intentions of the founders to create a space for advocacy through the promotion of effective communication, while still allowing space for some appropriate evolution to occur. For the sake of this essay, unwritten rules will be defined as knowledge and standards set by forensic coaches and educators actively involved that are not necessarily written in the rules and regulations of the activity.

Giddens' Structuration Theory

Structuration theory, as discussed by Giddens (1979), “conceives of social systems as grounded in the practices and behaviors of individuals who constantly (re)create their social systems through structuring activities” (Sommerfeldt, 2012, p. 272). In this conception, systems are social practices that are produced and reproduced across time and space through the agency of human actors. Giddens (1984) argues that they are three structures that affect how human actors interact with one another within a system: 1) actors draw on past experiences and knowledge to constitute meaning (structures of signification), 2) actors are subject to a normative order that sanctions those meanings or modes of conduct (structures of legitimation), and 3) resources are employed to create and/or sustain power relationships (structures of domination). Sommerfeldt (2012) points out that these structures may be simultaneously constraining and/or enabling for actors engaging in social relations. While pure structuration has become foundational to the sociological understandings of social interactions, many post-structuralists contend that one cannot separate structure from agency. Mouzellis (1991) maintains that time must be considered when analyzing structure and agency and that rules become fluid and can be used in strategic and performative ways. Therefore, as Robinson et al. (2016) reason,

structuration theory provides an appropriate lens to investigate the evolution of forensic activity because of the ways that unwritten rules have been brought into the system by various coaches, judges, and competitors and have become the norm by which competitors are judged. Through an examination of the changes that have taken place, we argue that the current rules and norms of IPDA debate are embedded in social process, rather than as the result of isolated rational actions.

Production, Reproduction, and Change Over Time

IPDA debate is one of several debate formats found at forensic competitions.

The primary goals of IPDA debate are:

to provide contestants with a forum in which they can enhance their education through the laboratory of productive, “real-competitive debate experiences. To provide instructors with a debate activity in which they can proudly invite colleagues, administrators, and community members as observers. To provide economic and academic benefits to the forensic community (IPDA, 2020).

Moreover, the organization promotes the following philosophic foundations: 1) inclusivity, 2) lay judging, 3) multiple topics, 4) limited preparation, 5) extemporaneous delivery, 6) rhetorical delivery, and 7) ethos (IPDA, 2020). At the core, IPDA debate is supposed to provide an opportunity for speakers to cultivate critical thinking, argumentation, research skills, and public speaking skills. However, when looking at many IPDA debate rounds, deviations from some of these principles have occurred. Therefore, when analyzing the current state of competitive IPDA debate, it is important to look at how behaviors have been produced, reproduced, and become normalized over time.

Resolutions

According to the IPDA website (2020), “each round should open with a set of five resolutorial choices and the contestants themselves should select the topic they will debate.” While the topic areas and specific resolutions are left to the discretion of individual tournament directors, it has become common practice in certain regions of the country for tournament directors to create topic writing committees from within the community, though not all topic writers are purely from the IPDA community. Some tournament directors still write all of the topics themselves in other regions. With the influx of more NPDA, NFA-LD, and CEDA-NDT former competitors into IPDA coaching, resolutions, especially policy resolutions, have become similar to those of other debate formats. As Redding (2009) argues:

Neo-rhetors on the affirmative and negative face off armed with a topic that is built around a problem, policy, or point that the framers of the resolution, and maybe even the critic have in mind...these resolutions are typically more hybrid fact/policy resolutions, with a compound predictive function – or an element of an implied risk. These resolutions, which often do not contain the word should, assume some imminent policy – and sometimes individual action – that has not been accepted as fact (p. 57).

This framing as a hybrid fact/policy increases the pressure for students to utilize debate jargon like policy planks, agents of action, and mandates to even access the resolutions, which forces the debaters to approach the topic from an established framework. The framework and infusion of debate jargon has been reinforced by judges, coaches, and competitors who see a direct relationship between the use of

debate jargon within a round and its competitive potential. This perspective perpetuates the practice. This constitutes both structures of signification and structures of legitimation. Currently, there is no clear distinction between what is an IPDA policy resolution versus an NPDA policy resolution versus an NFA-LD resolution versus a CEDA-NDT one. Even the IPDA value resolutions are written similarly to NPDA value resolutions. Therefore, the expectations of what should occur in the round are similar.

Historically, resolutions were framed with the intent of the student not having to rely upon a wealth of empirical research. IPDA framers asserted that this practice would lead to students engaging in highly theoretical meta-debate approaches that are antithetical to the original intent of IPDA. Specifically, the simplicity of resolution architecture is paramount to IPDA so that the student relies upon basic critical thinking skills, rhetorical analysis, and the basic canons of persuasion – which are all outlined and codified within the IPDA by-laws and constitution. Moving away from this simplicity further takes IPDA into the direction of NPDA and ultimately CEDA/NDT, which would make IPDA less accessible to programs and the student. This does not mean that IPDA competitors cannot or should not engage in debates about socioeconomic or geopolitical issues; rather, it means the resolution must be structured and worded in such a manner that it provides the student specific interpretations and boundaries as opposed to more vague parameters that allow for multiple interpretations. For example, the use of “this house,” common in NPDA resolutions, allows those debaters to assign an agent of action, which drastically changes the parameters of that debate round and forces those debaters to completely conceptualize the domestic and/or global metrics of that resolution. But if the agent of action is provided for the student, the student now just focuses on the merits of the

stated policy. There is a limit to this specification, however. Resolution writers should be cautious to not overly limit the potential avenues of interpretation either.

Speed

While the founders of IPDA debate and the organization as a whole still stress the importance of rhetorical persuasive styles, many coaches and competitors blatantly disregard this emphasis. According to the IPDA website (2020), “students should be encouraged to develop winning oratorical styles. The speaking style of the top public debaters should be highly effective when transferred into real world settings. High quality speaking styles and courtesy should be prized, promoted, and rewarded. The use of appropriate humor is encouraged.” However, judges are instead rewarding students for the number of arguments they get onto the flow, as well as the amount of evidence they can provide within the round. Cirlin (2008) contends that “high speed-jargonistic delivery isn’t being sought for its own sake. It’s an artifact of the desire to win...I’ve witnessed coaches actually drilling their debaters on speed delivery” (pg. 25). Moreover, Brown (2008) argues that part of this push for more evidence, not just in debate, but in all forensic formats, can be attributed to their desire to have a quantifiable measure of quality in order to make their decision process easier. This in turn forces students to speak more rapidly in order to meet this increased demand. When the behavior is rewarded by a ballot in their favor, students view this as not only acceptable, but preferable practice.

This emphasis on speed often causes debaters to hyphenate their analysis as opposed to detailing a specific argument. Instead of providing a descriptive tag line, citing evidence, and appropriate paraphrasing, students are engaging in the act of “spreading,” whereby they generate up to nine or ten arguments on the flow. A closer

inspection reveals this to be a hollow practice in vain of a “more is better” philosophy. Cirlin (2008) clearly points to this trend’s emergence within IPDA and how some of these strategies may be driven by the ghost of our NDT/CEDA past. While the framers of IPDA were clear with their intent, as the concept “highly oratorical style” appears in their by-laws, the desire to refute and to attack as much as possible by the negative is a strategy that has been utilized, and arguably is quite successful, with both expert and lay judges (Cirlin, 2008). The push for speed may not be true for every single region of the country; however, it is a practice that certainly has taken root in several regions and is worthy of interrogation because this a clear example of structures of legitimation occurring. One way to shift this practice is to incorporate wording about the rhetorical nature of IPDA for on ballots and having deductions incorporated for speedy delivery. If students stop being rewarded for a practice, they typically adapt in order to regain competitive advantage.

Professional vs. Lay vs. Non-Advancing Competitor Judges

In its original and intended context, the IPDA community has stressed the importance of having as many real-world judges as possible. Cirlin (2007) wrote that the use of lay judges was the most critical element of curbing the drive toward the excesses of NDT and CEDA. Walter et al. (2019) contend that the use of lay judging was to try to curb the practice of technical arguments, faster delivery, and the narrowing of understanding found in other debate formats. These are the very strategies outlined earlier as a structures of signification and legitimation. Moreover, Walter et al. (2019) discuss the use of non-advancing competitors as judges in IPDA elimination rounds. While this practice also varies from region to region, the use of eliminated competitors as judges is a practice that should also be grappled with because, whether this use is for practical purposes or not, this infusion of student

judges and more expert judges with formal debate training shifts the expectations of what should and often does occur within round.

To contend with the different types of judges, Lowry (2010) embraces what he would call a more realistic lay judge utilization practice that both gets to the heart of the founders' intentions of using lay judges and still allows for some discretion on behalf of tournament directors in selecting IPDA judges. He argues that even in the judicial system's "jury of our peers," there are several distinctions that have to be considered: 1) jury members must have a fluent understanding of the language being spoken, and 2) litigants are allowed to test and then potentially exclude jurors who might be perceived as less than neutral. Therefore, he concludes that the training of all judges, especially lay judges, should be a significant part of preparation for a debate tournament. Our suggestion mirrors this recommendation because finding community judges that feel comfortable with judging debate can be a challenge, but with some judge training this barrier can be overcome.

Conclusion

Within IPDA debate, we can conceptualize the evolution of the "rules" by looking at what is rewarded and what is discouraged by students, judges, and coaches. As Robinson et al. (2016) contend, "when a human actor does something novel and judges reward it, this leads to more recreation of this behavior" (p. 26). The novel act here can be recognized as the *structuration of significance*. When a judge or student takes notice and implements the novel behavior into pedagogy or practice, this makes the behavior part of the new normal and is an example of what Giddens (1984) would label as *structuration of legitimation*. When debaters utilize the novel behaviors that they have observed in future rounds, this demonstrates what Giddens (1984) called,

structures of domination, which in turn, normalizes the unwritten rules into the system.

When the new normal of unwritten rules are not incorporated into the formal rules of the activity, there is a major disadvantage to the fluidity of “rules.” Many of the behaviors are not grounded in sound debate pedagogy, and most debaters cannot even argue why they are doing the new behavior outside of “judges seem to prefer this” or “this is what wins.” For students and even debate coaches, this can become a minefield to navigate when crafting or even critiquing debate cases.

Every major debate organization has had to critique itself. Both CEDA and NDT were the dominant debate organization well into the 1990s. As membership started to wane, both organizations had to grapple with what this meant to the policy debate format. While very little was altered in terms of structure, both organizations merged to increase membership numbers. The NPDA community began to splinter in the mid-2000s as speed and technical jargon became common practice throughout that activity. This has also affected their membership. Quite frankly, the IPDA community has a series of decisions to make about the future of the activity. The community must task itself to engage in a holistic self-examination of its goals, skill sets, practices, and overall identity.

There are no easy answers as to why IPDA debate has evolved into what it is today. To maintain the structure within debate, we all must continue to learn and adapt in ways in which we see fit. Evolution in and of itself is not bad. However, grounding rules within the system has the potential to reduce uncertainty and increase clarity. There should also be some pedagogical reason for making changes, whether it is increasing the depth of knowledge or increasing students’ use of evidence, but there

has to be a learning outcome associated with the novel behavior that is grounded in our discipline. It has to go deeper than just “what wins is what’s reproduced.” We have to start asking ourselves what we want from our students, and we have to assess the overarching goal and aim of IPDA. What are we trying to teach our students? And is what we’re trying to teach them pedagogically sound and a reflective of a skill set that will be intellectually and practically appreciated in the real world?

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It's Halftime in the International Public Debate Association: A Critical Examination of the Present Cultural Practices in IPDA

Adam Key¹

Nearly a decade ago, when I was coaching the team at Sam Houston State University, we were given the honor of hosting the national tournament. It is memorable to me for several reasons: it was the first time the organization had Team IPDA at nationals, I became the youngest person to win the Bennet Strange Coach of the Year Award, and it was the second to last time, to my knowledge, that the professional division was featured as the stage round during the banquet. That round featured Ashley Hale on the Affirmative and my good friend and co-coach Jeremy Coffman on the Negative. Even nine years later, I still remember the resolution: "It's halftime in America."

Hale defined the resolution in an interpretation that would not be uncommon to see in a National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA), Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA), or National Debate Tournament (NDT) round. Her case

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revolved around the need to close certain CIA black sites. Coffman was having none of it and countered by attacking and refuting the colluvial meaning of the resolution. What started as a stage round for the national championship transformed into a battle between two cultural forces vying for control of IPDA: technical and rhetorical styles of debate. Hale's performance was technically flawless as she read through a laundry list of citations to establish that she had met significance, harms, inherency, topicality, and solvency. Coffman abandoned stock issues and stock arguments in favor of a bespoke rhetorical creation, passionately using ethos, pathos, and logos and peppering his arguments with colorful and illustrative analogies. At one point, he quipped that America's "coach" needed to "give a pep talk during halftime so the team would come out and bat a thousand," to which my Dean, a professor of health, leaned over to me and whispered, "He didn't play sports as a kid, did he?" His lack of sports knowledge aside, at the end of the round, Coffman's rhetoric stood tall against Hale's technical jargon. In a time where each organization still got a vote in the stage round, the Association overwhelmingly voted to make Coffman its champion.

In this Forum, we were asked to do one of two things: restate the arguments we made in a panel about IPDA practices at last year's National Communication Association conference or reflect on the legacy of Dr. Alan Cirlin. In truth, I cannot separate one from the other, so I have decided to do both. That has led me to one overarching conclusion: my friends, it's halftime in IPDA.

When Cirlin founded the Association, he was motivated by his analysis of the history of intercollegiate debate. The NDT was founded in 1947 as a means to unify various independent debating coalitions and competitions under one banner. Much as the award-winning film, *The Great Debaters*, depicts, the style of the time was highly rhetorical. As an offshoot of British Union debates, NDT started as a place where a

person could succeed only by being a statesman (Cirlin, 2007). Two decades later, the organization had devolved into a highly technical format featuring extensive use of jargon and debaters speaking at a high rate of speed, a practice now known as spreading (McGee & McGee, 2000). Debate was no longer for the public, but for specialized judges. Seeing that NDT had lost its way, a number of coaches, led by California State Long Beach coach Jack Howe, left NDT to form CEDA.

CEDA lasted two decades before it succumbed to the disease of technical debate (Jensen & Preston, 2001). NPDA, founded at the same time as IPDA, met a similar fate. Like our Association's early days, NPDA crafted resolutions using "metaphors or vague topics, allowing their debates to be filled with endless possibilities for the debaters" (Cates & Eaves, 2010, p. 24). However, under pressure from newcomers who prized technical styles and referred to the rhetorical style of early NPDA as "lazy debate" (Cates & Eaves, 2010, p. 23), NPDA followed the same path as its predecessors (Preston, 2006).

Historically, debate organizations have only lasted 20 years before devolving into technical debate, and IPDA is quickly approaching its 25th birthday. At this point, it is crucial that we check our symptoms. Since this is a Forum piece, I take the step, non-traditional for academic writing but fitting with the style of IPDA, of posting a list of quotations critiquing NDT, CEDA, and NPDA.

Review these and ask yourself, "Which of these could be said about IPDA today?"

1. "Most judges at debate tournaments expect an exercise of reasoned discourse, but often they hear only jargon, unintelligible, except possibly to the debaters participating" (Jones, 1978, p. 1)
2. "[D]ebate had become incomprehensible to all but the most specialized of audiences, as successful debaters responded to competitive pressures by

relying on highly developed note-taking skills, the extensive use of quoted evidence taken from expert sources, a rapid rate of speaking, and unusual interpretations of debate propositions” (McGee & McGee, 2000, p. 3).

3. “...total unintelligibility and hostility in delivery” (Steinfatt, 1990, p. 66).
4. “...spread debating, convoluted arguments, trick cases and abuse of evidence” (Horn & Underberg, 1991, p. 49).
5. “The research burdens have increased, the stylistic demands as far as minimum level of competency, mental quickness, as well as verbal quickness, the demands have increased to a very large extent” (McGee, 1993, p. 150).
6. “Competitive pressures and time limitations would also encourage them to adopt jargon and delivery practices consistent with the full utilization of this evidence and the more complex argumentation that it allowed” (McGee & McGee, 2000, p. 12).
7. “...a serious focus on sound bites of information and evidence” (Cirlin, 1997, p. 264).
8. “[T]he average contemporary... debater commonly knows little more than what is given to them by way of the research generated by others. The context of evidence is generally ignored and/or abused” (Cirlin, 1997, p. 7).

I specifically chose to quote Cirlin in the last two list items to draw our attention back from whence we came. According to Cirlin (2007), IPDA “is the only debate format in modern history which was intentionally developed using empirical methodologies to achieve specific pedagogical ends” (p. 11). We are the children of Cirlin’s grand experiment to make a debate format immune to the decline into technical style. Cirlin took several steps to ensure this. First, printed evidence was banned, and evidence was discouraged as a means to decide rounds (Cirlin, 2007). Second, like our name,

judges were supposed to be members of the public; “the typical Public Debate tournament uses classroom students and freshman debaters for its judging pool” (Cirlin, 2007, p. 12). Third, resolutions were to be drawn from a wide array of topics so that a good debater would have to know something about everything.

Today, we have the Internet to generate a never-ending pile of sources that we write down on bright sticky notes and adhere to our flowsheets. We have an increasingly trained judging pool, with coaches both judging themselves and training their students on what “good debate” looks like. The original goal was that, “rather than both speakers and judges conforming to preexisting schema for evaluating argumentation, debaters are instead required to adapt their communication style to the lay judge” (Key, 2009, p. 11). Instead, competitive success means adapting to what trained, rather than lay, judges want. Finally, given the availability of Internet research, resolutions are often now so highly specific that it takes a team of students and coaches to pull enough cards for the debater, just like they did in CEDA and NDT, only in 30 minute chunks. The demand for evidence and the simultaneous lack of time means debaters today do just what Cirlin critiqued: the IPDA “debater commonly knows little more than what is given to them by way of the research generated by others. The context of evidence is generally ignored and/or abused” (Cirlin, 1997, p. 7). One has to wonder: if Hale and Coffman performed the exact same round in 2021 as they did in 2012, would the Association still vote for rhetoric, or would they prefer technicality? We might never know as the voting format has changed from each program having a vote to a panel of five, but the hypothetical is still worth pondering. Are we still the descendants of Cirlin, or have we descended into something else entirely?

All is not lost. It's only halftime. There is still time to finish strong. This is an organization that, as our counterpart debate associations did, adapted to a global pandemic to still ensure our season would happen. If we can adapt to COVID-19, surely we can adapt to the disease of technical debate! The first step is simple: turn off the Internet. There is not enough time in 30 minutes to vet sources. As coaches, we may be unwittingly encouraging students to spread "fake news," and that's not tenable for any educator. For those that say that we cannot ban Internet research, we banned the use of cell phones as timers, the use of electronic devices during round, and research while in round on Yaatly. We can ban this too. For those who think that the quality of debate would suffer if we did, per Cirlin, evidence should not be a deciding factor in rounds anyway.

Second, bring back the lay judges. The only training we should give to judges are the same things we teach them in public speaking. We would fail a student who spread or made heavy use of jargon in a public speaking classroom, so why do we teach them that it is acceptable in the classrooms in which we hold debate rounds? We cannot do "Public" debate unless we are debating before the public.

Third, stop with the hyper-specific topics. The first step of removing the Internet will likely alleviate this, but regardless, we are not encouraging learning when we ask students to become 30-minute experts. If a student gets a resolution no one on the team knows about, tell them to do what we did back in the early days of the organization and find people from other teams with the same side of the resolution and prep together. Our early practices led "to a great deal of [camaraderie] on the IPDA debate circuit. It [was] quite common to see groups of debaters from different programs prepping together and helping each other if they happen[ed] to have the same topic" (Cirlin, 2007, p. 12). In a world that is increasingly polarized, teach your

students to see other debaters as potential colleagues rather than enemies. If we take away the Internet, we are forced to talk to each other again, and that is a net good. In the end, we have some hard questions to ask ourselves. Are we still doing Public debate? Are we still different from NDT, CEDA, and NPDA? Are we living Cirlin's dream or his nightmare? And if we are not the Association we want to be, what can we do to become it? Alan Cirlin left us a tremendous gift in the format of IPDA. Let's live up to what he knew we could be. Halftime is over, what game are we going to play now?

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