

# THE REAL POLICY DEBATE DILEMMA

by  
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After reading several of the articles in the *Rostrum* and listening to the people involved in the activity, I am deeply concerned about the status of policy debate. However, I am not concerned for the same reasons that others have listed for the demise of policy debate. There have been arguments made stating that debate will die do to the changes or "devolutions" of debate. People can't stand debate because the arguments are nonsensical, read at too high a pace, not understandable to the common "educated" person...I take these attacks per-

and you will see why programs around the country are disappearing. If you have done your job correctly, your students are successful and move on to colleges and universities, which never seem to be near your school, let alone in your state sometimes. Students see the value of more glamorous jobs and salaries. That is not policy debate's fault, that's society's fault for placing money ahead of other values.

As we all know, funding is also an issue. I hope that I don't need to go into much detail, but funding is an issue whether you are a national circuit team or an in-state team. Speech and debate teams only spend money. Education funding is always on the chopping block at the state and local level, so unless you have very supportive administrators, activity budgets are going down or away. Again, don't blame policy debate for this problem.

Mr. Haren's main concern was that policy debate has lost the communications part of the activity. If I am not mistaken, the debaters are still communicating. I know that we haven't switched to some other form

of translating information to others. The only thing that he really has a problem with is the speed. Why should speed be a reason to write off an activity? It takes an enormous amount of skill to 1) understand what the other team is saying, 2) analyze the argument in reference to your positions and 3) be able to communicate an intelligent answer to the other team's arguments. Why should we be attacking students that can make these kinds of critical decisions? I thought we were trying to prepare students for the real world where some decisions must be made at a moment's notice. I don't know about everybody else, but I would want a lawyer that could ask a witness a question and then know immediately how to handle their answer. Given how many policy debaters intend on going to law school, I would say we are doing a fine job.

Mr. Haren's solution is to have coaches and judges take back the activity, intervene if necessary. When did the activity become about the coaches? I know that coaches have a stake in the activity, but the students are who we really are about. If you don't like an argument, encourage your students not to run them, but remember that they are the ones willing to spend the money for institute, team travel and give policy debate the time that could go to other activities. As a judge, you can inter-

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sonally. I have been involved with the activity in some way for the last 17 years. I will be the first to admit that debate has radically changed since I read my first IAC, but that doesn't mean it has all been for the bad. The real reasons for the demise of policy debate are the coaches and funding, or the lack there of.

If you look around at the schools that have always done well in policy debate, it's because the schools are able to replace a coach when another one retires. In Ohio, many schools have ended policy debate and the rest of forensics because there is no one to replace a departing coach. I graduated from a program that had one main coach for close to thirty years. It took them three years to find a coach with any experience. During the first two years, they hired a cheerleader coach that was willing to give the activity a try and another person that had no experience in coaching. I was hired the third year and worked there for the next three years, until I had to get a job because I could not afford to be a substitute teacher and coach only. Since then the program has died. Every year in Ohio, new and old programs end because of the same story. New programs pop up and then disappear when the coach can't afford to coach anymore because they are not a teacher or because they graduate from college and move on to their careers.

Try to talk a student into teaching and coaching

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vene and reject arguments and teams. Is this fair to the students? You are to judge what both teams present, not debate the teams. How can students win if they can't hear you in a speech? If you give them preferences ahead of time and they don't adjust, then that is a different story. They deserve to lose because they didn't adapt to you. However, adaptation only means that they are changing for you. As long as judges like the fast and critical style, then you are not solving the "problem". Remember that policy debate, as well as every other forensic activity, competes with every other club, sport, or activity that students can choose from in school. If the coaches and judges make the activity difficult to be successful in, the only result will be to kill programs because no one will have fun.

Finally, we, as coaches, need to do everything we can to make policy debate seem more attractive. We need to get more people to realize that debate and speech are valid activities (students, coaches, and administrators alike). We also need to realize that everything evolves. Personally, if I get a major illness, I want the most updated technology available. I don't want to just put flowers in my pocket in the hope of avoiding the plague just because that's the way it has been done. Finally, I realize that I am the first to start complaining about the way some cases and critical arguments are being run, but I also realize that if I can't beat it with logic, maybe it's not the worst thing in the world. Remember, if you can't beat a "dumb" argument, maybe it might actually have some validity.

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