

*all* people are exposed to situations in which they must act as fools, that *every* insight contains its own special kind of blindness, you complete the comic circle. (Burke, 1984, p. 41, emphasis original)

Persons employing the comic frame do not resist new thoughts and seek victory, but they deal with complications to their plans and seek to overcome obstacles in the spirit of transcendence and integration. This new understanding will not only tend to moderate against extremism, but it benefits debaters by allowing them to approach the world with an attitude that embraces complexity, seeks to transcend differences, and imagines their fellow debaters less as enemies than as counterparts in our performance.

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## Choosing Sides: Affirmative/Negative Positions and Competitive Equity in IPDA

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**ABSTRACT:** *Fairness in competition is one of the primary goals of any intercollegiate debate organization. This study examines the competitive equity of the Affirmative and Negative positions of advocacy over the course of the Fall 2009 season of the International Public Debate Association. While no significant relationship was*

*discovered between the position of advocacy and competitive success, the Negative enjoys a statistically significant advantage over the Affirmative in speaker points. Possible causes and solutions are discussed.*

Fairness is a central concern of all intercollegiate debate. In every organization, rules are put in place to discourage unethical behavior, prohibit cheating, and attempt to level the playing field for all competitors. In addition to attempts to create ethical fairplay, numerous studies over the past several decades have examined the participation rates of women and ethnic minorities in various debate formats (Harper, 2009; Alexander, Ganakos, & Gibson, 2009).

Conspicuously absent from scholarship concerning competitive equity in forensic competition is the examination of the Affirmative and Negative positions of advocacy. A thorough review of available literature revealed no studies that independently examined equity between the two sides, though one did review it as a factor in a gender study (Bruschke & Johnson, 1994).

If a given side has a built-in advantage over the other, it would be increasingly problematic for an organization to provide fair competition. This is particularly relevant to the discussion of the International Public Debate Association, which according to Cirlin (2007) is “the only debate format in modern history which was intentionally developed using empirical methodologies to achieve specific pedagogical ends.” The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the Affirmative and Negative positions of advocacy and competitive equity during the Fall 2009 International Public Debate Association regular season tournaments. The study examined the effect of both positions of advocacy on competitive success and speaker point ratings.

### **Literature Review**

There currently exist four chief intercollegiate debate associations within the United States: the National Debate Tournament (NDT), the Cross-Examination Debate Association (CEDA), the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA), and the International Public Debate Association (IPDA). Each organization is the central organization for a particular style of debate. CEDA, for instance, focuses on policy debate which requires heavy amounts of research and preparation of detailed governmental plans. In contrast, NPDA focuses on adaptability within a limited framework, all the while following British parliamentary procedure. Cirlin (2007) provides a more in-depth meta analysis of each organization.

Of the four, only IPDA focuses on specifically on “real-world application” (International Public Debate Association, 2009). Public debate is primarily focused on delivery style, audience adaptability, and speaker credibility. For this reason, judges at IPDA tournaments are traditionally composed primarily of lay people from the surrounding community. 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.

While not exclusively an intercollegiate organization, IPDA is the most recent addition to an ongoing series of competitive intercollegiate forensic organizations within the United States (Cirlin, 2007). Beginning with NDT, each organization would begin with an emphasis on communication skills, but over time would devolve as rapid-fire delivery and technical jargon replaced rhetoric and audience analysis (Freeley &

Steinberg, 2005). As this transformation reached a zenith, frustrated coaches and debaters would begin a new organization (Eldridge, 2008).

The Novice division is open to any interested competitor who has participated in less than eight competitive debate tournaments since entering high school and who has not earned a four-year baccalaureate degree. The Varsity division is open to any interested competitor who has not earned a four-year baccalaureate degree. The Professional division is open to any interested competitor, including those who possess degrees, and has no entry restrictions (International Public Debate Association, 2009). A traditional IPDA tournament includes either six or eight rounds. For each round, individual competitors are matched against a competitor from a different program or university and pre-assigned the position of the Affirmative or the Negative. The Affirmative must advocate in favor of the resolution, while the Negative's duty is to argue against it. 30 minutes before the round begins, each pair of competitors is given a list of five resolutions. Beginning with the Negative, each takes turns striking two resolutions, leaving the final resolution to be debated during the round. Following that, competitors spend the remainder of the 30 minutes using the internet, their teammates, and coaches to prepare arguments (Richey, 2007).

Each preliminary round consists of two competitors being adjudicated by a single judge. The order of speeches is as follows: 5-minute Affirmative constructive, 2-minute cross-examination by the Negative, 6-minute Negative constructive, 2-minute cross-examination by the Affirmative, 3-minute Affirmative rebuttal, 5-minute Negative rebuttal, 3-minute Affirmative rebuttal. Following the conclusion of the round, the judge chooses a winner and assigns both competitors a speaker point rating. Speaker points consist of rating from 1(very weak)-5(superior) in eight areas for a range of 8-40 total points. The eight areas include delivery, courtesy, appropriate tone, organization, logic, support, cross-examination, and refutation (Alexander, 2010).

A certain number of competitors, not exceeding more than half, will advance to elimination rounds. Advancement to rounds is determined by overall record, with ties in record broken based on the cumulative speaker point totals. For instance, if a division has 32 competitors, the 16 debaters with the best record will advance. Under normal circumstances, each competitor will be assigned the Affirmative and Negative position an equal number of times. However, as competitors generally cannot compete in a preliminary round against the same competitor more than once at the same tournament, nor debate a member of his or her own program, the distribution of sides may not always be equal. Additionally, when an odd number of competitors is entered into a particular tournament, one person each round receives a bye, thereby producing an uneven distribution of sides.

In order to better understand the relationship between the Affirmative and Negative positions of advocacy, the following research questions will be addressed:

RQ 1: Is there a difference in competitive success between Affirmative and Negative debaters?

RQ 2: Is there a difference in speaker point allocation between Affirmative and Negative debaters?

### **Methodology**

This study is designed to investigate differences in competitive equity based on the pre-assigned Affirmative and Negative position of advocacy during the Fall 2009

regular season tournaments of the International Public Debate Association. This investigation focuses on two primary areas. First, the study examines the win/loss allocation to individuals based on their position of advocacy. Second, this study will examine the relationship between speaker point evaluation and the aforementioned categories.

The design is a quantitative non-experimental study.

### *Participants*

The target population for this study is debaters participating in Public debate at regular season tournaments sanctioned by the International Public Debate Association during the Fall 2009 semester, from August through December, within the states of Texas, Arkansas, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Mississippi. These states were selected because the majority of IPDA sanctioned tournaments occur in these states. Of the 16 regular season tournaments scheduled for the 2009-2010 season, only 2 were scheduled outside these states. During the Fall 2009 semester, only one tournament in Southern Idaho was scheduled outside the selected states.

The tournaments that occurred during the selected time period are as follows: Henderson State University in Arkadelphia, AR, September 19-20; University of Arkansas at Monticello in Monticello, AR, October 9-11; Louisiana State University at Alexandria in Alexandria, Louisiana, October 23-25; Louisiana State University at Shreveport in Shreveport, Louisiana, November 6-8; Union University in Jackson, Tennessee, November 20-21; and Mississippi College in Clinton, Mississippi, December 4-5.

279 individuals competed within the three divisions of IPDA during the timeframe. This study included all competitors, both students and non-students, in an effort to increase validity. Data was culled from the cumulative sheets distributed at the end of every tournament, which were made publicly available via IPDA's Google Site (Alexander, 2010).

The unit of analysis consisted of each round from the perspective of both debaters. That is, for every round, one unit was created per debater. The side(Affirmative/Negative), Result(Win/Loss), and Speaker Point Rating were included. Four rounds, eight total units, were excluded due to one debater withdrawing at a particular tournament after falling ill following his 4<sup>th</sup> round. As the speaker point rating was unavailable for that particular debater, all of his rounds from that tournament were excluded.

In total, 1,719 rounds were completed by 279 debaters, yielding a total of 3,438 units of analysis. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all relevant research questions.

For Research Question 1, chi square analysis was performed to test for effect on competitive success. For Research Question 2, an independent t-test was employed to examine the effect on speaker points.

## **Results**

RQ 1: Is there a difference in competitive success between Affirmative and Negative debaters?

**Table 1**

**Crosstab**

Count		winloss		Total
		Win	Loss	
affneg	Affirmative	835	884	1719
	Negative	884	835	1719
Total		1719	1719	3438

Table 1 reports the cross-tabulation of wins and losses between Affirmative and Negative debaters. Of the 1,719 rounds, the Affirmative won 835 times (48.52%), while the Negative was successful 884 times (51.48%). A chi square test was used to determine statistical significance. No significant relationship was observed at the .05 level,  $\chi^2(1, N = 1179) = 0.62, p = .43$ .

RQ 2: Is there a difference in speaker point allocation between Affirmative and Negative debaters.

**Table 2**

**Independent Samples Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
speaks	Equal variances assumed	.706	.401	-2.422	3436	.015	-.40547	.16741	-.73370	-.07724
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.422	3433.594	.015	-.40547	.16741	-.73370	-.07724

Table 2 reports the computation of an independent sample t-test of Affirmative and Negative speaker points. Affirmative debaters had a standard deviation of 4.84, while Negative debaters had a standard deviation of 4.97. A significant relationship was shown between the speaker points of Affirmative (M=31.77) and Negative (M=32.17) debaters,  $t(3436) = -2.422, p = .015$ .

**Discussion**

While no significant effect is recognized between the debater’s position of advocacy and his or her competitive success, a significant relationship is demonstrated in regards to speaker point ratings. The Negative has, on average, a .4 point advantage over the Affirmative. Over the course of a tournament, the advantage increases to 1.2 for six round tournaments and 1.6 for 8 round tournaments. While this may, on face, seem insignificant, it has potential for a very noticeable effect during tournaments. First, seed order between competitors with the same record is determined by speaker point rating. Seed order determines which bracket a competitor is in and who the competitor will face during elimination rounds. Additionally, speakers points can easily make the difference between advancing and not advancing to elimination rounds. Many times, the last seed advancing and the first seed to not advance are separated by less than one point.

One possible explanation for the disparity in speaker points between sides is the Affirmative’s first rebuttal, a three minute speech immediately following the Negative’s six minute constructive. In half the time it took the negative to attack the Affirmative’s

case and possibly launch an offcase, the Affirmative must rebuild his own case while attacking the Negative's.

This lack of time to rebut a speech twice as long will often cause debaters to speak at a rapid pace, called 'spreading,' in order to not drop any points (Dudash, 1998). This is problematic as speed of speech has a significant inverse relationship with listener comprehension (Foulke & Sticht, YEAR).

As IPDA is a format designed to emulate the 'real world' as much as possible (Cirlin, 2007), spreading is seemingly antithetical. Horn (1994) found that the primary reason debate coaches were leaving CEDA was the intense speed. Several quotes from coaches participating in the CEDA exodus speak very poignantly to the issue. "The actual educational advantages of 'speed debate' are, in my opinion, negligible. Only a highly specialized, incestuous industry could ever reward the skills taught in CEDA debate, and I speak with a clear understanding of politics and law as career fields" (pp. 1-2). "The fast-paced delivery is detrimental to students. They need to practice good speech delivery that will be accepted in real life situations" (p. 2).

Furthermore, the need for the Affirmative to spread affects the applicability of IPDA rounds to the traditional classroom environment. IPDA "competitions are intended to provide a forum in which classroom principles directly apply and where classroom students can be entered without undue embarrassment or ego-shock" (International Public Debate Association, 2009, p. 1).

"The fast-paced delivery is detrimental to students. They need to practice good speech delivery that will be accepted in real life situations" (p. 2).

"Until delivery/communication practice in rounds reflects the sort of theory we teach in speech classes, there will be serious dissatisfaction with intercollegiate debate. The problem has been chronic" (p. 2)

"I do not know of any coach in any form of debate that would allow or encourage students to speak rapidly in their speech classes. Why then do many coaches insist on it in debate rounds?" (p. 3).

Possible solutions to this problem include either adding preparation time to be used during speeches or to increase the 1<sup>st</sup> Affirmative rebuttal from 3 minutes to 4 minutes, while decreasing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Affirmative rebuttal from 3 minutes to 2 minutes. Future research should examine the effects of both options on competitive equity.

This study had three primary limitations. First, while it did encompass the entire sample save for the 4 rounds that were necessarily excluded, it only examined rounds occurring during one semester. Future studies should examine rounds over a larger timespan to see if the findings still hold true. Second, the study only examined the total speaker point number, rather than also individually coding each of the eight areas from which the total speaker point rating was drawn. This occurred since the cumulative sheets are public record both posted on the world wide web for anyone to see and given to every coach following the tournament, while only the coaches see their competitors' individual ballot breakdown. Finally, the study only examined preliminary rounds. This occurred to ensure the validity of the sample, as elimination rounds have a panel of judges and do not award speaker points.

In addition to addressing the above limitations, future research should endeavor to combine multiple factors including participant sex, sex of the opponent, sex of the judge,

and the like. This will enable the International Public Debate Association to gain a better grasp of the competition that occurs at regular tournament

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## Let Me Root, Root, Root for the Home Team: An Analysis of Home Field Advantage in IPDA

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#### Abstract

*Several years ago, a paper was presented at the International Public Debate Association (IPDA) National Tournament hosted by The University of Arkansas at Monticello that proposed that teams who competed in their own tournaments had an*