



New Horizons

Embracing Global Debating

by Alfred C. Snider

While debate has been alive and well in the educational culture of the United States since early in the 20th Century, in large part because of the influence of the National Forensic League, it often stood alone. There were other places, such as the United Kingdom, Ireland, and Australia, where debate grew following World War II, but the United States kept on going on its own path. America is a big country, and it was big enough for any high school looking for people to debate.

Since the end of the Cold War, debate has been growing explosively all around the world. Debate is no longer just a "some" countries activity, but is widely spread throughout the world and is growing bigger every day. This summer, I did debate instruction on four continents, and students in Europe, Africa, and Asia were every bit as excited as the students I worked with in the United States. In the 21st century, debating on this planet is growing as a worldwide phenomenon.

One issue keeping us apart from our fellow debate lovers around the world is the issue of format. Because the United States was so forensically developed and so large, it has its own numerous debating formats that are not shared by any of the other nations of the world. Schools around the world have

developed their own format, based on the format used at the World Schools Debating Championship (WSDC), an event where each country sends one team to compete for the world title. Outside of this tournament, schools around the world have embraced this format almost universally for many tournaments and competitions.

If the United States wants to debate the world, and I think we do and should, we are going to have to try their format. We could, of course, demand that they switch to our formats, but that would be more obstructionist than productive. The United States is a land of diversity and innovation, so my hope is that we can and will do that. We do not need to abandon our current proven debate formats, but for the purpose of debating the world, we need to try the WSDC format. We might even like it. Ultimately, debate is debate, and a good debate should be appreciated in any format.

The WSDC format is an exciting and dynamic debate format. Other formats have been tried around the world, and schools are constantly coming to agree that the WSDC format is best for them. I think it is also an excellent format for American students, whether they debate against Singapore and Germany or just against the team across town.

The format is not new, but tried and tested. Beginning in 1988, it has been developed in countless classrooms and tournaments around the world. It has powerful advantages and features that I believe American debaters and coaches will appreciate. These include:

- The contest largely takes place in English, the most popular second language in the world. When different countries debate each other, English is the obvious and default choice.
- WSDC debate takes place in natural language argument. Because it is international, it does not devolve into a context of jargon and insider knowledge. Because many of those involved are not English as first language speakers, it takes place at a moderate rate of speech. The rules are designed to train students to communicate with and persuade intelligent citizens, not debate experts.
- WSDC debate combines the concepts of "impromptu" topics with "prepared" topics. Most WSDC tournaments involve both topics that students have prepared to debate with topics that are new to them that they must prepare to debate on-the-spot and away from the influence of teachers



and coaches. Students need to stand on their own in some debates and use only arguments they have developed, while in other debates they work with teachers and coaches to develop their arguments. The impromptu topics tend to be a bit simpler than the prepared topics. On-the-spot thinking is featured along with the skills of research in this format.


- WSDC debate calls for debaters to focus on the issues. The affirmative (or proposition) team MUST address the heart of the topic, and judges are instructed to punish teams that try to avoid the issues. Likewise, the negative (or opposition) team does not need to spend time on procedural arguments that also tend to neglect the issues at the heart of a controversy.
- WSDC debate is dynamic in its presentation. Each of three speakers for a side must accept "points of information" from members of the other team, usually challenging questions and concepts for which they must come up with good answers while on their feet. Speakers should accept two points of information, but can accept or decline them at their will. The speeches also take place one right after the other without preparation time, meaning the event flows smoothly. While both of these features are challenging, they are very relevant to real-life experience, where

you are expected to answer difficult questions put to you while speaking and also are expected to speak when called on. At the National Tournament in Alabama this June, the audience watching Slovenia debate Singapore found these features very attractive.

- WSDC debate is a format that you can proudly show to your administration, parents, donors, and other sponsors. This format is available and attractive to them and makes them excited to support debating.

The National Forensic League is making a bold move to engage students from around the world in a broader debate. The League staged an international tournament at the Alabama Nationals, and those gathered in the Concer Hall watched an exciting and entertaining debate. The organization hopes to expand its reach and impact in future years.

The National Forensic League is creating its own international team to represent the United States of America in international competition. In doing this, they are building on past pioneering work by star coaches such as Richard Sodikow and Phyllis Hirth. Now is the time for more debate stars of America to step forward to represent their nation and the League.

When the best of American debate meet the best of world debate, then we will have a chance to experience something very special. 

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References

- Countries Who Do WSDC Format – <http://www.schoolsdebate.com/countries.asp>
- Debate – Canada vs. Singapore – Prepared Topic – The Creation of the Eurozone has done more harm than good, staged at NFL Nationals, Alabama, June 2013. <https://vimeo.com/68966056>
- Debate – Mexico vs. Slovenia – Impromptu Topic – Ban unpaid internships, staged at NFL Nationals, Alabama, June 2013. <https://vimeo.com/68961472>
- History of WSDC Debate – <http://www.schoolsdebate.com/history.asp>
- Lecture – Adding WSDC debate to your debate program in the USA. Mark Niles and Sandra Rodriguez, Houston, held at NFL Nationals, Alabama, June 2013. <https://vimeo.com/68945719>
- Lecture – Web resources for WSDC debate, Alfred Snider, Vermont, held at NFL Nationals, Alabama, June 2013. <https://vimeo.com/68949060>
- WSDC Rules – <http://www.schoolsdebate.com/docs>

Experience this exciting global debate format!



- *Improve Your Debate Skills*
- *Make New Friends*
- *Travel Internationally in 2014*

Extempers and debaters are encouraged to apply to be selected for the League's new International Debate Team!

Online applications will be vetted by a selection committee. A select number of students will be chosen based on sample videos of their speaking or debating.

Then, 24 students will be asked to participate in web-based interviews with League representatives and International Team coaches. From this group, 12 students will be selected to begin training for competition.

By April 1, 2014, six students will be named to the International Team representing the United States of America.

For complete details and application information, visit www.nationalforensicleague.org/wsdc



Pictured (l-r) are the three students from Team Slovenia; author Alfred C. Snider; and the three students from Team Singapore. Both teams competed in the World Schools Debate Exhibition Round held in Birmingham, AL this June.

To view footage of the 2013 WSDC Exhibition Round, or for more information, please visit our website: nationalforensicleague.org/wsdc.