

# ROSTRUM

Volume 73

Number 6

February 1999



DR. RICHARD JACOB AND BRUNO E. JACOB

Focus On Policy Debate

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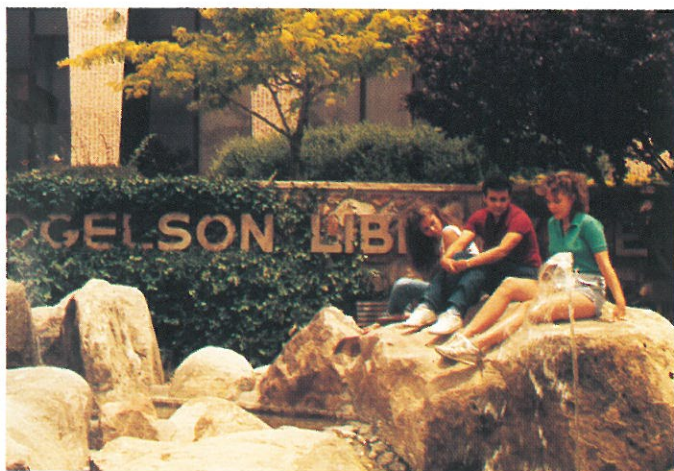
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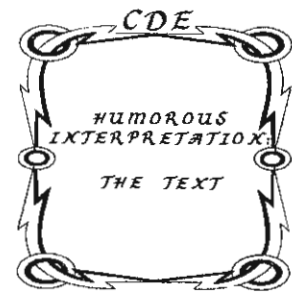
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## THE ROSTRUM

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**ON THE COVER: Dr. Richard Jacob with a portrait of his father, NFL Founder Bruno E. Jacob**

**NEXT MONTH: Accent on Contest Extemp.  
Hotel information for Desert Sun Nationals.**

## KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION TO SPONSOR HENRY J. KAISER POLICY DEBATES

Matt James, Senior Vice President for Communication and Media Programs of the Kaiser Family Foundation and Heather Balas, Project Director of the Kaiser Family Foundation Barbara Jordan Youth Debates on Health have notified NFL Councilor Ted Belch that the Kaiser Family Foundation will this year sponsor policy debate at the Lincoln Financial Group/NFL National Speech Tournament.

Sponsorship will include payment of entry fees for each qualifying debate team (\$19,000) and scholarships for the top eight teams (quarter finalists) at Nationals (\$19,000).

Belch, NFL liaison to the Barbara Jordan Debates, met with James and Balas in Washington in July to arrange sponsorship and finalize details.

"The Kaiser Family Foundation is delighted to provide debate opportunities for the youth of America", stated James, "while at the same time honoring great Americans like Barbara Jordan and Henry J. Kaiser."

Henry J. Kaiser was a high school dropout who started his career as an errand boy. He went on to establish a far-flung business empire worth billions of dollars that employed thousands of workers at his death in 1967 at age eighty-five.

Like all successful entrepreneurs, private or public, Henry Kaiser had great vision and was willing to take risks. Early in his career, he recognized that a healthy work force could be a more productive one. In the 1930's, Kaiser established health care clinics at remote work sites, which helped keep workers on the job and productivity up.



Henry J. Kaiser  
1882-1967

In later years, Henry Kaiser would sometimes refer to "the fourth dimension" of this plan. He believed that workers in good health--not burdened with worries about their families' health or concerned with finding money to pay for a needed operation--were able to think more clearly, work harder, and be more productive.

It was Kaiser's business practice to treat his workers well, take care of their needs, provide them with incentives to be productive, and look for new solutions to old problems.

After WWII Kaiser established a new automobile manufacturing business to challenge Detroit's "Big 3", producing cars called the Kaiser, the Fraser, and the Henry J., America's first compact car.

The AFL-CIO recognized his dedication to workers in 1965 with the Murray-Green award for achievements in health and welfare. In his acceptance speech, Kaiser spoke of his personal commitment to improving the health chances of others, noting that his mother had died in his arms because they could not afford to pay for her needed health care.

"We were poor," said Kaiser. "We could not afford a doctor nor the hospital care which could have saved her life. I resolved then and there to do something about people dying for lack of medical care."

1998 marked the 50th anniversary of the Kaiser Family Foundation--established by Henry and Bess Kaiser in 1948 to meet "the unmet health care needs of the citizenry."

## MARCH - APRIL LINCOLN FINANCIAL GROUP L/D DEBATE TOPIC

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# NEGATIVE DEBATING

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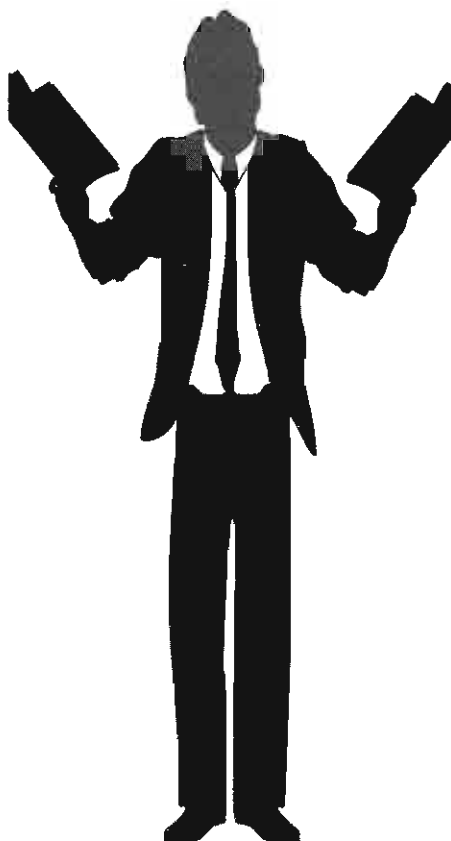
BY

KENNETH P. GRODD

DIRECTOR OF DEBATE  
ST. PIUS X CATHOLIC HS. (GA)

## ISSUES

- 5 MINUTE 1AR'S
- RESOLUTIONS WRITTEN WITH MINIMAL CASE GROUND
- THE ABANDONMENT OF PRESUMPTION
- THE PRESUMPTION AGAINST GENERIC ARGUMENTATION
- THE TEACHING AT SUMMER INSTITUTES
- NO NEGATIVE DIVISION OF CONSTRUCTIVE LABOR
- THE TREND TOWARD NEGATIVE DISCLOSURE



Is it just my imagination or are negative teams increasingly losing higher and higher percentages of debate rounds. It could be my Southeastern perspective, but given the fact that in my part of the country, teams in break rounds almost always opt to debate on the affirmative side of the resolution, something must be up. This seems true even of last year's energy topic, though perhaps a bit less so. Those teams who do opt to debate break rounds on the negative are invariably those who intend to offer a Kritik position, and have the Kritik as the only meaningfully extended argument in the 2NR argument. In other words, those teams that desire to debate on the negative in a policy debate round are those that have an essentially non-policy position to offer. I would venture to guess if those teams knew that the judge was averse to a negative position that dealt with philosophy and assumptions, or didn't evaluate claims of in-round abuse, those same teams would much prefer to debate on the affirmative. But this article is not a condemnation of the Kritik. I'll leave that important responsibility to those more articulate than myself on this question. This modest article presents both an evaluation of the negative decline, and some suggestions of how that decline can be reversed.

If the Southeastern experience is indeed indicative of the rest of the nation, then the critical question is: what has happened to negative debating? What is responsible for the increasing preference for the affirmative in the minds of debaters and critics? Seven reasons present themselves; the first three had an earlier ancestry than the final four, but they are all perhaps of equal importance.

### First, 5 Minute 1AR's.

When I started my debate coaching career, the four minute rebuttals were the rule. Negative teams won many rounds, in my experience, because the overburdened 1AR would fail to answer an important issue. The extended time uniquely assisted the affirmative, as the negative hardly needed five minutes in the 1NR, and only needed a little more in the final negative rebuttal. The law of unintended consequences really presented itself here, with a clearly detrimental impact on the negative.

## Second, Resolutions With Minimal Case Ground.

This is perhaps not so true this year, and the Kritik has offered a non-policy extension of negative turf. But in days of yore, the resolution represented a controversy, not necessarily a problem. The negative could actually win a round with a solid harms argument or a reasonable inherency position since there didn't exist a public consensus regarding the issue under consideration. Not so much in recent years. Additionally, judges don't require a 'reasonable threshold' for the affirmative case side positions. Existential levels of inherency are enough, minimum present or even future harms are enough. Mitigation of the affirmative case significance helps the weighing process at times, but can't hope to win many rounds by itself. In short, resolutions don't provide much area for case debate, and judges seem to have raised the bar above which a case argument is worth making.

## Third, The Abandonment of Presumption.

What happened to the affirmative burden of proof? An entire debate can be fought on negative ground, with only negative issues being argued. Affirmatives, in the eyes of many critics, never need to extend the case advantages. If the affirmative defeats the DA's, demonstrates the moronic nature of the Heidegger Kritik, and is topical, they probably win! As a consequence, plans that are offered represent a handwritten sentence devoid of any additional information such as mechanics and methods of implementation. They are very poorly constructed, probably because there is little requirement that they be well-constructed. Affirmatives simply don't expect to get attacked. The round is about defeating the negative by reducing risk probability, demonstrating topicality, and minimizing the Kritik. It is rarely about the affirmative proposal as contained in the plan, which does little more than mandating solvency and providing spikes to the off-case arguments. A reasonable burden of proof, or evaluating the prima facie nature of the affirmative appears to no longer be required.

## Fourth, The Presumption Against Generic Argumentation.

It's sort of a chicken or egg question. Do negatives lose generic arguments because they are so ridiculous and farfetched, or because they are offered so thoughtlessly

and introduced and advocated so poorly? Do negatives obligatorily read the pre-designed Clinton shell at light speed without even attempting to bring life or relevance to the issue because they know it's a bad issue? Or does it not win because they run it so poorly? Logic dictates that the more generic the argument is, the more intelligently it should be presented in order to compensate for its weaknesses. Negatives seem in an awful hurry to make bad arguments badly. But how can they make good arguments when the 1NC is simply a reader, taking no preptime, and simply spewing what they are told to spew? They can't. How many lost rounds before negatives realize that it is hard to vote on generic arguments made so poorly?

## Fifth, The Teaching At Summer Institutes.

Don't get me wrong, summer institutes provide an important service to the debate community...but for what they cost, students should get a lot more than just the resolutional links to the Clinton DA and the other perfunctory generic arguments, updated but rarely reevaluated. It would be nice if every summer institute went about the business of developing in the participant an intellectual understanding of the resolution prior to worrying about debating it. Bring in experts to deliver the substantive lectures on issues like energy. College students or even college debate coaches are seldom intellectually qualified to familiarize the student with the concepts underlying the problem area. Invariably, their lectures focus on how you use the resolution to win debate rounds. Any wonder negatives can't argue case. They know almost nothing about it. Debate institutes have an educational, not just a forensic obligation to the participant. Largely, I think, they fail to meet that obligation.

## Sixth, No Negative Division of Constructive Labor.

When exactly did it start? Where is it written? Why is it that all frontline negative positions need to be advanced in the 1NC? It was always theoretically justifiable to insist that counterplans and topicality be advanced in the 1NC, but DA's and case? What is the theoretical defense of placing these arguments in the 1NC? Particularly in light of five minute 1AR's? Constructives are for constructing arguments, presumably well-developed arguments, some of which

needed time during the round to prepare. These days, affirmatives will scream abuse to the gods if negatives dare run a new argument during that second constructive speech. More and more, judges seem to feel that new 2N positions violate some ethic. What ethic? And from where did it emerge? Whatever its origin, its effect is clearly averse to the interests of the negative.

## Seventh, The Trend Toward Negative Disclosure.

This never ceases to amaze and irritate me! An always prompt judge, I am invariably sitting in the room when the affirmative strolls in and announces the plan. This announcement is a relatively new phenomenon but probably contributes to the search for truth. At least affirmative plan disclosure is theoretically justified, given the other affirmative advantages and the fact that they go first. It's not as though they have to listen to any arguments before deciding on the affirmative 1AC. But then strangely, the affirmative will ask the negative what they are running, and negatives will tell them! Beam me up Scotty! Doesn't the negative have to actually listen to the 1AC and thoughtfully consider which arguments are best? Negatives seem to have their listless and lifeless canned arguments ready upon the affirmative announcing 'biomass'? Does this somehow make for good debate? This year I had the misfortune of hearing a round where the negative argued a definition of topicality in the 1NC which I suspect they argue every round. It was a bizarre definition that suggested that you had to have multiple specific types of renewable forms of energy advanced in plan. What was weird was that the negative ran this against the only case on the circuit that met the objection. The affirmative, an inexperienced but talented duo, read six minutes of plan which, as I remember, advanced 12 specific renewable energy types. The negative, blissfully uninterested in the 1AC, never picked up on what seemed an obvious disqualifier to that specific topicality argument. They extended the argument throughout the debate, blissfully unaware that they were offering an argument that, tactfully speaking, lacked intellectual or forensic credibility, as any non-debater listening to it would immediately conclude. Could anyone from the public sit in on this kind of debate and enjoy it? Perhaps that should provide a test. Nevertheless in my role as a critic of high school debate, I am (Grodd continued to page 10)

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#### 1998 L/D Fellows



1998 L/D Fellows were, (from left to right): Front row: **Lindsey Jandal**, (Grapevine); **Julie Ajinkya**, (Randolph); **Emily Pryor**, (Hopkins); Second row: **Max Clarke**, (San Antonio Lee); **Phillip Edwards**, (Miami Columbus); Third row: **Tom Zimpleman**, (Valley); **Justin Herndon** (Newman Smith); **Josh Goldblatt** (Syosset); Back row: **Steve Davis** (Roosevelt); **Michael Osofsky** (Isidore Newman); **Ben Shultz** (Stuyvesant). Not pictured: **Ben Silberman** (Roosevelt).

#### 1999 INSTITUTE FELLOWS

The Institute Director is currently recruiting eight to ten of the nation's top 1998-99 high school juniors as Institute Fellows. Nominations are encouraged. Those chosen will be dispersed among the various Institute labs, and will be announced in the March *ROSTRUM*.

#### 1998 POLICY FELLOWS



1998 Institute Policy Fellows were (from left to right): **Jake Foster**, (Head Royce); **Travis Swearingen**, (Montgomery Bell Academy); **Kate Eickmeyer**, (Greenhill); **Todd Fine**, (Glenbrook South); **Mal Hulbanni**, (Groves); **Amy McIntyre**, (El Cerrito).



Other 1998 Institute Policy Fellows were (from left to right): **Rashad Evans**, (Newark Science); **Tina Valkanoff**, (Head Royce); **Raja Gaddipati**, (Montgomery Bell Academy); **Srikanth Reddy**, (Appleton East); **Jonathan Neril**, (College Prep); **Sarah Miller**, (University School).

**CONTACT: Dr. J. W. Patterson, Intercollegiate Debate, 205 Franzee Hall,  
University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky 40506 - Phone: (606) 257-6523**

**"TRADITIONS OF EXCELLENCE CONTINUE"**

(Grodd from page 8)

constantly forced to listen to the worst eight minutes of negative debating possible, the contemporary 1NC. I hope teams don't mind if I don't flow much or take their arguments too seriously. It's amazing that no matter how bad and generic the presentation of 1NC's arguments are, the 2N still feels they have to answer the cross-examination questions, further devaluing the 1N, the substance of the speech and the individual who gave it.

Faced with the new axiom that instructs us that all negative positions, at least in part, need to be advanced in the 1NC (an axiom worthy of significant challenge), what can be done absent changes in resolutional construction or alterations in rebuttal times, to promote the interest of the negative? Of the two changes proposed here, one is relatively minor, though I might suggest significant, whereas the other involves a major reevaluation of negative duties. They are complimentary proposals though either can be adopted to the benefit of negative teams.

#### FIRST PROPOSAL

The first proposal is simply not to reveal the negative argumentation before the round. It's even better if the negative keeps an open mind, listens to the 1AC for the true nature of the affirmative proposal for change, any alteration in the proposal if heard before, or any nuance that could impact on the negative argumentation. No doubt that prior to the round, the negative should have a philosophy or a general approach to the affirmative, but to lock themselves into hard core, inevitably generic positions prior to a thoughtful listening for the 1AC is counterproductive to the point of being ludicrous.

Additionally the critic is forced to listen to the 1AC and the 1NC without any hope of spontaneity, without the prospect of any life being brought to the issues presented. I just can't decide whether this style of debate is more boring or more offensive.

As a corollary, consider the devaluation of the cross-examination of the 1AC. Where the cross-examination should be interesting, it often becomes tedious and perfunctory. The judge is clearly tipped off to the fact that the cross-ex is nothing more than an attempt to allow the 1NC, presumably the slower, more mentally deficient debater, to find the necessary files. But how about those times when the cross-ex of the weak 1AC is penetrating, when concessions are elicited, when the affirmative proposal

is clearly indicted or minimized. Alas, it matters not. Such substantive, thoughtful inspection is quickly forgotten as the 1NC is going to read what the 1NC is going to read, regardless of whatever the 2N obtains from the 1AC. And why should it be otherwise considering that the 1NC is regarded so often by the partner as a stooge, a chump, an ineffectual reader, who merely reads what the ever-wise 2N decided before the round he or she will read. Of course we know that the 1NR will never be allowed to extend a substantive, potentially winning issue in the block. The 2N probably will not even flow it, proclaiming to the judge that his or her partner, in case there was doubt, is indeed the junior member of the partnership, if partnership is too strong a word. The job of the 1N is to read, any thinking will be done by the 2N, and don't count on much of that.

Before the second proposal, a situation report. The wise actor in the negative drama, the 2N has put the negative side of the resolution in a uniquely tough position. Having the 1N merely read lifeless generic, scripted, and non-adapted arguments, the 2N is forced to pick the best of a group of bad arguments in the block. The 2AC has undoubtedly damaged the lifeless negative arguments, since beyond the perhaps obligatory extension of case advantages, the main goal they need to meet is the minimization of negative arguments. And goodness knows, they have had time to prepare responses, given that they knew the arguments the negative was going to offer before the round. So by the time the stronger negative speaker stands to present the 2NC, the negative is devoid of momentum and perhaps the good will of the person adjudicating the dispute. Additionally, they had to endure what is probably a meaningful cross-examination, weakening them further.

Now just before the second, and crucial proposal, a moment of reflection. It is forensically and educationally appropriate, and strategically beneficial, that all debaters in the round are significant and empowered. Very good teams are true partnerships. Good 1A's read well and answer questions thoughtfully, and in the 1AR, they cover issues articulately and thoroughly. They are part of the decision-making process throughout and between rounds. Good negative teams should be the same. There should be no assumption that one negative speaker is the real debater, whereas the other, invariably the 1N, is less. This weakens the negative, diminishes the potential contribution of one-half of the team, demoralizes

a student participant in the activity. This mindset will carry over to when that team is debating on the affirmative, hurting them there but perhaps not as much. Empowering the partnership is critical, ethically and competitively.

#### SECOND PROPOSAL

Now for the much awaited second proposal. It's really very simple and logical. Given the current debate reality, the most important negative speech in the round must be the 1NC. How many rounds must negative teams lose before they see that their doom began with the thoughtlessly read 1NC? The 1N should be the experienced debater, prepared to confront and assail the affirmative's search for truth. The first negative should take prep time, consider the affirmative proposal, construct meaningful case arguments, thoughtfully link the affirmative to DA's with logic, analysis, and perhaps rhetoric and humor explain why the affirmative violates the standards of the Kritik, and articulate just why the affirmative really is non-topical. Suddenly the generic, if they exist, don't sound generic. They sound thoughtful. And the non-generic are interesting to listen to, and to consider and evaluate. Additionally, the cross-examination of the 1AC, a crucial opportunity to rob the affirmative of momentum could actually be incorporated into the now attentive 1N, empowering both negative debaters and enhancing the negative side of the struggle. The negative, under this scenario, is thoughtfully attacking the affirmative early in debate, indicting them immediately rather than waiting for the 2N to hopefully say something meaningful nearly an hour into the round. This forces the judge to take notice and allows him or her to take an intellectual interest in the negative arguments.

In this scenario, the job of the 2AC is made infinitely more difficult. Not knowing what to expect was bad enough. Now they are faced with arguments that cut to the essence of what they propose. No generic sounding DA's. Now the DA's are thoughtfully linked and carefully explained. The solvency arguments have sinew and substance. They are really indictments of the specific solvency, not just a bunch of generic solvency cards. Given prep time, along with a careful listening to the 1AC and communications with the partner, the experienced negative debater in the 1NC can make the quality of arguments worthy of the activity. The 2AC will be required to think and not just read blocks. (Grodd continued to page 12)

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*Odds are they will be unable to make this adjustment well. As a consequence, the affirmative replaces the negative as the boring and tedious team to listen to and evaluate.*

Consider also that the 1N will be cross-examining the bewildered 2AC. Conceding that the 1N is the more experienced of the two, or at least an equal partner in the new scenario, would this not be a particularly important cross-examination? In fact, both negative cross-examination periods should become more significant and penetrating, and elicit admissions which can be incorporated. Before, even if the cross-ex of the 1AC was good, it was ignored. Now both cross-examinations by the negative become meaningful and relevant. Judges will be distinctly more inclined to pay attention and consider the information that flow from it.

Now that the affirmative, in the 2AC was not provided an easy opportunity to dismantle the 1NC's generic, let's examine what should happen in the block. Presuming the negative followed current debate convention that all arguments are initially presented in the 1N, the 2NC in concert with the partner, chooses out of a variety of solid negative positions. Even if the 2N is less experienced than the 1N, they should be able to rebuild certain negative positions that were probably not well indicted by the 2AC. This mindless 1N debater is now a thoughtful 2N, making argument extensions that may or may not be the real issue the negative is going for. Just as important, the 1NR

becomes a crucial speech, made by the more experienced debater. No longer can this speech be ignored. It could possibly, perhaps probably, contain the most important negative issue(s). The critical nature of the first affirmative rebuttal, offered by the affirmative 'reader', becomes even more critical since the tactical choices available to the negative, approaching the 2NR, have been enhanced and cannot be so easily assumed. Suddenly that 13 minutes of negative time in the block has a compelling impact, in sharp contrast to the situation today.

Consider most judges today, particularly the college judges but also to an extent the adults. In many circuits, the round is decided on the flow with some consideration for quality of explanation. Good arguments appear on the flow along with mindless ones, though they must psychologically have greater weight due to the explanations provided. The very thoughtful arguments advanced in the new 1N are not rhetoric, they are substantive. They will be evaluated as the judge examines the flow. Pure rhetorical arguments and gushing oratory are not evaluated seriously, at least in most circuits. Podium banging may have its place, but is considerably less compelling than what appears on the flow. So I offer the following proposition. The negative victories are attained in the block, they are no longer attained in the 2NR, that more oratorical and persuasive speech, at least not as often as they used to be. The idea that the 2NR has to inoculate the judge against the

affirmative's last lie, matters less since the arguments are on the flow. The 2NR has value, but the block has more. The 2NR, even if less experienced has time to collude with their partner, and assess what negative positions need to be extended, and decide how they will be extended on the flow with explanation. If rhetoric and compelling oratory can be included, so much the better. The main job of the 2NR can be done by the less experienced debater, whose final negative positions find their way on the flow to be evaluated. In states where rhetoric and oratory matter more, the 2NR will have to adapt. But the more experienced partner would have to adapt as well. Undeniably it would be better if the more experienced negative speaker gave every speech. But choices must be made.

Debate will be enhanced by these proposals. As debate people, we hear the same complaints about the activity time and time again. We must reach out to a larger audience while retaining our basic analytical focus. We are an activity about argumentation. We will be a better activity if we are about good argumentation. The affirmative has all sorts of obligations to assist in the improvement of our endeavor. Poorly constructed and underdeveloped plans, nearly absent solvency, and ridiculous advantage scenarios are a big problem. But these will be addressed by stronger and less generic-sounding arguments on the negative, forcing the affirmative to join in a thoughtful search for truth.

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# THE D G E



## Is The Clinton Disadvantage Theoretically Legitimate?

by David M. Cheshier

Policy debate is dominated like never before by political process arguments, and in particular by Clinton popularity/bipartisanship/agenda focus positions. Given the President's impeachment, recent American actions in the Middle East (which have produced a new slew of nuclear impact cards), and the increasing difficulty in devising other clever and unique disadvantages against Russia policy changes, the influence of strained Clinton scenarios is likely to persist.

This state of affairs drives many coaches and debaters nuts, and for many reasons. The typically hyper-abbreviated Clinton shell usually omits important internal link claims, and too often the argument reduces to: "A. Clinton popular. B. Americans hate Russia. C. Middle East peace process collapse causes nuclear war." Or: "A. Clinton's agenda on the brink. B. Winners win. C. Successful peace process causes nuclear war." Judges end up forced to vote for arguments which they believe utterly lack internal links or real uniqueness, and they're getting increasingly bitter about having to do so. I expect much of the other opposition to the Clinton argument stems from the total saturation and sick-to-death feeling politically literate people have lived with since Monica/Clinton/Starr/Tripp took over the news channels roughly a year ago.

Translating this general disgust with the argument into winnable responses has proved difficult, despite the increas-

ingly common affirmative practice of expressing Clinton answers in the form of theoretical objections. Here's a quick review of some of the arguments now being offered, on both sides, about the "legitimacy" of the political reaction arguments:

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First, one might argue that *process arguments are simply poor disguised "should-would" arguments*. The reasoning goes something like this: The focus on policy merits, embodied in the resolutional term "should," is designed precisely to prevent our bogdown in discussions over the means or likelihood of implementation. There remains a continuing opposition to jettisoning fiat, often based on the fear (legitimate or not) that without fiat we'll end up hearing 51 "Senator So-and-So will vote against the plan" meet-needs.

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Of course, were the affirmative to argue that the plan's unpopularity will result in its repeal by a Congress still hostile to the President's initiatives, it would get shot down immediately as a "should-would" argument. But is it so different an argument type to argue that the Congress, rather than acting out its backlash sentiments by taking direct aim at the plan, will get its "revenge" by passing national missile defense, yanking its support for Iraqi action, and all the rest?

---

Some find it quite easy to say "yes" to such a question, and it might indeed seem easy to answer this should-would objection. I suppose the main response would be that the popularity disadvantage does not express a "would" objection to the plan" after all, it does not deny that the plan will be passed and implemented. Clinton scenarios are easily cast as merits objections: "we should not pass this plan since passage would set in motion pernicious consequences." But this answer, as obvious as it is to popularity disadvantage defenders, is not altogether persuasive. After all, the same rationale can be used to transform even obvious "should-would" arguments into "disadvantages." Is the repeal meet-need any less a should-would argument if the negative attaches a "policy reversals undermine America's hegemony" impact?

---

A second possible objection relates to the first, but strikes most as weaker. We might argue against the popularity position that *political reaction arguments are not name objections to the plan*. Here the

focus is not on reaction arguments as "should-would," but on the broader philosophical question of whether political reaction should count against the tallied benefits of a policy proposal. I've heard this objection expressed several ways. Some argue political reaction is not germane on moral grounds, and to illustrate the point they may analogize rejecting the plan on popularity grounds to the more obviously repugnant practice of rejecting, say, civil rights legislation because of predicted racist backlash. Others argue that political reaction positions do nothing but silence discussion of radical change proposals, since they inevitably throw super-conservative caution brakes on proposals for change. Opponents of progressive (or even reactionary) change have long made it their stock-in-trade to oppose proposals by hyping their predictions of extraordinary backlash, predictions which usually fail to materialize. Arguably backlash positions do nothing more than ratify this perverse thinking by hyping Congressional or public reaction beyond all reasonable bounds. Why not simply dismiss the whole argument category as irrelevant to a tightly controlled discussion of merits?

---

But these arguments are not usually found persuasive, and for good reason. If backlash risks are small, then why can't the affirmative simply say so with evidence, and defeat the disadvantage straight up? And as repulsive as it sometimes seems, shouldn't policymakers factor likely negative reaction into their decisionmaking calculations? Backlash does happen, and often with disastrous consequences.

---

Another objection derives from the literature on deontology, and reflects all its strengths and weaknesses. This objection usually tries to stress the many low-risk internal links typical of the Clinton disadvantage, and to argue that *taken together, the strung-together link story forms such a speculative scenario that it should be discounted to zero* when compared to the "certain" case harms. Needless to say, this argument is difficult or impossible to make when the case relies on equally strung-together Russian nationalism advantage claims.

---

There are substantive objections to Clinton-type positions as well, and these are increasingly cast as in theoretical terms. The most powerful launches an attack on

poll-driven policy debate. One version objects to political reaction arguments because they perpetuate the horse-race nature of public argument. Our media coverage is undeniably obsessed with process over product. Were the President to call a press conference to announce a proposal designed to instantly achieve world peace, the nightly news would lead off with something like: "In a desperate bid to head off continuing scandal, the President today appealed to moderate Republicans with a smoothly packaged proposal to..." Our public discourse is taken over with winner and loser talk, of who's up and down, at the expense of the actual merits of proposed policies.

---

This obsession is increasingly criticized by students of political communication and journalistic practice. James Fallows' *Breaking the News: How the Media Undermine American Politics* emphasizes how a horse-race obsession diverts citizens from meaningful participation in public life and fosters electoral cynicism. And others, critical of how polling data increasingly substitutes for deliberation, have urged changes in media coverage so it will more reflect real pro-con discussions (see Benjamin Ginsberg's *The Captive Public*, or Michael O'Neill's *The Roar of the Crows*). Prof. Gordon Mitchell, the University of Pittsburgh debate director, has recently posted arguments to the debate listservs that extend these objections into a generalized position hostile to a reliance on polling data in formulating public policy.

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When debaters let their debates be taken over by process arguments, they only ratify these distortions in public deliberation, and further guarantee that the actual benefits and consequences of proposals for change will be given short shrift, or ignored entirely.

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As compelling as these objections are, they are not so difficult to answer. In a world saturated with horse-race policy talk, perhaps we should encourage forms of policy argument that equip students to handle political popularity-style arguments. Popularity debates may inoculate students against public opinion claims, rather than making them cynical or apathetic. One might also note that, despite the internal link issues, the Clinton disadvantage is not exclusively a polling argument, but involves (Cheshier to page 33)



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# MAINTAINING THE INTEGRITY OF ELIMINATION ROUND BRACKETS



*Minh A. Luong*

I have been have been involved in forensics for over twenty years as a student, judge, coach, program director, and most recently, tournament administrator. I am fortunate to have had expert as well as patient colleagues with me during these times and for all the successes, they deserve most of the credit. Over the last ten years, I have helped run some of the largest and most prestigious tournaments in the nation and I have done my best to apply what I learned from my mentors along with some sound judgment of my own. Yet despite the smoothness with which some of these tournaments have run, I am hard-pressed to name one issue related to tournament administration which has caused more frustration, anguish, threats, pleads for change, and harsh words between otherwise collegial colleagues than the issue of whether to break elimination round brackets at highly competitive tournaments.

Over the past two years, there has been a heightened interest in this subject which I believe warrants serious discussion in the forensic community. Because of my involvement in count-

less tab room, judge lounge, and between-the-round discussions on this issue, a good number of individuals have asked me to share my thoughts on this subject to explain why I do not break elimination round brackets as a tournament administrator.

## *Defining Terms:* **WHAT IS "BREAKING BRACKETS?"**

**There is a lot of confusion just on terminology surrounding this issue, so for the purpose of the discussion here, let me define a few key terms. The term "breaking brackets" refers to the practice of**

**re-seeding the elimination pairings to prevent competitors from the same school from debating.<sup>1</sup>** If the pairings are not broken and two competitors (L/D)/teams (policy) from the same school are scheduled to debate, the school is said to have "closed out that part of the bracket." If debaters from the same school occupy all spots in the elimination round pairings, then the school has "closed out the tournament."<sup>2</sup>

## *The Tournament Administrator....* **MAINTAINING A NEUTRAL ROLE**

As a former high school and college competitor as well as coach, I understand the position of those who support breaking brackets; many of whom I respect deeply as colleagues and supporters of our activity. Believe me, this practice solves and even prevents a lot of intra-team conflicts for the coaches and team members. Not breaking brackets may cause hard feelings be-

tween debaters and put coaches in positions they otherwise would rather not occupy. I have been in both positions as a debater and coach, and believed for years that not breaking brackets was a very uneducational practice. Of course at the time, I was most concerned about my own and later as a coach, my students' interests.

My opinion on breaking brackets changed 180 degrees when I accepted the responsibility of running large national competitions, and with that responsibility, to be as fair and impartial as possible. As a tournament administrator, I feel that my position is not to solve nor avoid team conflicts, nor to favor large teams over small ones. I view my job as being entrusted to run a completely fair and non-discriminatory competition that treats every debater equally (the last three words are very important here).

The individual performances as determined by the collective wisdom of the judges are, in my opinion, the sole determinant of qualification and subsequent placement in the elimination rounds. I learned by hard experience it is extremely unwise to adopt such an interventionist and discriminatory policy as breaking elimination round brackets at important national tournaments.

If the two matched debaters/teams are from the same school, the issue of what to do is for the coach and the debaters from that school to decide. As the tournament administrator, I offer the school a few options:

1. *I can advance the higher-seeded debater/team; or*
2. *I can advance the debater/team based on coach's preference (seniors advance over juniors who advance over sophomores, for example); or*
3. *I can give the school three judges so the debaters can have a debate; or*
4. *I can provide the school a room*

*where the debaters debate in front of the coach(es).*

But the decision is in the coaches' and debaters' hands -- NOT MINE. The tournament administrator should be impartial and stay out of internal affairs of teams. Some people have asked why don't I just make it easier for teams with no coach, parent coaches, or spineless coaches by breaking brackets? My reply is it is simply not my business as the tournament administrator because my decision to break brackets affects other coaches and debaters in exactly the opposite way (debate is like physics that way...for every action there is an opposite and equal reaction). As the tournament administrator, I will abide by the coach's decision, but I will not intervene to relieve them of any discomfort of having to deal with their internal problems. My suggestion is that members of teams should all agree before the tournament on a set of clear criteria of who advances in the tournament should members of that school be paired to debate against each other in an elimination round. Deciding upon a policy and living with it can be a valuable experience useful for later lessons in life.

Initially, I viewed the large team "dilemma" of having to decide which debater/team to advance as a disadvantage. After a discussion with my friend Tim Averill, the director at Manchester HS (MA), however, I now share his view that maintaining the integrity of brackets provides some level of reward for large teams for the depth of their success while still treating all debaters equally. As a director of a large, successful program who, as a tournament administrator, does not break brackets, Mr. Averill points out that as a coach, he actually hopes for closeouts because of the two debaters/teams, one is guaranteed to go to the next round; an important consideration when earning qualifying legs for

the National Tournament of Champions. If brackets are broken, then there is a risk that both of his debaters/teams would lose and that no one would advance to the next round. Large teams who break multiple debaters at tournaments are, in fact, rewarded for their depth of success.

## WHAT ABOUT JUDGE INCONSISTENCY?

After win-loss record, speaker point rating is the next determining criterion for seeding elimination rounds. Other coaches with whom I have had discussions about this issue point out that seeding is so arbitrary; citing the marginal variance in speaker points which separates top seeds from bottom seeds.<sup>3</sup> My answer is that debate is subjective and that is the nature of the activity. Our activity is more like figure skating than track and field; determining the winners in debate is a matter of opinion more than fact. We all accept that as a condition of participation when we go to competitive tournaments. That said, however, I think that many of the competitive national tournaments such as the Tournament of Champions have the most consistent judging pools in the country. Marginal speaker point variance actually points to a very consistent judging pool; one which has a narrow range of Z-score ratings<sup>4</sup> and one that indicates that speaker points are indeed useful. Additionally, most tournaments drop the high and low speaker point ratings as the second criterion (after win-loss record), which removes a significant amount of variance. Thus, speaker point variance really is not a legitimate justification to break brackets.

The real question which should be raised is:

"Who is supposed to evaluate the debaters? The tournament admin-

istrator or the judges? When we break the top 16 Lincoln-Douglas debaters out of a field of 70 over seven preliminary rounds as we do at the National Tournament of Champions, 735 separate decisions were made by the judging pool to determine the overall seeding.<sup>5</sup> Who will single-handedly intervene to override the collective judgment of those judges? Certainly not I as the tournament administrator! While I am the last to worship elimination round seeding as the "sacred cow" of debate administration, I have yet to discover a better, non-arbitrary way of determining elimination round placement.

## MAINTAINING BRACKETS IS EDUCATIONALLY SOUND

When elimination round brackets are broken, an uneven playing field is created. The result is that high seeds hit high seeds early in the tournament and half are eliminated prematurely. Debaters on the "weak side of the bracket" literally walk into finals while debaters trapped on the "hard side" have to bleed every inch of the way just to make it to the next round. I made the horrible mistake as a young tournament director of allowing myself to be talked into breaking brackets when I directed a huge triple-octos tournament and there were many lopsided late elimination round debates. No wonder! High seeds were meeting in octofinals and lower seeds were making it all the way to quarters and semis because the bracket was broken twice in double-octofinals and octofinals to avoid conflicts within large teams. The result was, in my opinion, a rather poor tournament that did not showcase the best debaters in the late

elimination rounds. Unfortunately, instead of the semifinal and final rounds being "clash of the debate titans" those well-attended showcase rounds were, to be candid, quite embarrassing.

Coaches who have asked me to break an elimination round bracket often point out that closing out that part of the bracket means that no debate would occur, thereby depriving other students from observing and learning from exemplary debate. While their intentions at first might seem quite altruistic, if we take that argument to its logical conclusion, breaking brackets might actually produce the opposite result. While breaking brackets might prevent early elimination rounds from being closed out, it actually results in more closeouts in semi and final rounds which deprives the students who observe such rounds of comparatively better educational opportunities. As a tournament administrator, maintaining the integrity of brackets means that there is a better chance for students to observe the best debaters in the final rounds of the tournament; something I would also want as a coach and a debater.

## AN APPEAL FOR UNDERSTANDING AND DISCUSSION

If you support breaking brackets, I will not ask you to change your mind, however, I do understand the responsibilities a tournament administrator must take in maintaining the integrity of the tournament. I usually do not take such a strong tone in my *Rostrum* contributions, however, I will speak up energetically on issues which



I feel threaten the integrity of the activity and as long as I am directing the tab room at tournaments such as the National Tournament of Champions, the integrity of those competitions will be vigorously defended.

*(Minh A. Luong is a former high school and university coach who served as Chairperson of the Communication Studies Department at Pinewood College Preparatory School (CA), Director of Debate at San Francisco State University, and Director of Forensics at the University of California at Berkeley. Now a corporate consultant, he co-founded and directs the National Debate Education Project, an organization which conducts weekend debate seminars in underserved areas around the country. He served as the Tournament Director of the California Invitational at The University of California at Berkeley for five years and is now serving his sixth year as the Director of L/D debate at the National Tournament of Champions.)*

<sup>1</sup>This debate assumes the classic "tree" elimination round format and not the NFL "two/three down" matching schemes.

<sup>2</sup>For example, if four teams from the same school win their quarterfinal rounds and advance to the semifinal round, the school has "closed out" the semifinal round and the tournament.

<sup>3</sup>At some of the most competitive tournaments, the speaker point difference between the top seed (1) and the lowest seed (32) is less than ten (10) speaker points out of 210, only a 4.7% difference.

<sup>4</sup>A Z-score is available using Rich Edward's TRM (Tab Room in a Mac) program. It measures the relative variance of speaker point ratings awarded by each judge in comparison to the judging pool.

<sup>5</sup>70 debaters = 35 debates X 3 decisions (win/loss as well as affirmative and negative speaker point assignments) X 7 rounds = 735 overall decisions.

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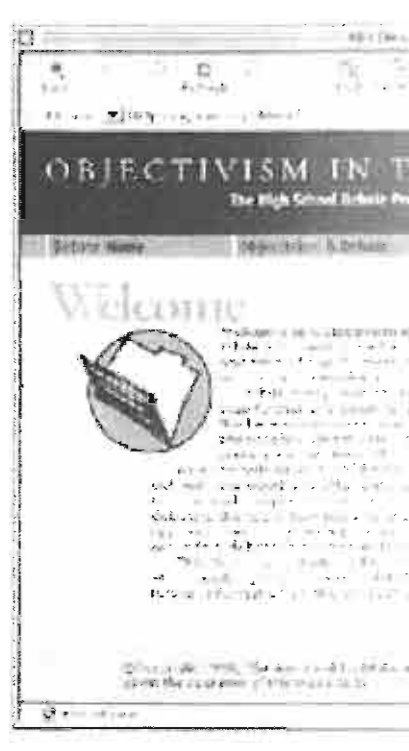
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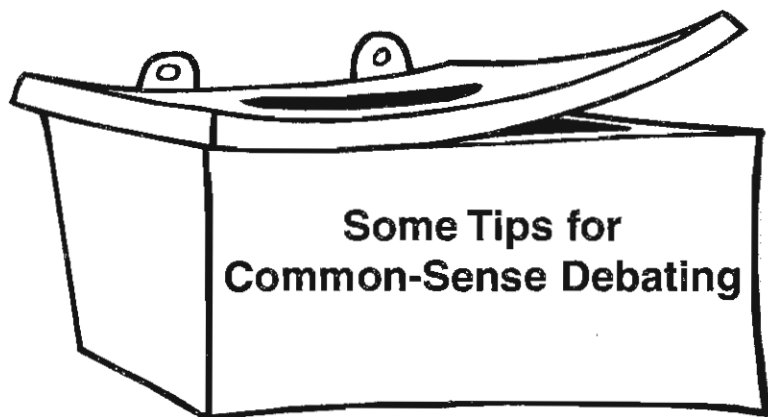
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by  
Harry F. Noyes III



The first year I judged debate, I thought American high school debating had lost sight of its all-important, down-to-earth, democratic roots and had evolved into a ritualized, inbred, elitist game.

Today, after my third year of judging tournaments for San Antonio's MacArthur High School (mostly Lincoln-Douglas, with some cross-examination and ex-temp), I have decided my initial reaction was overdrawn -- but not completely wrong.

Debate coaches DO need to throw a little more common-sense ballast into debaters' bouncing theoretical boats.

If this is not done, many debaters will never emerge from the caterpillar stage and become the handsome butterflies of public life that they could be. Instead, like computer nerds, they risk becoming a lonely community of geniuses isolated from the rest of humanity by their own self-imposed, needless obscurantism.

Computer nerds can survive in their cloisters because they turn their ingenuity into tangible machines and because their monkish labors earn money for the hiring of interpreters.

### Break Habits

But debaters, if they are to fulfill their potential, must someday stop talking only to each other, and start persuading the rest of us -- boards of directors, city councils, customers, voters. To do that, they

must break some habits they develop in debating and start speaking the same language that outsiders do.

Debaters are extraordinarily bright kids and they pick up quickly (too quickly) on the "high technology" of forensics, i.e., the intricate analysis, the jargon, the citation of rules.

### Convince Ordinary People

In the process, they forget that the real-life value of debating skills is to convince ordinary people -- not debaters -- to support the causes, the values, the decisions they believe in.

I hate watching smart kids waste their brains and energies "lawyering" the (supposed) rules of debate instead of actually debating. It's like watching football players arguing with the referees when they should be blocking and tackling each other.

### Avoid Accusations

Instead of discussing the meat of issues, debaters too often just accuse each other of violating topicality, triumphantly trumpet an opponent's alleged overlooking of a third contention, demand that arguments be drawn over to their own sides, and instruct judges on what the judging issues are.

"I DON'T CARE!" one wants to

scream. "Topicality sounds like a pomposity that deserves violating; I don't remember what your third contention was; I'm not keeping a chart to draw things over on' and I - not you -- will decide what the judging issues are."

### Avoid Debate Jargon

Usually, I'm not that blunt. However, I do write critiques warning debaters that many judges don't know or care about debate jargon; that, in the real world, there are no rules of debate except to change minds and hearts; and that, in the real world, this demands cogent information, common sense arguments and clear, simple English - not a mastery of debate theory.

### Use Debate Theory

It's not that debate theory is wrong. It's a good tool for learning how to influence ordinary people. It's just that, when it comes time to actually influence people, one has to *USE* the theory.....*not talk ABOUT it.*

Often this is just a matter of choosing the right words. A debater can win a layman over by objecting that an opponent has gotten off the subject to avoid facing reality. He will lose the layman if he insists on using the term "violated topicality."

Fortunately, as debaters mature, most

seem to reconnect with the real world. They slip into jargon and lawyering much less. Perhaps repeated battering by codgers like me has something to do with this. One hopes their coaches are influencing them, too.

## Show The Finished Product

Coaches should do even more in this arena. Impress upon all debaters, including novices, that the jargon, analysis and chart-drawing done in the classroom should be left in the classroom.

Remind them that doctors study anatomy, pathology, etc., but they don't regurgitate it all to their patients. They just say, "You have an infection. Take these pills."

Another analogy: A skyscraper contains incredible complex support and utilities structures, but smart architects don't let occupants and visitors see that stuff. They conceal it behind walls, floors and ceilings that give the building users the only thing they care about: practical working or living spaces.

Debaters need to do the same. By all means, learn the debate jargon, the analytical techniques, the "rules" that work most of the time. Use that stuff to build strong cases, but don't show it to the judges. A debater should show judges only the finished product: a well-knit, smoothly spoken, plain-English argument that makes the debater look more right than the opponent.

Lay judges will actually punish debaters for showing the innards of their art -- not deliberately but just because they really do not understand. Debaters who get used to succeeding with these approaches in debate classes or with expert judges may come to see them as magical incantations for any occasion. They are going to be sorely disappointed when they try them on lay judges and do not get the expected results. It is the job of coaches to make sure this doesn't happen by training debaters not to use such arguments in tournaments.

## Face the Judge Using Common-Sense Approach

(It is dangerous to try to guess, or ask, what kind of judge one is facing. Both kinds may resent the gamesmanship this implies. "Just play ball!" is likely to be their attitude. Even if one guesses successfully, one assumes the burden of trying to "switch

hit" between common-sense and legalistic approaches every time one faces a new judge. What's the point? Expert judges may tolerate a legalistic approach, but surely almost all of them will accept a common-sense, substantive approach equally well. Indeed the best ones will prefer it, for all the reasons I have cited. So if everybody likes the common-sense approach, and lay judges hate the legalistic one, doesn't it just make sense to always take the common-sense approach? The case for substantive content couched in good, plain English is overwhelming.)

The same usually cannot be said for cases made by student debaters, a problem caused mainly by an archaic approach to research and argumentation. Debaters slave endlessly over their research, but the ideas and evidence they end up with often falls short of the required level of persuasiveness.

In my opinion, as an educated outsider, the crux of this problem is an obsession with long-dead philosophers that most Americans have never heard of. As a liberal-arts graduate, I am pleased that my debater son is learning about Hobbes, Locke, etc. However, I don't look to those guys as guides to 20th-century issues, and Joe Six-Pack doesn't have a clue who they were.

Consequently, a typical debate opening statement -- "Because I agree with Tycho Brahe's grandmother, I must affirm" -- is dead on arrival as far as most lay audiences are concerned.

If listeners don't say just say, "Who?," they are likely to say, "Well, you may agree with that witch-burning, serf-flogging, pre-steam-engine troglodyte, but I don't." And then what chance does the debater stand?

## Proper Opening Statement Structure

A winning case is a logical structure, built with evidence and argumentation, on a foundation presented in the opening statement. For a case to succeed in the short time available, that foundation MUST be one the audience (judge) instinctively recognizes and agrees with.

It must be axiomatic, i.e., so commonly agreed-upon by Americans from all walks of life and all schools of thought that the opposing debater would not dare to question it and the judge would never think to. A debate case can survive having some of

its evidence and arguments skewered; but if that philosophical foundation is attacked and defeated, then everything stacked on top of it collapses and the case is doomed.

What kinds of ideas qualify as unassailable axioms? Given time and intellectual skill and will, of course, almost any axiom is assailable. However, the time limits of debate and the limited philosophical inclinations of most Americans confer a virtual impregnability on certain sources of ideas and quotations.

For example: humane moral precepts from the sacred religious texts of any modern faith, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the writings of Benjamin Franklin or Einstein, the speeches of George Washington or Abraham Lincoln or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. -- such sources are instantly recognized and command instinctive respect from American listeners.

A clever analyst might rip some ideas from these sources to pieces, but very few judges will think to do so and opposing debaters would attack such honored sources only at great risk. With a trusted and unassailable foundation, a debater can build the rest of his logical superstructure with much more confidence.

Hobbes and Locke simply do not provide that. They inspire distrust in some judges even if the opposing debater does not say a word against them -- and they can be attacked with impunity.

"My opponent cited Hobbes, who every right-thinking person knows is an idiot, pervert and enemy of modern humane values," a debater could say...and most judges would not have any reason to doubt it. If a judge found this riposte plausible, it would virtually blow the opponent out of the water. And even a judge who disagrees with this gambit is unlikely to be offended by it, whereas many judges would react negatively to a debater who challenged ideas from the Bible, Declaration of Independence, Constitution, Washington, Lincoln or King.

In short, debate coaches should counsel their students to seek their ideas from sources that command sacred or quasi-sacred status in American society, not from forgotten philosophies.

Another point that must be impressed more vividly on debaters is this: one of the few absolute rules in debating is that no argument counts unless the judge can hear the words. Sadly, this is a rule many debaters violate profligately -- especially CXers, of course, but the problem is by no means

limited to them.

The most brilliant argument in the world is worthless if the audience (judge) hears only a cacophony of words piled up on top of each other. Even when words are spoken one at a time, if the pace is too hectic and there is no time to absorb the meaning of it all, very cogent arguments may be missed or underestimated by the harried listener. Impress upon debaters that three or four decent ideas, clearly presented, are more persuasive than 20 brilliant ones that nobody can hear, understand or absorb.

### Research -- Broaden General Knowledge

One final idea worth passing on to students: while targeted debate research is essential, there is no substitute for an underlying liberal education.

During one ex-temp speech on an economic issue, a brilliant young novice failed to cite the most important economic factor of all. He simply hadn't stumbled across it in his hasty pre-speech research. While it would be unrealistic to expect such a young man to be an economics expert and I did not penalize him for this omission, it was sad to see him come so close to sheer perfection and miss it for lack of a fairly common-place fact.

Of course, no one is every going to hit on all cylinders in ex-temp, but this incident does point up a valuable lesson. Over the long haul, the best debaters will be those who possess an inexhaustible yearning for knowledge of all kinds.

Great debaters do not just fill their debate research hours with a mechanical collection of facts on this year's topics -- they fill their whole lives with learning in the broadest sense.

Consequently, when they go into a debate, they need not gamble all on the hazards of a hasty, quick-and-dirty topical research effort. They operate from a solid foundation of personal knowledge, supplemented by debate research -- much sounder research because it is guided by their broad general knowledge.

### Use Metaphors From Unrelated Fields

As a writer, I find that the best arguments on any topic often are metaphors from totally unrelated fields. The best way to win a political point may be an analogy from sculpture, or natural history, or the physi-

cal sciences, or religion.

Research will not turn up such connections. An all-permeating liberal education will.

### Broaden Reading Material

Encourage debaters to get that kind of education. Encourage them to read constantly, from non-fiction of all kinds and from great literature. As a minimum, urge them to begin a life-long habit of reading a good news magazine -- ALL of it -- every week.

In conclusion, I urge debate coaches everywhere to return to the days of yore when high-school debate was exemplified by Mickey Rooney and Judy Garland, on stage in an auditorium packed with parents and siblings, pondering the merits of standing up to Hitler -- plain talk for plain folks on real public issues so difficult that smart people of good will may disagree.

### "Forensics" A Valuable Experience

Clearly, I believe there is room for improvement. Having said that, however, let me emphasize that high-school forensics is an immensely valuable experience. I have gratefully watched my son grow tremendously in analytical skill, wit, articulateness, knowledge, confidence and leadership.

This is a great program. Debaters just need to remember that their ultimate audience is the rest of American society, not just each other.

*(Harry F. Noyes III is a journalist in the Public Affairs Office of the U.S. Army Medical Command. He is a volunteer debater and speech judge in Texas.)*



*(Cheshier from page 17)*

students in substantive arguments about national missile defense, trade policy, American hegemony, and Middle Eastern policy.

More than all this, political reaction matters. Particular presidential actions do produce generalized backlashes (witness the Clinton health initiative and his infamous responses to the Congress' "81 questions"): should we ignore the tangible consequences of such reactions? Probably not. I've heard others energetically defend how the Clinton position dominance forces students to stay current in their reading or database searching (although I suspect most would be grateful for relief from night-before-the-tournament update madness).

As sick as most are of the typical Clinton disadvantage, the argument genre may be with us for good, despite the considerable energies being expended to theoretically subvert it. Many of the common objections to political process arguments are unlikely to be given trumping theoretical weight, especially when they are so easily introduced as link or internal link answers. Others are tough to win when the negative combines an advantage-solving counterplan with a process argument. The argument that "given equal solvency for the case claims, why risk the political backlash?" will continue to persuade. In the meantime, it's probably more productive for affirmatives to refine their link and uniqueness responses.

*(David M. Cheshier is Assistant Professor of Communications and Director of Debate at Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA. His column The Edge appears monthly in the Rostrum).*

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# LET'S SHARPEN THOSE ISSUES

by Harry F. Noyes III



## Defending the Affirmative or Negative Issues

Nothing is more frustrating to debaters and judges than to be trapped by a debate topic that inadvertently favors one side over the other. Unfortunately, several of the topics I have seen in my three years of judging fall into this category.

While I cannot remember the topics clearly, I do remember feeling on most of them that the negative didn't stand a chance unless the affirmative really performed badly.

Some topics were stated in such a way that the negative could only come up with forceful arguments by adopting postures that seem inherently immoral to most Americans -- a burden no high-school debater should have to overcome.

Others were stated so vaguely that a clever affirmative could focus the topicality in any way it wanted to. This in turn would have the effect of forcing the negative into the same position of climbing uphill against judges' inherent moral convictions.

For example, one topic dealt with "strengthening" immigration laws. Most people would take this to mean reducing immigration.

However, I judged a debate in which the affirmative cleverly the vagueness of "strengthen" by demanding refinements that would speed up the admission of orphans for adoption.

Negative was placed in the impossible position of arguing against orphans, adoption and family love. They tried heroically, but logically as well as emotionally they

simply had no legs to stand on. All the usual anti-immigration arguments -- Who will pay for them? They'll change our society. Their own countries need their skills -- collapse completely in the context of orphan babies being adopted by American families.

It's easy to tell judges to be neutral, but they must decide the merits of arguments and there is no way they can totally shake a lifetime of values in doing that. And, as in the example above, in some cases even the coldest logic leaves one side holding the dirty end of the stick before the debate ever starts.

For fair debating, the topic itself must be neutral. That is, it must be selected and worded in such a way that the affirmative and negative cases both lie somewhere within the mainstream of American values or at least within the normal parameters of American policy conflicts. Topics must be one that intelligent adult Americans of good will sincerely disagree on -- and which a self-disciplined judge can therefore truly see both sides of. If not, there is no way for judges to be neutral and there is no way for affirmative and negative to have equal chances to win.

In other words, it's fair to ask debaters to defend either the affirmative or negative of genuinely hard issues. Let them flail away on balancing the federal budget, on foreign aid, on whether to send troops to Bosnia. Don't ask them to argue the merits of motherhood, compassion or honesty, where society has already made up its mind what it believes -- and don't give them vague topics that might "melt down" or be twisted by affirmative into a form that negative has

no hope of winning.

Clearly no one writes a bade topic on purpose. That some slip through suggests a need for better screening. Not knowing the current process, I risk proposing the obvious. But I would suggest pre-testing the topics with a series of debates, using average high-school debaters (not the national champions) and real lay judges. They should be able pretty quickly to report whether the topic presents unfair difficulties for either case or for the judges.

Identifying appropriate issues is hard. Crafting the wording is even harder. The topic must be sharply focused, yet not too restrictive. It must be succinct and yet not vague.

No doubt about it: this is hard work, but it can be done. This year's Lincoln-Douglas topic -- whether private groups should be allowed to discriminate -- worked quite well. I saw both sides consistently scoring good points.

However difficult, the crafting of good topics is the *sine qua non* of an effective debating season. This is a challenge that must be met if debate outcomes are to depend on more than just the luck of drawing the affirmative slot.

*(Harry F. Noyes III, San Antonio (TX) is a journalist in the Public Affairs Office of the U.S. Army Medical Command. He volunteers as a debate judge in Texas)*

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# ISRAELI STUDENTS LEARN DEBATE DOES NOT REQUIRE SHOUTING

by Larry A. Smith

The *Jerusalem Post International Edition* for the week ending February 7, 1998, devoted a full page to Israeli students learning the process of formal argumentation and debate without the traditional Israeli style of, "He who talks loudest is the one who gets heard."

For the first time "civilized argument will be heard throughout the land" as high school students from 26 countries participate in the World Schools Debating Championship.

Asher Weill, the British-born editor of *Ariel*, a local arts and culture magazine, notes, "We see debating as the key to improving democracy. It's not just shouting at the other guy; it's actually listening to him, relating to his arguments and speaking back in a way that is polite and informed."

Reasoned, quiet, logical discourse is not a tradition in Israel, according to Prof. Shoshana Blum-Kulka, of Hebrew University's Department of Communications. "We have a long tradition of argumentation...where everyone seems to talk at once. There is a tradition which is very Israeli, that of saying exactly what you mean. It all feeds into a highly confrontational style."

Israeli high school students, led by their coach Adam Lifstein, hope to establish a more reasoned tradition of argument in Israel, one based on logical, courteous, and carefully conceived argument. Lifstein comes from a family tradition of debate at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Adam, his father, and his sisters all have participated in debate. Lifstein teaches rhetoric at several Israeli schools. He notes, "Part of the health of a democracy is the quality of its discourse. Debate is one of the best ways to teach children and adults about the discourse that makes up democracy." Some might say he came to the wrong country, given the tradition of debate by shouting. Lifstein disagrees. "Certainly my skills as a debate coach wouldn't be that necessary in England--but here I'm one of the few people who actually has some experience in the issue."

Lifstein is like other debate coaches. He has been teaching his students the fundamentals of rhetorical argument: identifying logical fallacies, ways of analyzing

opponent's arguments and proper methods of structuring and writing speeches. He also is trying to teach them to be effectively "listenable" by adding in a little humor and passion to their speeches.

Yehoshua Gurtler, a 17 year-old at Jerusalem's Hartman High School was "bom talking" according to his father. Yehoshua wants to be a lawyer. He is a great fan of LA law. "I'd heard about debating from friends and watching television, so I decided to try it out, and I got hooked. I enjoy the intellectual game, the idea of speaking in public, the techniques. I really like discussing and examining both sides of an issue...but what I enjoy most is going head to head with an opponent."

Yaron Nahari, 16, and a student at Tel Aviv's Tichon Hadas humorously notes he got into debating because he likes to wear suits. He also admits he likes to argue and lives in a home where the family argues about everything. He also admits, with a smile, he still settles arguments with his younger siblings the way he always has... "by beating them up."

Yaron credits his formal training with making him more effective in prevailing in arguments. "I never thought it would happen, but I keep a lower profile when I'm arguing now. My arguments are more analytical and cream less--it's more about getting the point across." His prowess at persuading has convinced his friends at school. They now send Yaron to the principal when the friends want something done.

Sivan Cohan, 15, of Holon's Ephraim Katzir High School, got into debate because her mother couldn't get a refund for the tuition at a debate workshop which Sivan's older sister could not attend. After the workshop she was selected to the national team after advancing through national competitions. Sivan has only one complaint about debate. "I hate wearing skirts." Cohan admits to being nervous in front of an audience, but once the debate begins, she often overcomes her jitters with a little humor. During a debate on technology teammate Nahari described a man's technology gone awry with toast popping out of a toaster uncontrollably and a coffee pot boiling over. Sivan responded, "That man should either have gotten married or taken home econom-

ics instead of woodworking in high school."

Yael Shapira, 16, another team member, thinks learning to maintain eye contact with listeners (and judges) is the key to successful debating. Another key element he says is, "staying focused and thinking about how to stand (on an issue). You have to think about what the opposition is going to say." That is certainly a departure from traditional Israeli discourse where a person only concentrated on what HE was saying and ignored his opponent's thinking.

The World Schools Debating Championship was held in the Knesset, Israeli's parliamentary house. The topic was, "This house would continue to prosecute World War II criminals." Certainly the topic was one that was very relevant to those who live in Israel. The topic would obviously have a highly charged emotional meaning for those who live in the Jewish country. An emotionally charged topic would normally lead to the traditional confrontational shouting match that has been a long tradition in Israel.

Notes Gurtler, "There is a big problem in Israel because a great deal of arguing is about things that are emotionally charged. Sadly, the role model for kids is *Popolitica* (a televised "debate show") and the Knesset." Apparently neither forum is a positive model for reasoned, logical, and courteous argumentation.

Coach Lifstein says, "We can't pretend that if everyone learned to debate, there would be no more raucous performances like *Popolitica*. What I would hope is that if people learn to debate, they'll be able to watch it in a much healthier way, that they won't be swayed by the 'rhetoric of force.'"

Coach Lifstein and his team members are truly a tiny seed for progress in developing democratic, non confrontational debate in Israel. His goal in teaching young people to be future leaders is the same as the goal of the National Forensic League. Perhaps Lifstein and his debaters ought to be accorded honorary membership in the National Forensic League.

(Larry Smith is former district chair of the Sierra (CA) district and a member of the NFL Hall of Fame.)

# NFL'S TOP 50 DISTRICTS

(January 4, 1999)

Rank	Change	District	Ave. No. Degrees	District Trophy Contender	Rounds
1.	-	Northern South Dakota	160.88	Watertown	627
2.	-	Kansas Flint-Hills	137.94	Hayden	619
3.	-	Northern Ohio	119.54	Niles-McKinley	530
4.	+2	Heart of America	118.21	Kansas City-Oak Park	662
5.	+2	West Kansas	113.50	Concordia	690
6.	-1	East Kansas	111.86	Shawnee Mission-East	826
7.	+2	San Fran Bay	110.38	Miramonte	645
8.	-4	Rushmore	108.80	Rapid City-Stevens	517
9.	-1	Florida Sunshine	108.70	Tampa Prep School	303
10.	+1	South Kansas	107.85	Wichita-Campus	669
11.	-1	New York City	102.17	Lynbrook	478
12.	-	Central Minnesota	96.43	Apple Valley	413
13.	-	East Los Angeles	96.10	Alhambra	300
14.	+4	California Coast	94.71	Los Gatos	403
15.	-1	Northwest Indiana	91.76	Munster & Northfield	424
16.	-	Hoosier South	87.84	Chrysler	569
17.	-2	Sierra	87.55	East Bakersfield	578
18.	+5	Show Me	85.11	Raytown	694
19.	-2	Hole in the Wall	84.18	North Platte HS, NE	633
20.	+1	Carver-Truman	83.40	Monnett	730
21.	+3	General	81.00		
22.	-3	Florida Manatee	80.68	University School	379
23.	+2	Eastern Ohio	79.91	Jackson	767
24.	-4	South Oregon	79.33	Roseburg	393
25.	-3	Ozark	75.55	Bolivar	619
26.	+4	Northern Illinois	75.23	Loyola Academy	436
27.	-	Southern Nevada	74.14	Chaparral	312
28.	-2	Rocky Mountain-South	74.07	Wheat Ridge	537
29.	-	Southern Wisconsin	72.84	Cedarburg	352
30.	+4	Western Washington	72.81	Central Kitsap	263
31.	-	Northern Wisconsin	69.31	Sheboygan-North	459
32.	+12	Nebraska	69.15	Omaha-Central	492
33.	+3	Eastern Missouri	68.83	Jefferson City	638
34.	+1	East Texas	68.19	Kingswood	758
35.	+2	Tennessee	67.95	Collierville	382
36.	-4	Northern Lights	67.16	Grand Rapids	546
37.	+12	Montana	66.89	Great Falls	709
38.	+8	Hoosier Central	66.68	Kokomo	683
38.	-10	New England	66.68	Sacred Heart, MA	292
40.	-2	Southern Minnesota	66.30	Eagan	532
41.	+2	Deep South	66.28	Holt	281
42.	-9	Illini	66.25	Glenbard-South	406
43.	-3	Valley Forge	65.20	Pennsbury	322
44.	+1	North East Indiana	64.70	Ft. Wayne-Northrop & Lakeland	464
45.	-4	Michigan	64.57	Portage-Central	111
46.	+14	West Los Angeles	62.61	Taft	458
47.	-8	New Mexico	62.28	Los Alamos	636
48.	-	New York State	61.07	Scarsdale	311
49.	+28	Tall Cotton	60.66	Amarillo-Tascosa	497
50.	-3	Pittsburgh	60.26	Bethel Park	424

# NFL DISTRICT STANDINGS

Rank	Change	District	Ave. No. Degrees	District Trophy Contender	Rounds
51.	-9	North Dakota Roughrider	60.05	Magic City Campus	482
52.	+2	Heart of Texas	59.76	Waco	359
53.	-3	Western Ohio	58.12	Dayton-Oakwood	427
54.	-3	Pennsylvania	57.84	Bishop Guilfoyle	318
55.	+4	South Texas	56.43	Aldine Sr.	404
56.	+5	West Oklahoma	56.31	Bishop McGuinness	513
57.	-5	South Carolina	56.15	Mauldin	287
58.	-5	North Coast	55.64	Gilmour	465
59.	-4	East Oklahoma	54.48	Jenks	687
60.	+13	Central Texas	54.06	Taft	509
61.	+21	Colorado	54.00	Chatfield	576
62.	+2	Big Valley	53.75	Modesto-Downey	595
63.	-7	West Iowa	53.38	Denison	383
64.	+17	North Oregon	53.35	Clackamas	584
65.	-3	West Virginia	53.00	Duval	73
66.	-8	Lone Star	52.45	Turner	454
67.	-10	Colorado Grande	52.04	Sierra	486
68.	+2	Wind River	51.89	Hot Springs	730
69.	-6	Nebraska South	50.37	Omaha-Mercy	572
70.	+10	North Texas Longhorns	49.23	Shepton	493
71.	+4	East Iowa	49.00	Wilton Community	481
72.	-7	South Florida	48.46	Miami-Carol City	311
73.	+13	Rocky Mountain-North	48.33	Pomona	625
74.	-7	Sundance	48.20	American Fork	601
75.	+9	Eastern Washington	47.44	Wenatchee	238
76.	-	Utah-Wasatch	47.33	Davis	382
77.	+8	Kentucky	46.81	Murray	300
78.	-9	Greater Illinois	46.61	Crystal Lake-South	282
78.	-4	New Jersey	46.61	Teaneck	363
80.	-9	Mississippi	46.00	Terry	210
81.	-15	Louisiana	45.90	New Iberia	434
82.	-14	Maine	45.66	Maranacook Community	209
83.	-11	Idaho	45.35	Twin Falls	593
84.	+7	Arizona	42.84	Flagstaff	449
85.	+2	Carolina West	42.73	West Charlotte	330
86.	+4	Georgia Northern Mountain	42.64	Gainsville	292
87.	-8	Sagebrush	41.80	Reed	432
88.	-5	Southern California	41.75	San Dieguito	508
89.	-	Great Salt Lake	40.08	Hunter	447
90.	-2	Mid-Atlantic	39.37	James Madison, VA	276
91.	+2	Gulf Coast	37.35	Calallen	380
92.	+2	Iroquois	36.80	Holland Patent	145
93.	-1	Capitol Valley	36.25	Marysville	255
94.	+4	Georgia Southern Peach	30.72	Northside	395
95.	+1	Puget Sound	29.12	Eastlake	154
96.	-1	Patrick Henry	28.94	Clover Hill	172
97.	-19	Big Orange	25.53	Anaheim-Western	265
98.	-1	Tarheel East	22.91	Northeastern	293
99.	+1	West Texas	19.29	Montwood	367
100.	-1	Hawaii	18.09	Moanalua	259
101.	-	Alaska	10.50		
102.	-	Guam	6.14		

# Letter to the Editor

December 1, 1998

Dear Educators:

Thirty years of active participation in debating and judging leave me perplexed. I have difficulty identifying any useful skills being taught in the current style of advanced cross examination. The overriding emphasis on gasp inducing speed reading of pre canned plans and counter plans has apparently pushed aside presentation skills, logic, reasoning and persuasion. Many of my fellow long time volunteer debate judges have quit due to an inability to understand what is being said. There is also frequent abusive squabble and exchange of "evidence." The frustration of getting to the end of a round without sufficient understanding to render a knowing verdict has caused many to change events or quit judging altogether.

I understand a need for change and do not advocate a return to the same form of our high school debating in the 1960's. I admit that I have not attended instruction courses on how to be a volunteer judge, but I am not sure that would be helpful if students are trained to speak at an incomprehensible pace while relying on slang "terms of art" to facilitate slinging more evidence into the room. Even with high school and college debate experience, active debate judging for over twenty years, twelve years practicing law and eight years serving as a District Court Judge, I find myself hoping someone in the one of the cross examinations will ask the question "so exactly what is your plan?"


Posture, eye contact, persuasion, reasoned dissection of the affirmative plan, and thinking on one's feet have yielded to face down, slumped over, speed reading and unimaginable rudeness in questioning. I can identify no usable life skill other than the ability to buy, organize and carry enormous amounts of information from room to room. My oldest child starts Bolton High School next year with aspirations of being a third generation Bolton debater. I have trouble encouraging this endeavor if what is required for success in competition will not only fail to assist in real world communication, but may actually develop counter productive habits.

I feel certain the goals of ACX debate are well intended, but the trend towards less structure and more speed, increasing frequency of "open cross" (which too often results in a four way squabble that is incomprehensible to the judge), and narrowing of affirmative plans that have removed the grace and art of intellectual sparring. There are few things more enjoyable than articulate youth matching wits within the defined structure of a speech tournament. Unfortunately, that has become the extremely rare exception.

A legitimate claim may be the need for better judges to understand and appreciate the event. If that is the direction of high school debate, then it may be time for me to take my thirty years experience and observations of the trend and get out of the trenches. On the other hand it may be time for the guiding forces of high school debate to step back and look at the object of the exercise to see if it has developed past the point of real benefit as a thought engaging tool. Like any profession, high school debate may have specialized to a point that has lost sight of its purpose.

I appreciate your taking time to read this letter. (Any current advanced ACX debater could have read it to you with two breaths in under 20 seconds.) In my effort to persuade you to swing the pendulum back a notch, I have no evidence, studies, or reports. My perceptions are based on observations and discussions with the ever dwindling number of local regulars willing to try and judge ACX. If you share my concern, I may be preaching to the choir. If you don't believe or disagree, I may be thrown out of the church. In any event, I felt it important that you get some feed back from an end user, a debate judge.

Sincerely,

  
W. Ross Foote  
Judge for the Ninth  
Judicial District Court  
State of Louisiana  
Alexandria, LA

# EMORY

## BARKLEY FORUM

EMORY NATIONAL DEBATE INSTITUTE, Policy Division

Under the Direction of Melissa Maxcy Wade

June 20 - July 3, 1998

Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia

The Emory National Debate Institute has been contributing to the education of high school debaters for twenty-four years. The curriculum is steeped in the most fundamental aspects of debate: presentation, research, and critical thinking. The curriculum has also developed over the years to adapt to the needs of current practice. An excellent combination of traditional argument and debate theory and an emphasis on current debate practice makes the Emory National Debate Institute one of the most successful year after year. Novice, mid-level, and varsity competitors have found the Institute a worthwhile learning experience because the staff has the expertise to teach all levels of students and the experience to adjust to a variety of student needs. A small, select division for rising eighth grade students was added last year for commuters.

### Features of the Emory National Debate Institute

**Experienced staff:** Our senior level staff has worked at this Institute and many others, including: American University, Bates College, Baylor University, Berkeley, Dartmouth College, Georgetown University, University of Iowa, University of Kentucky, Northwestern University, University of Michigan, Wake Forest University, Samford University, and Stanford University. Students will have access to all faculty.

**Excellent staff student ratio:** The Institute offers debaters the opportunity to work with one senior level instructor accompanied by at least one active college debater in small lab groups of 10 to 20 students.

**Material access:** The Institute offers debaters access to materials from the Woodruff library system, including the Gambrell law library, the Woodruff medical library, and a large government document collection. While the main Woodruff library undergoes renovation an expanded in-house dormitory library will provide access to journals, books, and government documents. We find the dormitory library especially helpful for the beginning student.

**Flexible curriculum:** The Institute has always provided students a wide variety of instruction suitable to their levels of experience. Each laboratory group has explicit objectives and a field tested curriculum for the two week period, dependent upon their level of experience. Each student is tracked into theory and practicum classes appropriate to their needs.

**Commitment to diversity:** The Institute has always been committed to making instruction accessible to urban and rural areas. We have several funded scholarships dedicated to promoting diversity. Additionally, ongoing grants make it possible to support many students from economically disadvantaged areas.

**Dormitory supervision:** An experienced staff including high school teachers, graduate students, and college upperclass students will supervise the dormitory. Returning for her fifth year, the head dormitory counselor's sole duty will be supervision of the dormitory.

**Coaches workshop:** An in-depth coaches workshop is conducted. Topics will include administration, organization, and coaching strategies. A full set of lectures appropriate for the classroom will be developed. Junior high teachers are welcome.

**Inexpensive:** The Institute charges a standard fee of \$1200. This one fee includes tuition, housing, food, lab photocopying fees, entertainment, a t-shirt, and a handbook—the works. Commuters pay \$875, while participants in the Junior High program are charged \$275.

For an application, write or call:

Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia

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A woman is shown from the chest up, sitting in a kayak on a river. She is wearing a dark jacket and a life vest. She holds a black paddle. The background features a wide river and distant mountains under a hazy sky. The overall color palette is warm and sepia-toned.

I have a MOTHER.

I have a FATHER.

I even have a BIG BROTHER.

I DON'T need someone else looking out for me.

I NEED someone who can help me look out for myself.

 **Lincoln**  
Financial Group

I have a FATHER.

I even have a BIG BROTHER.

I DON'T need someone else looking out for me.

I NEED someone who can help me look out for myself.