

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE: A CALL FOR FACULTY INVOLVEMENT

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You know the scenario: Less than forty-eight hours ago you drove eleven hours in a van to take ten kids to an out-of-district tournament. You've judged four rounds of paneled IEs and 5 rounds of CEDA, broken up another near fist fight between John and Tina who can't debate together but can't find anyone else to debate with, and you've assured Mike, who's doing six IEs and is stressed out anyway, that the argument he had with his girlfriend is not the end of the relationship. Now it's 9:00 PM. Your headache's raging; its the sixth round of debate, and you know that for the next hour and a half you'll have to endure four hyper-ventilating students who spit all over themselves while trying to put out one more illogical, improbable, unsupported, mishandled argument. The thought crosses your mind that it would be easier and more fun to make a living as a manager at McDonald's.

Communication and forensics journals offer much ongoing criticism of traditional forms of academic debate and many believe "academic policy debate is in a state of crisis" (Rowland and Deatherage 246). Many critics over the past ten years have pointed toward a significant decrease in communication skills in CEDA and a noticeable absence of traditional persuasive arts in all forms of current intercollegiate, tournament debate. Certainly, most of the CEDA rounds I've judged over the past five

years while a Director of Forensics have provided little in the way of useful or pleasing rhetoric. While I firmly believe CEDA and NDT still provide excellent pedagogical benefits for our students, especially in the areas of research and analytical thinking, I've given up on the efficacy of these forms to develop skills in public speaking and oral communication. Instead, as a faculty member and Director of Forensics, I'm looking toward parliamentary style debate with the assumption that it can serve as the needed complement to the forensics program offered at most institutions. With that focus as a goal, I strongly believe it is up to other faculty members who work with these intercollegiate forensics programs to support and promote competitive parliamentary debate.

In this article, we'll examine the parliamentary debate activity within the tournament setting, detailing why faculty involvement is necessary for the activity to thrive on a large scale, especially within the Western United States. While parliamentary debate may survive in some form without faculty involvement, it will be the proactive support of faculty members which establishes a credible pedagogy for the activity, opens up the event to a greater amount of students, and maintains the consistency of or will be responsible for the negative mutation of competitive parliamentary debate.

By way of background, although a significant body of literature exists comparing American and British styles of debate, specific literature on parliamentary debate within the tournament setting is minimal. This absence of scholarship is one

reason why Parliamentary Debate: The Journal of the Western States Parliamentary Debate Association was started. Nevertheless, two recent articles begin to establish research in this area. Sheckels and Warfield's 1990 Argumentation and Advocacy article, "Parliamentary Debate: A Description and A Justification," sets forth "seven pedagogical reasons an educational institution might choose to establish a parliamentary or traditional debate program" (86) and then discusses the practice of American Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA) debate, showing how APDA meets those educational goals. E. Sam Cox's and Kendall Phillip's article, "Impact and Implications of Parliamentary Format on American Debate," recently published in *Advanced Debate: Readings in Theory, Practice and Teaching*, provides some comparisons between CEDA and APDA in the areas of "geographic participation, sponsorship, procedural differences, resolutions, and decision rendering" (96) but concludes with ways to enhance the educational experience of participation in CEDA.

Both of these articles validate the competitive parliamentary debate activity and are useful to describe the event and delineate it from its alternative counterparts of CEDA and NDT. But both articles also point to areas for further study and allude to ways we as faculty members can become involved with the event.

First, let's look at the area of pedagogy, for it is the educational experience which debate provides our students which gives us our reason for being. CEDA and NDT are both set within a long established pedagogy. Kent Colbert and Thompson Biggers

provide three general areas of educational benefits of debate:
"communication skills...a unique educational experience [which] promotes depth of study, complex analysis, and focused critical thinking...and excellent pre-professional training" (qtd in Schiappa and Keehner 82). These benefits are absorbed within the seven specific pedagogical benefits of debate which Sheckels and Warfield discuss:

- 1) to teach argumentation skills,
- 2) to teach public speaking skills,
- 3) to teach oratorical skills
- 4) to teach "on your feet" thinking and speaking
- 5) to expose students to other parts of this nation and to other nations,
- 6) to encourage students, especially high aptitude/achievement students, to interact with peers from other institutions, and
- 7) to develop student responsibility. (86-87)

While it's not necessary for us to discuss these seven benefits again here, I would like to expand the above list with the addition of two more benefits of parliamentary debate: the teaching of audience analysis and adaptation and the teaching of research skills.

Both the Sheckels and Warfield and the Cox and Phillip articles mention the importance of audience adaptation to debate, and given the vast body of communication literature devoted to audience analysis and speaker adaptation, I believe "teaching audience analysis and adaptation" should be listed separately

among the pedagogical goals of parliamentary debate, rather than grouped within public speaking or oratorical skills. Any speech communication professional can cite the importance of audience analysis and adaptation to oral rhetoric, but perhaps the most important reason, I believe, for emphasizing audience analysis and adaptation as a separate category is that it is one way of training our students to be sensitive to gender and cultural issues present within our pluralistic society. Perhaps a generation ago, because society believed itself to be a more unified body, our main focus in the area of audience analysis was on the "hostile-favorable continuum". Now, however, as Valerie Endress states in her article, "Feminist Theory and the Concept of Power in Public Address,"

we need to reevaluate our assumptions about audience response to ... rhetoric. We have yet to determine in what specific ways gender impacts the assessment of such a variable. We must also determine in what ways the factors of race and class impact this response. And we need to investigate the extent to which patriarchal expectations of audience response influence both women's actual act of audiencing and the rhetorical critic's judgment in assessing response. (105)

Every textbook on public speaking has a section on audience analysis, which normally includes some reference to gender and cultural issues also. Nevertheless, our competitive debaters (who are usually white males), rarely have the opportunity to put

these precepts into practice. The CEDA "audience" is a lone judge, most often a forensics coach or graduate speech communication student. Even in the multi-judge panels of outrounds this basic composition of the judging pool remains fairly consistent. Tournament directors, instead of being praised for enlarging the judging pool with "lay judges," bear the scorn of debaters and coaches alike for using judges unfamiliar with debate jargon and unable to flow mass amounts of information. And yet, a quick glance through early CEDA scholarship shows a concern that CEDA emphasize audience adaptation. Jack Howe firmly stated that CEDA ought to provide an "emphasis on an audience-centered approach to debate" (qtd in Weiss 43). The problem is that while an audience-centered approach is possible in CEDA, I don't think such emphasis is probable in the near future.

Parliamentary debate as practiced by APDA doesn't offer the debater much improvement in audience emphasis either. Judges tend almost always to be students and thus fall within the same rough demographic categories. So to achieve our educational objective, I think we need to look to Western States Parliamentary Debate Association (WSPDA) style debate, which strongly encourages in its Constitution and Bylaws package that tournament directors use multi-judge panels composed of lay judges and undergraduates, in addition to forensics associated personnel. Such a judging pool will normally provide many opportunities for debaters to speak to and attempt to adapt to culturally mixed and gender-mixed audiences across a wide age

spread. In addition this judging pool will provide audiences which fall upon a variety of points along the traditional hostile-favorable continuum line for the particular topic being debated.

A final pedagogical goal for parliamentary debate should be the development of research skills. Now, of course, an extemporaneous format and topics which vary by round will not encourage the in-depth, meticulous research which the CEDA and NDT debater does. But participating in parliamentary debate does not mean the debater does not have to conduct research. The best British debaters will tell stories of how they spent weeks researching the topic for their most prestigious competitions. The difference is in the way the research is conducted. A broad-based knowledge of the topic and sub-concepts is critical to good parliamentary debate. Also, while the debaters may decide to keep an "extemp file" for debate purposes, rules against "specific knowledge" and against bringing prepared materials into the debating chambers should prevent the abuse of "evidence," while still allowing for the development of some research skills.

Now that we've examined the pedagogical worth of the parliamentary debate activity, it should be our goal to offer this educational experience to our students. We can do this in two ways, by hosting WSPDA (or APDA) tournaments and through public debates at our schools.

Hosting a WSPDA tournament or offering WSPDA style debate with your traditional tournament offerings will open up the field of parliamentary debate to students all across the country, but

especially in the Western half of the country, which has been virtually untouched by parliamentary debate. APDA style debate has been practiced within the tournament setting for about ten years. By and large though, it has not spread far from the Northeast part of the United States, and only two schools west of the Mississippi are members of APDA at this time. I believe this geographic concentration occurs because of the minimal involvement of faculty members in APDA and the nature of the forensics activity in other parts of the country. There are several reasons for the lack of faculty involvement in APDA, but the major one is that being a student-run activity, APDA is as much a social outlet for the students who participate, as it is a debate activity (Sheckels and Warfield 89-90). Over the past four years however, seeing value in the event, several faculty members, including myself, became interested in exposing our students to parliamentary debate, but found that faculty involvement in APDA is highly discouraged by the APDA membership. (Students involved in WSPDA report such feelings still exist today in APDA.) So, "spurned" by APDA, faculty members must turn to WSPDA if there is going to be a pedagogical emphasis added to parliamentary debate and a greater geographic spread to the activity in the United States.

Offering WSPDA is not difficult for the tournament director. If you have the rooms available within your facilities, the rounds, which take only one hour from the announcement of the topic to the return of the ballots to the ballot table, can be run against other divisions of debate. With the recommended

composition of the judging pool expanded to undergraduate and "lay judges," judges are easy to find for WSPDA, and most could be volunteers. For example, you could arrange it so that students enrolled in certain classes (speech, law, political science, philosophy, etc) would be required to judge a number of rounds as part of their course requirements. Also, many community members or professionals are happy to judge rounds for the tournament as community service. While you would need to conduct some training for these judges, the concepts are not as intimidating to unfamiliar judges as are "topicality," "value objections," "negative presumption," and a host of other concepts common to CEDA and NDT. Also, if you offer a public debate at your school, potential judges can watch as part of their training.

In addition to judge training, a public debate is another way to open up the activity to more students. Parliamentary debate is meant to be public address and political rhetoric, since the foundation of the activity is built upon the debates within a legislative body rather than a court of law. Hosting public debates on various topics of interest to the school and the community are great ways to expose the student body and the public to what parliamentary debate is. A demonstration debate for faculty members often results in a huge increase of support for your forensics team. The added benefit to a public debate is that at the end of the official debate, the moderator can open up the floor to "members of the house" (the audience) for what are called floor speeches. Listeners are invited to address the

"house" for no more than two minutes on either side of the motion. Then "the house" can even vote to resolve the issue, if desired.

As more students become exposed to and participate in parliamentary debate, one question naturally occurs. Will parliamentary debate mutate or degenerate into just another form of debate manifesting the same kinds of negative behavior we are currently seeing in CEDA and NDT—that is, a reliance upon jargon, truncated argumentation, sloppy delivery, and an abuse of the function and emphasis accorded to evidence? Such questions have been raised by CEDA coaches in the past and are now being raised by faculty members exploring whether to offer WSPDA to their students. Let's look at some past concerns within the CEDA community and see if there are any possible answers for us as we begin WSPDA. In his "State of CEDA, 1986" article, Walter Ulrich, then president of CEDA writes that

debate is a competitive activity, and a student's view of competition is often learned indirectly from the coach and those in the activity. It is important that we stress the positive nature of competition; debaters should learn not only how to think and to be persuasive, but they should also learn how to behave as considerate human beings. (62)

Certainly Ulrich's goals of debate (thinking, persuasiveness, and consideration for others) fit in with our pedagogical goals already discussed. But Ulrich states a very important fact: that what is important to emphasize in debate is a learned behavior,

and debaters pick this behavior up from those who train them and are already involved in the activity. Therefore, I believe faculty members must be the "torchbearers" so to speak, upholding the ideals and maintaining the standards of parliamentary debate. But that brings us to the issue of standards. What are they?

Ulrich goes on to state in his article that CEDA's remarkable growth

has highlighted the fact that CEDA has not yet developed a unified philosophy of what debate should be like. This statement might focus on the nature of argumentation in society, an emphasis on reasoning, yet a recognition that delivery is also important. (62).

Any coach involved in CEDA can attest to the variance of standards from district to district and even judge to judge. Even parliamentary debate has its variances. Except for its format, APDA debate almost seems to have more similarity with CEDA than it does to WSPDA or international styles of parliamentary debate. "Squirrel" cases, backfiles, tenuous links to the resolution, and "canned" cases are all quite common with APDA, as the 1992 APDA National Tournament competition proved. So how can any idealistic standards be defined, and how can they remain consistent?

I believe standards for WSPDA debate should be derived from international style parliamentary debate which seems to have remained more consistent and more stable than American forms of debate. The use of common examples and statistics for evidence, a strong reliance upon the analysis, refutation of the logic of

one's opponent's case, and a witty sense of humor are all consistently present in the best international debates. These attributes have been placed in the Appendices to the WSPDA Constitution and Bylaws as the recommended attributes of the WSPDA style. It is up to faculty members to become familiar with their employment in parliamentary debate and then help to maintain the consistency of those attributes within the debates they hear, both by their coaching and by their decisionmaking within rounds.

In addition, some of the negative factors (excessive speed, jargon, severely truncated argumentation) now present in CEDA may not manifest themselves within WSPDA due to multiple judging panels and a different composition to the judging pool. Only time and experience with the activity will prove whether this assumption is so, but one thing is certain. If faculty members do not take a proactive stand as this new debate activity unfolds across the United States, we will surely see the negative mutation and degeneration of the ideals of the event.

Parliamentary debate is a worthwhile activity with a credible pedagogy. It is up to faculty members to promote the event within their forensics programs by offering parliamentary debate with their CEDA or NDT divisions at their tournaments and by hosting public debates. Above all, it is up to faculty members to aggressively maintain the ideals of the activity through their judging and coaching.

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