

## **IPDA longevity: 10<sup>th</sup> year anniversary, an analysis of former champions.**

**ABSTRACT:** This study researches the impact International Public Debate Association (IPDA) debate has had on former National Tournament champions and season long sweepstakes champions in the open and varsity divisions. Several questions were posed to the surveyed on sliding scale questions to gauge there the importance that their collegiate debate experience has on their current occupation. The study also analyzes what fields these champions have moved into in their post-college years. Former champions reflected positively on their former debate experience and its importance to their current occupation. The study also shows that there is an equal distribution of occupations split between the legal field, education field, and other (non-relating) fields.

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Patrick Richey: Graduate Student at Stephen F. Austin State University and IPDA Governing Board Member. He has competed in numerous formats of debate and researches argumentation.

#### **Overview:**

International Public Debate Association (IPDA) debate is a debate format that emphasizes public speaking skills. In IPDA two competitors are given a slip of paper with five topics. Generally the topics go as follows: one serious policy, one humorous policy, one serious value, one humorous value, and one miscellaneous. From the time the two competitors receive the slip of paper until the round begins is exactly thirty minutes. The competitors can use any form to gather evidence in the thirty minutes of preparation time. They can use evidence that they brought, find on the internet, or get from coaches and other competitors. Once the round begins, only hand written material may be used. No printed sources are allowed in the round. Direct reading of evidence is also highly discouraged (Richey, 2006). After listening to the argumentation of both competitors, a “lay” judge makes a decision. A lay judge is anyone who is of reasonable intelligence and is academically at least in middle school (IPDA Constitution, 2006).

There normally is between five and six preliminary rounds. Only a certain number of the contestants (no more than half) move on to the out-rounds or elimination rounds after the preliminary rounds are completed. From there, the out-round competitors continue to eliminate each other until there is a single champion. This person is named champion of his/her particular division for that specific tournament. There are a specific number of points each individual can obtain at each tournament depending on how well he/she did (IPDA Constitution, 2006).

There are three divisions. Open is available to anyone who is in high school or older (college degrees are not necessary). Varsity is for those debaters who have debate experience of more than eight tournaments of any form of debate at any level. Individuals may remain in the varsity division until they have attained a four-year college degree. This is what is considered traditional collegiate debate. Novice is the lowest level

designed to help build new debaters before they move into the varsity division. They are allowed eight maximum tournaments at any level (IPDA Constitution, 2006)

Of these year long tournaments, an individual is allowed to count their best six tournaments towards and end of the year sweepstake award in each division (moving points from one division to another is no longer allowed though it was in the early years). These are compiled by the Executive Secretary and at the National Convention banquet, year long individual season-long sweepstake awards are presented in each division (IPDA Constitution, 2006).

The IPDA National Tournament is slightly different than a regular season tournament. It consists of eight preliminary rounds as compared to the normal six. Also the IPDA constitution is strictly adhered to on qualification criterion of competitors. During the year long tournaments, tournament directors can specify certain criterion outside the IPDA constitution as needed. This is forbidden during the National Tournament and the constitutional rules are strictly abided by. In a manner similar to a normal tournament, only a certain number of competitors (less than half) will advance to out rounds. From this point each elimination round reduces the number of advancing competitors by half until have a national champion in each specific division is named (IPDA Constitution, 2006).

There were not always three divisions in IPDA. In the early years there was only the open division which was all competitors. As the event progressed, it was decided that a novice division was needed to protect new debaters and varsity was integrated for the collegiate level debater. Because of this formula, there is not an even number of national champions. Also some exceptional debaters have won multiple divisions or were repeat champions. In the ten years since its founding, IPDA has had twenty-seven different season-long and National Championship Tournament champions in the open and varsity divisions.

### **Previous Research:**

There have been no researchable studies done thus far on the tracking of former IPDA debaters let alone champions. There however have been some very limited studies done in the Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) and National Debate Tournament (NDT) formats of debate (Malton & Keele, 1984; Srader, 2006). In Malton and Keele's (1984) study of NDT, it was found that there was a high percentage of past debaters joining the legal field. "Nearly four of every ten students who attended the NDT have law degrees. Approximately the same number has some kind of master's degree. Finally, more than two out of ten former debaters have Ph.D. degrees or doctorates in education, law, divinity, or medicine." A more current study researched by Doyle Srader (2006) shows the benefits of debate. "Results suggest that former debaters who work in the classroom benefit from their research skills, their seasoning as public speakers, and their ability to think on their feet..."

Bennett Strange (2005) also discusses post-debate benefits in his chapter of the IPDA textbook. He comments that participation in forensics debate develops those traits which equip debaters for leadership even after leaving the realm of debate.

### **Hypothesis:**

I hypothesize that there will be a positive response from former national champions and season-long sweepstake champions when surveyed about their experiences in IPDA debate and its relevance to their current occupation. I also hypothesize that a majority of former IPDA champions are now working towards or practicing in the legal field. The null hypothesis is that there is a negative correlation between IPDA debate and a national champion's current occupation. A further null hypothesis is that most national champions are not in or working towards the legal field.

### **Methodology:**

The design and purpose of this survey and study was to determine the correlation and impact IPDA debate has had on former national champions and season-long sweepstakes champions. The survey was opened May 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 and closed November 1<sup>st</sup> 2006 (a six month span) on [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com). Those intended to be surveyed were sent emails with a hot link to the correct survey. I also followed up on the surveys to ask if there had been trouble and mark champions off of my master list. There were twenty-seven different national champions and season-long sweepstake champions in the varsity and open divisions. This number seems skewed but one must remember that the same individual could win both the season-long and national championship. Also the same individual may do so multiple times over the years. Trey Gibson from Louisiana Tech University is an excellent example of this phenomenon because he has won both national tournament titles as well as season-long sweepstakes awards. Of the twenty seven different champions, I was only able to obtain current contact information and emails on eighteen of these champions through search engines, former friends, teammates, and especially former coaches. Of the eighteen champions that I found contact information on, fifteen responded to the survey.

The methodology of the actual survey used was both sliding scale questions and open ended answer questions. The first four questions were sliding scale of 0 (no influence) to 5 (greatest influence). They were stated as:

1. Debate oratorical skills have helped me in my current occupation.
2. Principles and structures of argumentation have helped me in my current occupation.
3. Research skills learned from debate have helped me in my current occupation.
4. Socializing skills learned while debating have helped me in my current occupation.

The second two questions were open ended questions and stated as:

5. What is your current occupation?
6. Please give any comments you feel pertinent about your debate career and its influence on your current occupation.

The first four sliding questions were analyzed by calculating the mean, median, mode, range, and standard deviation. The final two open ended questions were evaluated for content. Similarities in answers were analyzed.

### **Findings:**

In order to understand the complete findings of this study it will be important to analyze each individual question.

The first sliding scale question was, “Debate oratorical skills have helped me in my current occupation.” The fifteen respondents largely agreed to the importance of oratorical skills learned from debate on their current occupation. There was one 3, four 4s, and ten 5s (see figure 1) with a mean of 4.6, median of 5, mode of 5, range of 2, and standard deviation .737. This question showed an extremely positive response by the participants. It is interesting to note that IPDA focuses on speaking skills in argumentation and that there was such a positive response to this question.

The second sliding scale question was, “Principles and structures of argumentation have helped me in my current occupation.” Of the fifteen respondents there were four 4s, and eleven 5s (see figure 2) with a mean of 4.733, median of 5, mode of 5, range of 1, and standard deviation of .457. It is surprising that there was such a positive response to this question. All forms of debate are highly structured, especially in speaking format, and these skills can be easily carried over into the professional world.

The third sliding scale question was, “Research skills learned from debate have helped me in my current occupation.” There was one 0, two 2s, three 3s, two 4s, and seven 5s (see figure 3) from the fifteen respondents with a mean of 3.733, median of 4, mode of 5, range of 5, and standard deviation of 1.417. This response was across the spectrum. IPDA is not nearly as research driven as other formats of debate. Yet there still was an overall positive response to this question.

The final sliding scale question was, “Socializing skills learned while debating have helped me in my current occupation.” The fifteen respondents showed a fairly positive response with four 3s, seven 4s, and four 5s (see figure 4) with a mean of 4, median of 4, mode of 4, range of 2, and standard deviation of .756. While not as positive as the first two questions proposed, there is still a positive response towards socializing. Since IPDA is a heavy speaking format of debate, socializing skills must be learned in order to be an effective communicator.

After being asked four sliding scale questions, the champions were asked two open ended questions.

The first question asked what their current occupation was. There were fifteen responses from champions to this question. There were three main groups of responses (See figure 5). The first and least surprising is the legal field. Five of the fifteen were practicing in the legal field or in law school at the time of this survey. The next field, education, was equally as large at five. There was one graduate, one teacher, one speech communication instructor, and two respondents involved in the debate and forensic field. It is interesting to note the number who went into the teaching field upon graduation. The

final group is “other.” These respondents had no similarities in their current occupation. One is a financial analyst; another is a special assistant to a president; a third is a Texas state contractor, another is in human resources, and finally the last is a youth pastor in the Arkansas Baptist Children’s Home.

The final question asked was, “Please give any comments you feel pertinent about your debate career and its influence on your current occupation.” There were only nine responses to this question. I looked for common phrases and themes in the answers as well as oddities. All nine responses were positive in nature. While each response was unique, there were some common themes. All nine believed IPDA helped them in their current field. Three respondents discussed positive aspects from IPDA in their current legal occupations. One compared the importance of understanding “lay judges” and jury selection and the importance of use of evidence in preparing briefs. Another commented about being hired into a law firm because the employer knew about the individual’s past experience in debate. There were also three respondents who commented about the education field. One explained that they decided to teach after being on their IPDA squad and helping prepare novice debaters. Another discussed the importance IPDA had with them in relaying messages to students in class. Two of the comments were just general positive comments about their experience in IPDA. The final respondent emphasized how important the structure was in preparing for his/her sermons.

Of the two hypotheses I proposed at the beginning of this project, one was confirmed and the other was disproved. My first hypothesis about a positive response from former national champions and season long sweepstake champions when surveyed about their experiences in IPDA debate and its relevance to their current occupation was very favorable. The statistics from the respondents shows a very positive response. I also hypothesized that a majority of former IPDA champions are now working towards or practicing in the legal field. This hypothesis was partially true. About one third are now working in or towards the legal field. Surprisingly, the same numbers are in education with an equal number in “other” fields. This shows that a majority of IPDA champions do not end up in the legal field.

### **Errors and Future Research:**

This study was a beginning look at the long term effect IPDA has had on national champions and season-long sweepstake champions. The study only gives us a glimpse at the top echelon of this format of debate. Future research could look at IPDA’s impact on all members of the organization once they move into occupation fields. Also IPDA is one of the youngest formats of debate, being only ten years old. As the format ages and grows there may be different outcomes. Follow up research would be very interesting to see if the trends continue. Also the size of IDPA is problematic. While this is a direct correlation to its age, a larger sample would have been better to chart longevity.

### **Conclusion:**

I believe this to be a good beginning study into the insight of how IPDA debaters have been able to use skills learned in IPDA debate to help them in their current

occupations. While the findings are not concrete, they do point to the importance that champions feel about their debate experiences. From this study we can begin to draw a post academic picture of IPDA’s contributions. As one of IPDA’s founders, Jack Rogers, once stated, “The (International) Public Debate Association was formed to encourage coaches and student competitors to look beyond the final round of their competitive careers” (Rogers, 2005).

Figure 1: Oratorical Skills

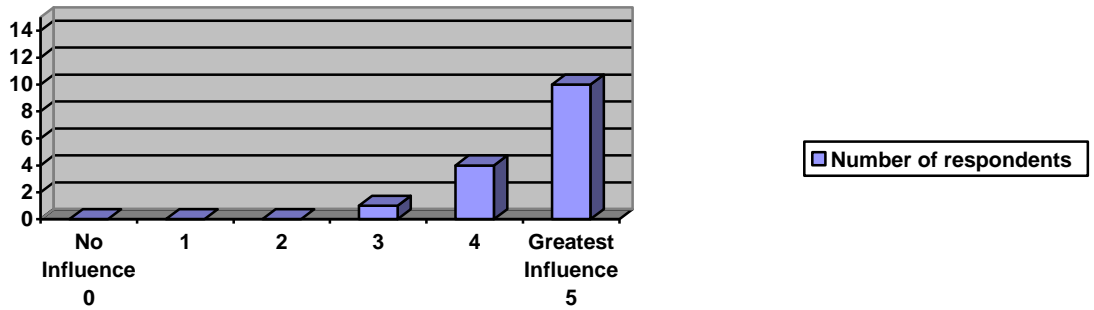


Figure 2: Principles/Structure

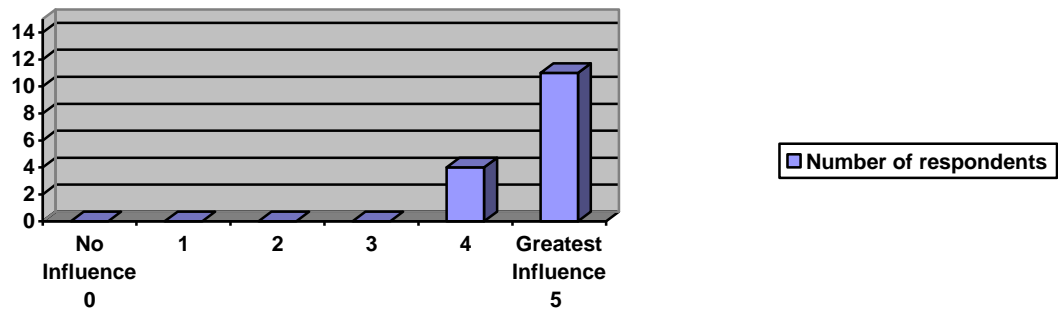


Figure 3: Research Skills

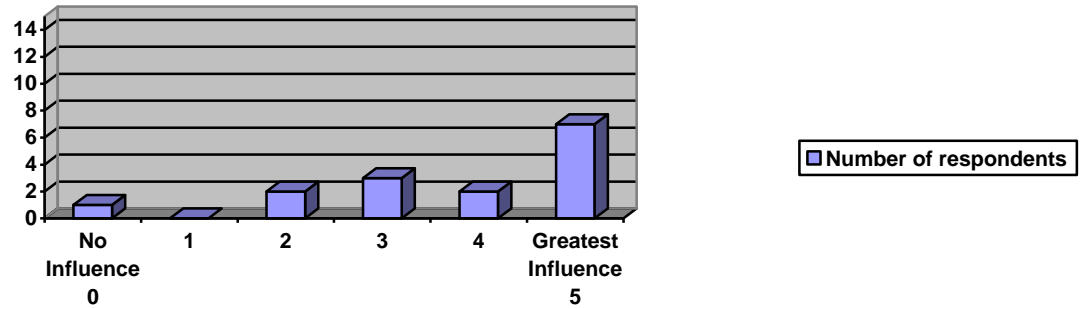


Figure 4: Socializing Skills

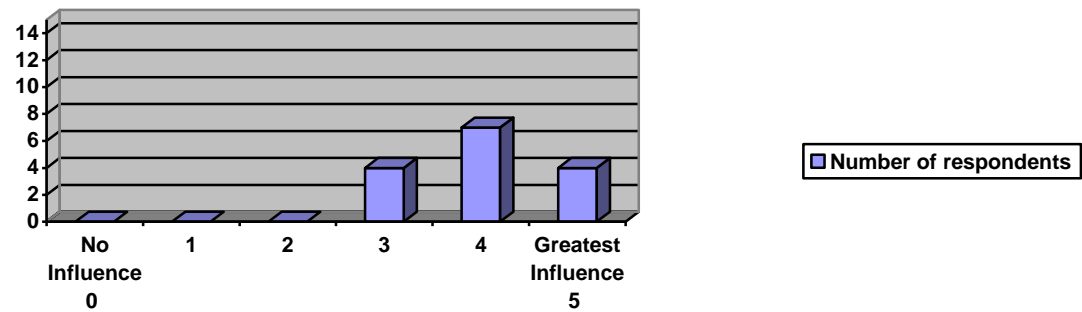


Figure 5: Current Occupations

<u>Legal Field</u>	<u>Educational Field</u>	<u>Other</u>
Legal Intern/researcher	Graduate Assistant	Financial Analyst
Attorney	Teacher	Human Resources
Law Student	Communication Instructor	State of Texas Contractor
Law Student	Ass. Director of Forensics	Ass. to the President
Law Student	Speech & Debate Instructor	Youth Pastor

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