

HOW TO START A

DEBATE SOCIETY

A BRIEF GUIDE

Ary Ferreira da Cunha



IDEBATE Press

How to Start a Debate Society: A Brief Guide

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International Debate Education Association

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this short book is to present a few brief, honest, and unpretentious tips to those who are thinking of starting a debate society. After we presided over the creation of the first Iberian debate society with international visibility, the requests for advice multiplied. Those demands raised the question of whether there was a demand for a guide for starting a debate group, just as there's a demand for guides on debate. Based on our experience, we believed there was a demand and felt a duty to provide a guide.

When we began our group a few years ago, we were lucky to have someone explain how important it was for us to start competing internationally, but we had to learn from our experience the importance of debating in British parliamentary format, the great value of peer-to-peer teaching, and of creating and maintaining a team where each individual takes ownership of the project.

Much of what we write has been inspired by conversations with debaters from around the world—but most reflects our personal view of debating and our experience. So, while reading this, bear in mind that: a) this is not “The Holy Bible on How to Start a Debate Society,” for we were not divinely inspired and we do not intend to establish dogma; b) this is not a magic recipe—just because some of this stuff worked in the past somewhere, to some degree, does not mean that it will work in another place and time; and c) this is not a complete guide so, for brevity's sake, we left some things out.

We also must warn you that this guide is meant mainly for university debate in Western liberal democracies. Not because we think there shouldn't be debate outside that limited context—indeed, we believe that debating has a greater impact in places that have no experience with debate and/or where establishing debate is more difficult—but because we recognize our lack of experience in tackling some of the problems you might face if you are starting a debate society in high school or in a very different political and cultural setting.

Also, a word on the structure of this guide. We address the issues related to starting a debate society from a macro to a micro perspective. We go from why to start a debate society; to how to develop a strategy to establish an institution able to achieve those goals; to an array of practical advices that can help you step by step to build such an institution. We do this because we think too often people tend to get stuck on whats and hows and never quite get the time to think about the whys. And, if your main motivation is building a stronger civil society in your country, then the answer to “what should we do as a debate society?” is different if your primary goal is to train lawyers. If your group doesn't have a common vision or buy into your mission statement, only by chance will members agree on where the society should focus its efforts.

Finally, we hope you find the next chapters useful. We felt the need to create this guide to serve as a dynamic repository of know-how for the debating community. This means that if you have any ideas on how to improve it, if you disagree with something, or if you have an idea from which others may benefit, you can and should write us an email to aryfcunha@gmail.com. We would be more than happy to include and fully acknowledge any pertinent remarks and comments.

CHAPTER 1:

WHY WOULD YOU START A DEBATE SOCIETY?

Starting a debate society is not easy: it's an endeavor that will probably take much of your free time as a student, it might prolong your stay at university for more time than you would like, and, in the end, there's no guarantee that your efforts will have a lasting impact.

But don't let all this discourage you; helping to build a debate society can benefit you in many ways:

- As an organizer, you will test (and improve) your leadership and your ability to negotiate and manage conflicts. You will learn to network, to manage projects, to fund-raise and get sponsorships. Establishing a society might give you the opportunity to put your knowledge to work before getting a job in various areas such as arts and design, marketing, management, law, politics, or psychology.
- Debating has a strong impact on the communities it reaches, and so you might be building a school of civic values and political engagement, providing, long after you have moved on, life-changing opportunities to students you will never meet.

And, let's not forget the benefits of being a debater:

- Debating is a perfect way to meet a fun, interesting, intellectually stimulating (and sometimes nerdy) crowd, both at your university and all over the globe. It's not only an "interesting-people-magnet," but also a great way to make friendships that stand the test of time and distance. Plus, debaters tend to not to be that judgmental, so you can just be yourself around them.
- As a debater, you will complement your academic training by learning critical thinking, active listening, and communication skills that will be invaluable in your personal and professional life. You might be using these skills already in your academic life. They might have a very positive impact on the way you approach questions on a test, how you respond to an oral exam, or how you tackle writing an essay or thesis. Accordingly, debating might have a very positive impact on your marks.
- Debating will always give you more and better reasons to believe in what you believe, but less absolute certitudes. It will help you to listen better and understand better. It will foster tolerance, as you will be more capable of "walking" in other people's shoes.
- Debating gives you knowledge and awareness of past and current events and all kinds of scientific and social phenomena, exposing you to a ton of ideas. People from all academic backgrounds debate all sorts of topics, and so you will learn a lot about many interesting subjects you would never have known if you stayed in your comfort zone.
- You will not only improve your language skills in your native language, you'll improve your English as well since most international debate tournaments are held in English. This obviously

doesn't apply if English is your native language, though we have met at least one native English speaker who participated in debate competitions in another language.

- Debating can boost your self-confidence.
- The skills debating helps you develop make you very attractive to prospective employers.

Egoistic reasons for creating a debate society abound, but we shouldn't forget the altruistic ones. Those will be further examined in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2: THE MISSION

Many Goals, Many Reasons

In all societies, people with a common cause or a common goal often create institutions that pool resources. A debate society (or debate club, debate union, or debate association, whatever) is an institution created by people eager to implement a program that focuses on competitive debate in a particular format.

These groups can have many ultimate goals. In some places, debate is used as a tool to develop fluency in a foreign language, to train legal professionals, to get people involved in philosophical thinking, or to raise awareness for human rights and other worthy causes. Some people see it just as an intellectual sport, others as a way to make their parents pay for their trips around the world, others as a way to meet people and have fun. You might start a debate program for one of these reasons, for more than one of these reasons, or for different reasons.

What Is Your Reason?

Our reasons for establishing a debate society were not clear when we began and probably yours won't be either (creating a debate society just sounds so cool!), but, in time, you will have to ask the question and, if you are working with a group, come to a consensus on goals. Having a debate society where the main purpose is to have fun is not the same as having one where the ultimate objective is to develop language skills. Of course, it's likely that you may have more than one goal and, at some point, you will have to prioritize them. We wanted our debate society to have a positive lasting impact on the surrounding community: analyzing policy, helping to spread inspiring ideas, promoting diversity and freedom of speech, but especially empowering citizens with the tools they need to demand accountability from political representatives and defend themselves and others from abuse.

Beyond Debating

Debating allows for the creation of a very special sort of elite, one not based on wealth or birth, but on a kind of merit that arises from the skills debate teaches—critical and strategic thinking and great communication. Ideally, this elite is aware of the problems of the world, civically engaged, and eager to make a difference. But in most regions, people who go to university are still a privileged minority who might not understand that they can and should be leading change in their communities; and often, an active educated elite is the only part of society capable of stopping a wave of short-sighted, narrow-minded populism from sweeping a country or counterbalancing the power

of special interests with well-reasoned arguments. That's part of the reason why we believe university debating can have a deep impact not only in the individuals themselves that take part in competitive debate, but also through them in their societies.

While the creation of that elite is often a by-product of many debate societies, empowering minorities and citizens in disadvantaged communities is unlikely to happen if we do not aim for it. Most contemporary societies have large groups whose rights are in constant threat. An active educated elite can help protect these rights on a macro scale, but is unlikely to be effective on a micro scale. People must be able to stand up for themselves; a debate society can develop in them the skills they need to be able to do so effectively. To aid the disadvantaged and marginalized, debate societies cannot stay safely in universities and expensive private schools. They must create outreach programs that put them in contact with those who may never have the opportunity to attend university.

CHAPTER 3:

THE (IL)LEGAL NATURE

Debate programs are organized in various ways around the world. Some are formal extracurricular activities at universities; others are informal associations of students. Student unions promote debate as one of their activities; English departments coach their own teams and sponsor their activities, and NGOs foster debate and organize debates at the university level. Some organizations promote debate on an international scale, some on a national scale, others in a specific city or region. Still others recruit members only from one university or even one department. You will always need a group of people willing to set up a debate program, but the institutional framework in which they work can vary.

For a debate society to be sustainable, it needs new members, new friendships, new ideas, and cross-pollination. Having the same people from the same backgrounds will not enable your program to grow. Some debate societies gather only individuals from one department, but we personally find this to be too close of a network.

You must determine what type of organization best fits your goals and resources. In fact, you can change the structure as your program

evolves. We started informally at the department level and grew to a formal university-level program, but some societies may have taken the opposite path.

Discuss different models with the members of your group to see what fits your strategy. Initially, you might not need a formal institutional framework, especially if you expect to be running on a very tight budget and won't have the money for the legal expenses associated with creating a formal association.

You also need to consider your university's regulations. We met some debate societies that started off on the wrong foot when they spoke directly with the chancellor—they did not realize they had to first get the approval of the Student Union.

CHAPTER 4:

THE STRATEGY

This is not a strategy or management manual—it just offers a few very practical suggestions for starting a debate club.

Begin with a plan, preferably a detailed plan. Making a plan forces you and your group to think about your objectives and how you'll achieve them. It helps you keep focused on the important stuff and evaluate your performance. It gives you a goal to aim for as a team and ensures that everyone knows what they have to do to reach it.

Analyze the Chessboard

Strategize! So, how do you develop a strategy? Start by analyzing your current position. What resources do you have? What have you accomplished? Create a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) diagram where you determine these characteristics of the group. Strengths and weaknesses are respectively positive and negative aspects of your situation that derive from internal characteristics of the organization or project—like the experience

of your debate squad, your financial stability, or the array of expertise you have at your disposal. While opportunities and threats are respectively positive and negative elements inherent to the external context in which you operate—like the existence of other debate societies nearby that can help you organize workshops and trainings, or the financial constraints current or potential sponsors have because of the economic climate. Think about what you can do to deal with your weaknesses, prevent threats, seize opportunities, and maximize the impact of your strengths.

Don't forget to take into account different stakeholders: students, members of the debate society and the society's board, the community, sponsors and potential sponsors, the chancellor, the deans, the professors, the staff, other student groups, your regional or national debating circuit, and whoever your work might touch. Understand how all these stakeholders affect your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and how they can react positively or negatively to different courses of action.

Determine your group's comparative advantages. These are basically strengths or opportunities that will make your society unique and that your competition can't copy. Focus on them and try to understand how they can help your group reach full potential.

Try to balance strengths and weaknesses. If you and your group lack public recognition but have contacts with the press, you can use this strength to fight that weakness. Don't forget that things are rarely simple: you may think that your board members being involved in lots of other activities is a weakness or a threat because it can lead to conflicts of interest, but it is also a strength when it gives you diverse perspectives and experiences and widens the span of your network expanding opportunities.

Thinking about your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, about all the actors whose path may intercept yours, and about your comparative advantages will help you understand how the pieces are placed in the chessboard before the next move.

Define Your Goals

Then ask yourself “what would I like us to look like?” Be SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) when you write down your goals. It’s really important that you establish a time frame for achieving your goals.

Next, look at the interconnections among goals. Reaching some of your goals may be dependent on first achieving other objectives. These minor goals might not even be relevant in the end, but they are indispensable for achieving the major ones. Let’s say that your goal is to organize the World Universities Debate Championship (WUDC). You first might want to organize some large tournaments, to participate in some international competitions, to recruit a large team of reliable volunteers, to foster good relations with your university or with a few hotels. You get the point; if you are just starting a debate club and your goal is organizing the WUDC, it’s probably not the best idea to prepare a bid right away.

Having looked at the interconnections, you might then establish deadlines for the smaller goals. If you want to organize the WUDC in 2025, you might say that you want to go to your first WUDC in 2013; and go to at least three tournaments per year and organize an annual debate tournament by 2014. Be SMART!

This way you make sure you know you are not doing stuff “just because,” you are focusing your efforts on the actions that will enable you to fulfill your plan. Those who don’t know where they are going will never have the wind in their favor.

Of course, by now you will be thinking that this is all nonsense. Most worthwhile goals are achievable only with long-term plans, so, if you are starting a program at your university now, there’s a good chance you will not still be a student there to see it firmly established. You are absolutely right! A huge part of achieving your ultimate goals will be based on your ability to pass the torch to a new generation of students and their ability to pass it on to those who come after them. But we will talk about that later.

CHAPTER 5:

HOW AM I GOING TO MAKE THIS WORK?

In this chapter, we look at the different dimensions of running a debate society. Lots of guides to debating are available to help you understand the rules of your format and perfect your game. Therefore, we don't have to address these. Instead, we'll analyze four areas about which you need to be concerned: institutional, financial, organizational, and operational. We look at these areas independently, but obviously they are interconnected.

Institutional: How Do We Want to Be Perceived?

REPUTATION

Like countries, debate societies have friends and reputations. To a large degree, a debate society exists only once a certain number of agents in a specific community recognize it. It won't do your society much good to exist on paper at your university if the students and administration aren't aware of your existence. To achieve a higher profile, you must create friends—usually other debate

societies—that confirm your existence. Ask an international law student about country recognition, he might elaborate on this issue.

Your first step is to raise awareness of your existence, but that's not enough. Just existing is not that awesome—many things exist and we don't pay attention to them. So, you have to develop a brand statement that explains why people should not only pay attention to you but actually like you (and, if possible, love you and have your babies). What do you have to do? You have to create an image that spells: awesome.

Basically, a brand statement is the big promise behind every brand. So what is your promise? You can't promise "to have lots of parties" (which is a way of being awesome) if you have no intention of throwing at least a decent number of parties every year. If you promise, deliver. People will probably look at the word "debate" and think that you will be offering a serious program and expect, well . . . debates, workshops, conferences, etc. (Though serious partying goes along very well with debating.)

Your brand statement should also be consistent—you can adapt it a bit when speaking with different audiences. The promise "we are going to train very good debaters" is consistent with both "we are going to teach you how to ask for a raise in your allowance" and "we are going to win lots of tournaments for the university."

Many brands use famous actors or sports personalities in their commercials because they convey a certain promise (and an implicit guarantee). The promise behind many products is "we will make you beautiful." But beautiful in what way? How does that feel? Answering these questions is a lot easier when you have a public figure on the screen. Your promise then becomes much more real and people can relate to it more. Try to be the promise you present.

Saying your brand statement often sounds somehow silly. So say it with everything but words—in the typography you use, in the colors of your logo, in the design of your business cards, the style in which you write your newsletters, the way you approach new students, professors or distinguished guests, the activities you organize. Make your actions and outcomes consistent and deliberate.

STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS AND POTENTIAL ALLIES

Your friends are your best allies. It is vital that you create and maintain a network of individuals and institutions that like your debate society. These include those who might be interested in helping you out and who have the ability to assist you financially or offer you their expertise. Don't forget to establish personal relations with:

You: Meaning your entire network. Tell everyone about your society. Show them how thrilled you are about it. Post it on Facebook; twitter all the time. Show pride. People will sense your confidence and feel attracted to the project.

Parents: In many cultures, university students are still dependent to some degree on their parents. Your debaters will travel a lot, spend late hours organizing events, or skip classes to go to a debating workshop, so make sure their parents support what they are doing. Persuade parents that debating is good for their children. Remember, parents will probably be your biggest sponsors and supporters at workshops, tournaments, etc.

Many parents are eager to take part in their kids' lives, so involve them in your program. Invite them to presentation debates, show them videos online, tell them what you are doing and how it is

relevant to you and your community. Don't forget that parents may have contacts with people or institutions that might want to sponsor your events or could be of help in other ways.

Deans, chancellors, and high-ranking professors: Try to earn the respect and admiration of those who call the shots. The success of your debate society will also be dependent on how difficult they try to make your life. Explain what the university/faculty/department stands to gain from a debate program. Try to understand what kind of people they are and what they value. Read their strategic plans, go to their conferences, and determine how you can help them realize their goals and how they can help you achieve yours. Earn their trust personally as well; show them you are reliable and accountable.

Press: If it's not in the news, it didn't happen. If you don't have access to the major media, try to get to the student media first.

VIPs: People love VIPs; they treat them like they were demigods and they will rush to your events if you have a VIP attending. But, in fact, political, economic, showbiz, academic, and other kinds of celebrities are just people; many times they are good-natured, easygoing individuals who don't even perceive themselves as celebrities. Everyone you see on TV actually exists and usually has a cell phone, email, and Facebook page. More than that, VIPs usually have friends. In fact, usually they are very well connected. You just have to find a personal link. We bet that for a national celebrity you won't be six degrees removed, you will probably be two or three steps away from her.

Administrative staff: I've had many activities that were only possible because staff members were willing to close their eyes when you just need an extra room now and have no time to wait for the department's approval and lend a hand. Truth be told, they are the ones

that make it happen inside most institutions, especially in countries where informal connections play a big role in how things get done.

Other student groups: Sometimes they are your competition (people can't join every group), but most times they are your allies. In most universities, the majority of students don't take part in extracurricular activities. They just go to classes and go home, unless there's a party somewhere. Indifference, lack of attachment to the university, over-focus on studies and/or parties are your biggest challenges, not other student groups. Becoming engaged with one group usually leads to joining others. Collaborate with other groups to maximize your impact and make your message reach new people. But keep your eyes open: people that enjoy making little effort and claiming all the credit may head some of the organizations you come across, they may use the partnership to get access to valuable know-how, connections or contact databases from which you derive significant comparative advantages.

Public officials: If you are preparing a big event, many government agencies might be willing to help you. In some countries, city councils can give very nice sponsorships to tournaments; in other places, they can provide very nice rooms for your debates and events. Many public institutions have grants for youth activities and can lend you equipment or help you spread the word about your program.

Sponsors: We will deal with sponsors in detail in the next chapter; here, we just want to emphasize that you should think of sponsors as long-term allies. Create value, establish trust, and you will be rewarded.

Alumni: In the beginning, your debate society won't have an alumni group since most of those involved will likely still be students, but your university probably has an alumni organization. If it works well,

you will have access through the alumni association to a network of thousands of highly educated people who still feel connected to their alma mater. Usually the individuals heading these groups are former student leaders, and so they will likely empathize with your struggle and try to help you in whatever way they can. Sometimes these groups even have access to influential people you might want to invite to speak; a few alumni groups are very well-funded and are able to sponsor some of your events.

Other debating societies: You are not alone. Thousands of people around the world are involved in debate. These folks are articulate, great fun, inspiring, smart people who organize wonderful events for one another, who like to learn, talk, and listen, to drink, and to read *The Economist*. Many in this community will be thrilled to learn that you are starting a debate society and will gladly help you. Inspire yourself by learning what's being done elsewhere, talk to people about their experiences, ask them for advice, visit different groups just to see how they run their societies, organize workshops together and ask trainers from other institutions to come train your debaters.

Financial: How Are We Going to Pay for All This?

MONEY: THE ROOT OF ALL EVIL?

Working with a small budget is very hard, but it can boost creativity and make you focus on the important stuff. No, you won't have large posters all over campus. But when was the last time you went to an event because of large posters? And, did the size and ubiquity of

the posters influence your decision? And you don't really need posters at all, you can use social media to spread the word, for example.

No, you won't have a conference with that big name because you can't pay a business class airfare, but some of the best conferences we attended weren't with the "big names" from overseas, but with interesting individuals who are eager to talk with young people and who would gladly drive to the university on a Thursday afternoon.

First thing you need to know is that money won't solve every problem. The quality of your activities is not proportionate to the amount of money you spend on them. Nevertheless, creating an internationally competitive debate society without considerable amounts of money is hard. Ideally, people would be able to attend debate events regardless of their economic status; sadly, most debate societies can't afford to send debaters, which means that usually only rich and upper-middle-class students go to international competitions. The sense of unfairness is almost unbearable when you see talented and devoted debaters coming week after week, year after year to trainings and leaving the university without ever attending a major tournament, while you are sending, and sometimes even subsidizing, substandard freshmen with thick wallets.

This also brings us to the point that money can sometimes be a curse, as it can attract debaters who are interested only in the touring or social aspects of debating. Even worse, money may attract organizers that like to use collective resources for their own individual benefit. Improper use of money can make you lose credibility among students, sponsors, and the university, so be very careful and make sure the proper checks and balances are in place so that power can stop power and the collective good can prevail over individual greed. And,

try to make sure you don't subsidize travel for those who don't show consistent commitment to personal and collective improvement.

SPONSORSHIPS

People are always suspicious when giving money to students, just as we are when giving money to a beggar. We are afraid he will spend it on drugs; they are afraid we will spend it on booze. Start behaving like a businessperson and not like a beggar. Tell people what you can do for them, what their business stands to gain by supporting you. You are a debater; you should know how to argue this.

Create a short sponsorship book that presents your activities and plans, and which outlines the advantages of sponsorship. That book should also contain categories of sponsorship with cool names. Platinum, Gold, Silver, and Bronze are the most standard ones, but you can use different ones. Aim at having a pyramid-shape number of sponsors, with just one Platinum but several Bronze partners.

Develop proposals that would make sense to you if you were in the decision-making position. To do this, you must understand the business's philosophy and strategy, especially toward the public you represent: smart, urban, educated, middle-class young people.

A business might be interested in sponsoring you for many reasons. It might want to promote awareness of its products and services among young people or to make a direct sale; it might want to hire smart young people; it might want the public to perceive it as engaged in community activities; it might want to associate itself with some aspect of your brand statement and so on.

Some multinational companies are known for sponsoring debate, but you can also try to get support from local businesses. Global firms

like KPMG, PwC, Deloitte, Bain, Morgan Stanley, J. P. Morgan, T-Mobile, Accenture, Clifford Chance, McKinsey & Company or Grant Thornton have supported some debating events, but so have national companies like the newspapers *Die Zeit* (Germany) or *The Irish Times* (Ireland). Beer brands also seem to have a big interest in sponsoring debate events (or is it debaters that sponsor beer brands?).

Think hard about what you can offer. Many times it's a good idea to start by selling a specific event, perhaps one of your flagship events, and then build up a relationship so the business becomes more comfortable with long-term commitment and with a more general approach to sponsorship.

Don't forget a big debate competition attracts many people. This means many businesses, even small ones, can potentially make a significant profit from it. You can use this to win support from your city council and tourism promotion offices—and also from such local businesses as restaurants, bars, hotels and hostels, taxis and buses, souvenir shops, and museums.

Regardless of whom you approach, focus on creating real value for you and for them. It's a lot harder to establish a partnership than to maintain it and renew it. Don't try to rip them off. If possible, propose a sponsorship whose amount is tied to results. Potential sponsors might be a bit more willing to donate money if you share the risks.

Get as much information on a potential sponsor as you can, but don't forget to know yours even better. If you don't like memorizing facts and figures, have them with you: What's your budget? How many debates did you have last year? And this year? With how many people? How many people have visited your website? Your Facebook page? What percentage of your members would you consider active?

Use your personal connections to reach the right people. We all know a friend who knows a friend. Using these connections is not illegal or unethical. You just want a fair chance to present your case to the right person. Before you meet with anyone, make sure you know all you can about her. You need to talk very differently to someone from marketing than from human resources or sales.

At a meeting, don't be flirty, but don't be afraid of using your charm and dress up to the occasion. Show yourself confident and at ease. Smile, but don't force it, you'll look nervous. Be polite and be honest. If you don't know how to begin the interview, take your cue from the other person: if she is informal, be informal; if he gets right down to business, get right down to business; if he likes to chat, chat with him.

Be ready to make a complete proposal at this first meeting. This proposal should include the duties for each party, the time frame for the contract, and a figure for the value of the sponsorship. If you don't have the authority to seal an agreement, discuss what you'll be proposing with those who do before you meet a potential sponsor. Don't seal the deal unless you have power to do so. Many times, the people you are meeting with will have also to talk with their superiors.

Try different angles. If a potential sponsor is reluctant to give you an annual grant, ask him to sponsor an event or to fly a team to a tournament. If a company makes or sells something your society needs, ask them to donate stuff instead of money; if they can't give it for free, ask for a discount.

Learn to say no to unacceptable offers. Sponsorships are not unlimited. You cannot sell 10 "platinum sponsor" places the same way it's unlikely that you will manage to have two banks sponsoring the same event. Firms and brands use you as a way of standing out from the crowd, they value visibility, exclusiveness, and access to

the participants. You can't give dozens sponsors the same visibility you can give to one in a poster or a newsletter; and even if you could have little stands for all of them at your venue, firms prefer undisputed attention and access to the participants. So if you have McDonald's, you can't have Burger King.

But learn to say yes to low offers. When you're just starting out, accepting low proposals from high-profile companies makes a lot of sense. First, it's an opportunity to show the sponsor that you are trustworthy, so that in the future it might want to increase its support. Second, the fact that a company is sponsoring you gives other companies a sense of security. If you are good enough for one company, you should be good enough for another.

Be persistent, but learn when to quit. "No" sometimes means "no," but many times it means "I'm not sure" or "I didn't understand" or "I can't fit that in my budget right now." Even when you have to quit, try to learn from your experience. Ask people if they liked the way you approached them, the way you negotiated with them, what you can do to improve your proposal, and when they would like you to contact them again with another proposal.

Always have the last word, even if it is "Thank you for your attention. I hope we can talk again sometime soon."

UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

Many universities support their debate societies by subsidizing their activities and travels, by helping them promote their activities in the media and among the students, by paying a coach, by providing them with rooms to meet, or, for example, by giving the society special status so that those representing the university in competitions

can skip classes to compete. Some universities even support debate by creating and funding university-run debate teams, sometimes with very significant budgets.

They are helping to build vibrant debate programs and should keep on doing so because:

- Debating is an academic activity that promotes attitudes and skills that the university is meant to encourage. A winning debate team enhances the university's reputation domestically and abroad.
- Debating creates a rare chance for universities to prove they are better than their competition by beating other universities in a way that is more meaningful than sports.
- A good debating team can attract very bright students to a university. This actually happens a lot more often than you would think. Many secondary school debaters rank among the best students in their classes, many want to pursue graduate studies, they enjoy international experiences, and debate is usually a big part of their lives and identities (otherwise they wouldn't call themselves "debaters" so often); so, it's only natural that they make the decision about where to attend university based on these aspects.
- Extracurricular activities make student life more enjoyable, lower dropout rates and attract more students. For many students what they do outside the classroom makes them thrilled to attend a certain university.
- University teams help build a university identity by giving students, professors, and staff a common source of pride.

- Students involved in debate usually maintain their emotional ties to the university and are more likely to become graduate students there. They will be ambassadors of the university in industry, finance, or politics, or even, eventually, become significant financial supporters of the university.

So, a debate society has a lot to offer your university. It stands to gain a lot from a successful debate society. Your job is to show university officials how you can create that value. Report to them on your activities; involve them in drafting your long-term plans; create a close bond with some key professors and staff; go to their boring institutional ceremonies and present yourself as representative from the debate society to show that your group supports the university.

BUDGET

A debate society is a fairly easy business to finance because you don't need many employees or expensive equipment. Five hundred euros can get you comfortably started anywhere in the world (covering the costs of legalizing the association, first posters, a website, business cards, maybe a couple of T-shirts, and travel expenses for a trainer).

But you can start on a shoestring. Just tell people to bring a pen, a piece of paper and an old cell phone to serve as a timer. If you don't have money for big posters, create small ones. Don't have money for color, do black and white; don't have money for posters; do flyers, don't have money for flyers, just use social networks and talk to people. People will come, especially the first few times, not because of a glitzy advertising campaign but because a friend told them to. And that's still free.

Use free stuff and ask people to give you stuff for free. If you know a friend who has a data show projector, don't buy one. Do you really need a professional designer to create your website or your logo, or do you have a friend who's a senior design student who will be glad to make it for free if he can add it to his portfolio? This is a good cause, and people are glad to help if you give them some recognition.

Ask for money. We know this is not seen as polite in some cultures where educated people are not supposed to talk such trivial things as money. Many times people won't regard a free service as having the same quality as one they paid for, so if you have a good product (an interesting workshop, for example), you can ask for money.

With time, you will have the money to do some things differently. Instead of asking for free cakes or cookies at every café in the neighborhood, you may go just to three or four and negotiate a price. And, if you become very busy and very successful, there might be a time where you can just go to one place and buy things as a regular customer does. But remember that if your finances dip again, you can always go back to basics.

Diversify your sources of income. You never know when someone will stop helping you, so don't risk putting all your eggs in one basket.

Especially if the rule of law is well established in your country, the bigger the stakes, the longer the length of the contract. If a certain institution is willing to put a bunch of money into your debate society, it will probably also actually prefer doing so over time. Therefore, your interests do not conflict. With a large sum of money coming all of sudden, you might be tempted to incur expenses that will make your operation harder to downsize (like asking the university for more rooms you then have to maintain or hiring a secretary).

Use your long-term, predictable, ongoing sources of income (old steady sponsorships, automatically credited membership fees, or rents) to pay for long-term, predictable, ongoing expenses (salaries or rents). Use your variable sources of income (profits from a debate workshop or charitable donations) for variable expenses (tournament subsidies). If your current income doesn't cover your current expenses, you must try either to increase income, or decrease the expenses. As Portuguese, we must advise you: you don't want to try to learn this the hard way.

Never forget to get a written contract, sign it, and keep a copy. Actually, keep multiple copies. When doing a transition, don't forget to hand over those copies so people know exactly what their obligations are, and what they have the right to. Trusting people is nice, but a written contract is often a useful deterrent of contractual breach, and better evidence of your rights and liabilities if ever things go wrong.

Organizational: Who Is Going to Make This Happen?

HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

No good team can be made without good individuals. Recruit from the most talented and hard-working students and show them why this project is worth their time and passion.

But, good individuals don't always make a good team. If you have only bohemian artists, or nerdy accountants, or cool surfers, or fast-talking lawyers on your team, you'll have a hard time starting a debate society. Try to create a team of diverse people, but especially

of people with complementary skills who know how to work as a team.

Get leaders: people who make a difference, who take the initiative, who volunteer to go the extra mile and inspire people to go the extra mile with them.

Get communicators: people who know everyone everywhere they go and make friends in a snap.

Get experts: computer wizards to manage your website and Facebook account, run TAB, make electronic devices work properly, or designer skills to make your stuff look good and work better, or accountants to make you feel safe about a tax audit; or lawyers to draft your contracts.

Get salespersons: people who could persuade every freshman to apply for membership, or with the political skills to get you a meeting with the chancellor in 24 hours, or with the ability to get you a sponsorship after a 30-minute talk with a senior manager.

You won't help your project if you put people in the wrong place. Albert Einstein said, "Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid." People perform best when they do what they like and have input into what they're doing. Before telling someone what to do or how to do it, ask her what she would like to do and how she thinks the group should do it.

Some people just add extra weight and not extra value to a project. Try not to quit on them too quickly—sometimes talking with them or changing their position might do the trick. If it doesn't, don't worry too much; you don't have to be right about every pick you make. And, in a volunteer project, deadweights usually go away after a while.

Always try to end your relationship on good terms. With a little bit of luck, the person might serve as an ambassador for your project and many times will gladly lend an extra hand when you need it most.

Sometimes debate societies suffer from brain drain. Debating puts bright people in the spotlight, and so other student groups might recruit debaters to join their ranks. You can try to prevent this by showing people what they stand to gain by investing in debating. If you don't succeed (and you won't always), try to look at this phenomenon as brain-circulation. People can leave and come back; they can learn from their experience in other groups and as they expand their networks they are also expanding the reach of the debate society, which ultimately is beneficial to it.

MEMBERSHIP

If you want the project to live long and prosper, you need to attract new people and allow them/persuade them to take ownership of the project by involving them in planning, implementing, and evaluating activities.

But first you need to reach them. People have to know you exist, and they are far more distracted than you would think. You need to create a strong, coherent marketing program that hits people in a way that they remember the message. You can create a website, a Facebook page, a Facebook group, a twitter account, a YouTube/Vimeo account, posters, flyers, business cards, T-shirts, and a merchandising plan that promotes awareness of your brand across campus. Try to set up direct marketing events where you talk up the project on campus and invite people to come to your events, present your project on open days, when high-school students, candidates or freshman come to the campus—just pitch it to as many people as you can. Ask

people from the university how can they help you reach students; maybe the university has an internal TV, a newspaper, a magazine, an agenda, a newsletter, or a website where you can promote your activities. Regardless of how you advertise your program, present a clear message that emphasizes what do you do, why they should do it too, and how they can do it.

Once people come, establish a connection between them and the society. An easy way to do this is to have a membership option that could/should have some kind of privileges (for example, give them discounts for paid activities like tournaments, try to negotiate discounts in local shops, try to give special credit in terms of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), or equivalent for activities, or have participation in the debate society appear in graduation diplomas). A membership card is also a nice way to establish a link with members. You should collect contact details you can reach them through a variety of channels (personal email and cell phone number), but also other information so that you get to know who are the members of the debate society and what is getting people to sign up (what's their course, their department, who they found out about the debate society, etc.). This will allow you to plan and benchmark your activities better, maybe by having a bigger event on a department where you know you have a good support base, or scheduling fiercer recruitment campaigns or presentation debates on places where you are pulling a lower percentage of students.

Make sure an experienced member of the debate society accompanies individuals or groups to a debate for the first time. Have someone explain the debate format to them and make sure you make a personal connection with newcomers so that you can ask

them to come to the following session. Don't push them too hard to debate, but encourage their involvement in the society.

Work on cultivating a sense of belonging. Promote the idea that a debate society isn't just a place where people sometimes gather to talk and then go home. It should be seen as a place where people can speak freely, where people can come for intellectual inspiration, for constant challenge. People don't just debate, they are debaters; debating can and should be part of their personal identity and self-image.

We're always asked about membership fees. We think that depends on what you need to grow faster to achieve your goal: your bank account or you membership numbers.

You will recruit members more easily if you have no or low fees and especially if you can get them discounts or other benefits. A large number of members can increase your credibility with deans and public authorities. But having numbers is not equal to having active participants: some members won't be active, they will just join to have a fancy line in their CV or a nice discount at the local bookshop, and the lower the fees the more likely it is for you to get lots of unengaged members.

We might argue that charging a membership fee can foster a sense of ownership and thus make for more active members of the society. You also have to realize that while many people won't even show up if they think of the debate society as a "members only" club, others may be drawn precisely by that idea of exclusivity. Some debate societies also have different levels of membership (and dues), with different duties and privileges. You will have to see what serves you best.

What serves you best, of course also includes evaluating your financial needs, and some debate societies rely heavily on their membership fees to support their activities. But higher fees may decrease the total income you get, and are likely to drive at least some people away from getting involved, and then you should also ask yourself how much do you really need that money.

Some societies recruit from only a few departments or even on just a few courses. This can be a good idea when you start your program, but ultimately this strategy can kill it because you will always have the same people, the same kinds of arguments, and no real cross-pollination of views. Based on our experience and from what we have seen, although some courses are easier to target than others, you are never really talking about courses, you are always talking about people. And, you can find people interested in debating in all disciplines.

But, yes, people in different courses usually like different things. Try to find a way for people to connect with debate. Discussing the tensions in the Senkako/Diaoyu islands can be a very “real” thing to International Relations students, but a very abstract one for medical students. The same medical students will find discussing euthanasia in minor patients something very real, but it will be little more than a philosophical exercise for International Relations students. Still, even if appealing to a course related motion is an easy way to appeal to that specific demographic, don’t think people only care about things connect with the course they study. The natural discussions that pop-up among friends in the cafeterias across different departments may not include all the same things, but they are likely include a number of the same things: maybe it’s unemployment,

social media, Internet privacy, access to quality education, support for university sports or university groups, etc.

The need to establish an entry-point also exists when you address students who you perceive as apathetic and resigned. It's not enough to be passionate about debating for people to understand why you are passionate and for them to be passionate as well. You must show them that debate is not "just words." Policy doesn't change after a debate, but debating changes perspectives, it fosters tolerance, and it gives participants skills they can use outside of formal debate to shape the world in the way they think is needed. It's not "just words," when those words change people and people change the world, or at least the world around them.

Show them that debate isn't a "political thing" (in the worst sense of the word). The subjects we debate are ones that affect our community; they are issues that matter to them and to other people in the real world.

DELEGATING AND TRANSITION

You will quickly learn that you can't do everything. If you want the society to be more than just about you, you will have to delegate responsibilities. This process is easier when you're telling someone to make a poster and you have no idea how to make one. It's a lot harder when you know that if you were to do something, you would do it better and faster. And, it's almost impossible to delegate when you know that you will spend more time and effort supervising or teaching how to perform a task than if you were to do it. Unfortunately, the best option in the long term is almost always to delegate what's possible, so that knowledge and experience are multiplied and the program can continue once you've graduated.

Managing is important but “unmanaging” is often crucial. Learn not to micro-manage; just let people take on their own responsibilities. But before establishing a culture of responsibility, don’t assume that everyone is responsible. In the right context, most people are, in the wrong one, no one is. This is why a sense of belonging is very important.

Manage not just for today but also for tomorrow. Imagine what kinds of record of previous events you would like to have in the future and start building it now. For every big activity you organize, for every partnership you promote, you should leave a paper trail so that your successors will know what you’ve done. And, keeping proper records will make managing the society easier for you as well. Just imagine how much easier organizing the second edition of an event will be if you have copies of the invitations letters, grant applications, sponsorship applications, participants’ feedback, the graphical image of the event, contacts of past participants, partners and organizers, a task distribution schema and calendar, etc. all in one place. Maintaining good records is extremely useful and actually prevents knowledge loss when there’s a big change in your organization.

It’s important for your project to be able to regenerate itself. For that you need to find a balance between people with experience and new people. Experience doesn’t transfer itself with just the mere passage of time. Usually, it’s highly related to the amount of responsibility you give people.

Learn to let go of your project and let others have the wonderful experience of running the beautiful mechanism you have built. After all sooner or later you will have to let go. Won’t it be great when you ensure a smooth transition and watch the seeds of your work sprout into trees?

Letting go shouldn't mean disappearing. Visit the society office once in a while, offer your services as a trainer, accept the opportunity to judge a debate tournament, drop by for the parties and buy the society members a few drinks, keep in touch with the new members of the board, foster relations between the society and its alumni, persuade your company to sponsor the club or introduce club officials to people who might become sponsors. You know you would love to know how things are going and lend a hand. You've learned from your own experience that they will likely appreciate your presence, highly regard your advice, and cherish the opportunity to talk with someone with a bit more experience. The presence of older members in these societies is what really makes them institutions, endeavors that carry on regardless of who runs them at a given moment. It's one spirit in multiple bodies.

Transition is important not only for the leaders of your organization, but for everyone involved. Even volunteers create and perfect work routines and establish connections with members of the staff and sponsors. It's important that people learn from those who previously held their job and build on what their predecessor has done. All should be working to make themselves dispensable.

POLICY MANUAL

It's a good idea to create a policy manual that spells out both the roles and tasks of different members in the board/organizing committees and also sets out administrative guidelines for things like allocating funds. A policy manual makes procedures more transparent, avoids conflicts that can easily spur from case by case decisions on things like travel subsidies, for example, and ensures that information is

widespread and easily accessible to those who need it, and that similar cases are treated in a similar way.

VALUES STATEMENT

It's important for the organization, and especially for board members, to understand and incorporate the values of the society. They should reflect the culture, the mindset, of the people who make up the group and address issues that might be problematic in your specific context. These values can be set down in an ethics code and help members keep a steady course in times of change.

In our case, we picked the following values: Chivalry (we aim to raise brave, respectful, and honest leaders); Independence (we are democratically run and are independent of political, religious, philosophical, and other groups of all persuasions); Diversity (we cherish diversity in all its shapes and forms, inside and outside debates, as springboards for the progress of ideas); Unity (we believe in the power of synergies among different people and institutions); and Ambition (we are passionate about serving the community, we aim to do it better and to lead through example).

Operational: What Are We Going to Do?

What you do greatly depends on what you are trying to achieve—so do stuff that helps you reach your goals. This is hard at times because you might have lots of ideas, plans, and invitations, and you might not be able to implement or take advantage of them all. So you must decide what's important to you at any given moment, what puts you closer to your goals.

One issue that is often discussed in recent debating societies is whether a certain event is too big to be organized right now. There's a level of institutional, financial, and organizational capacity that is required to do a certain activity. So when is an event too big for you?

Growing is about pushing the limits. A debater who competes only with those who are weaker than herself will never achieve her full potential. An organization that doesn't try to push itself to do things it has never done will most probably stagnate and die. Aim high, "shoot for the moon, because even if you miss you will land among the stars."

But there's very thin line between being a visionary and being a lunatic. That line is called success. There are many things that you will not be able to do (at least for the time being). There are even more things that are not worth doing (at least now) because they are, or could be, too resource consuming and you have other priorities. So think if your idea is likely to succeed and about the comparative consequences of different levels of likely failure or success, but also if it is worth doing at all given other ways in which you can use the available resources.

There are many good reasons for you to do something, just don't do it out of vanity or because you've always done things that way. There are many good reasons for you not to do something, just don't refrain from doing it out of fear or laziness.

Be a leader and embrace the possibility of failure, learn to deal with it, but don't ever become addicted or used to it. Learn from your mistakes while trying to succeed; it's important (vital even!) to survive your own mistakes. If you feel an attraction for the abyss, to fail spectacularly, to go down in flames, to die with a bang, remember that your debate society really isn't yours, and that decision is really

not yours to make. It's a lot harder to build than it is to destroy, so keep the destroying to a minimum.

So what should you do? The approach we take is to force ourselves to attempt things that are just a bit over our head. This allows you to keep learning and to keep growing while giving you a decent chance to survive your mistakes.

You have to start somewhere, so don't be afraid to start small. Margaret Mead said, "never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that has done it."

But let's finish with a word of advice: you do need a group, you can't decide to go it alone or against any substantial part of your team.

THE MODEL

Please do yourself a favor: start debating in British parliamentary, aka world's style, and stick to it. It is a fascinating format because it has a more complex strategy, it privileges persuasion and not the ability to speak fast (as policy debating does), incentivizes general knowledge (you have only 15 minutes of preparation time), it's fast-paced, and it allows for some deep analysis. Moreover, it's used around the world, which means that you can travel to almost any region of the globe and debate with people using the same format.

Be careful when deciding in which language you will debate. In some countries, kids nowadays learn English from a very young age and are almost bilingual. They reach college being very comfortable with their English-speaking skills and they might be seduced by the idea of debating in English as a way of ensuring that their English doesn't get rusty. But these areas of the world are an exception.

Most probably you will be starting your society where most university students understand English well but are not proficient or confident in speaking it. Many of your colleagues will be scared if you start in English.

Basically, you have two options in terms of language. If your top priority is getting better debaters and creating internationally competitive teams, you should probably start in English. If having a large number of debaters is important, start in your native language.

THE FIRST DEBATE

You don't have to make your first debate a launching event—with everything and everyone present. Hold a small debate first, just among friends and friends of friends. If you can, find someone to help you, an exchange student who used to debate, a professor who studied abroad, an English professor, members of debate societies both near and far. . . . if you would appreciate some help, ask for it.

Obviously you can handle this “pre-launch” training debate as you think best, but here are a few ideas:

1. Ask 10 friends you can count on to take part in a show debate; 8 will debate while 2 will serve as judges.
2. Email them some materials, preferably in their native language, with debating rules and adjudication guidelines, links to a couple of debate videos, and a list of motions so they can become familiar with a formal debate.
3. Pick a classical but still controversial topic (death penalty, prostitution, drugs, etc.) or one that they know about (local issues, current national news, etc.) as the subject of the motion. Make

sure that the topic is widely known and no research is needed, that there are no ambiguities in the wording of the motion, and that it is very clear what the motion is about and what are the practical steps necessary to implement the policy changes it suggests.

4. For this first debate, give teams 20 minutes prep time instead of the normal 15 so you (and may someone helping you) can move between one team and the other, challenging their ideas and asking them questions that might help them to come up with better-developed arguments.
5. If a debater can't fill the seven minutes assigned to the speech, help him out by asking questions. If he's already in the last minute, tell him to summarize what he just said.
6. After the debate, make the adjudication as much of a conversation as possible and try to reach a consensus with the participants.

The first debate will probably generate many questions. Try to answer them by consulting a debater's or adjudicator's briefing online (Google it) or just email a debater you know. If you don't know anyone, email us (aryfcunha@gmail.com). Not that we're the best people to answer your question, it's just that we like helping out like others helped us.

After this first debate, you will be better prepared to make a first show debate. Consider inviting some people from other debate societies for this first show debate as it is important for the first show debate to be a good one, increasing people's confidence in the work of the debate society:

1. Pick a date and book a room.

2. Print some black-and-white A3 posters and place them all over the campus.
3. Use online social networks to invite all your friends to the event and ask your friends to invite their friends, phone friends, text friends, email friends—above all talk to people face-to-face and tell them how cool it will all be.
4. After all this work, don't feel bad if only a few people show up. It will get better.
5. Once again, pick easy motions without much definition or model, i.e. have no ambiguities in the wording of the motion, and it's is very clear what the motion is about and what are the practical steps necessary to implement the policy changes it suggests.
6. Oral adjudication and a question-and-answer period may be important to make people engage in the debate.

After this, you are launched and the real work starts.

GUEST SPEAKERS, CONFERENCES, AND NONCOMPETITIVE DEBATES

You can promote all sorts of events unrelated to formal debate to create value for members; to draw attention to a specific issue related to your goals; to strengthen relations with other clubs, sponsors, or the university; or to gain visibility on campus or in the public eye.

Some societies draw many students and get intense media coverage with events featuring leaders from business, politics, or the arts. To do this, however, you need a lot of money, the right connections, or a very strong reputation. Even when you have the connections and the reputation, you may still have to pay for transportation,

accommodation, and food. So, at least at the start, try organizing events around some local or national leaders or reputable local academics. Professors and researchers are accustomed to talking for free; local business leaders like an opportunity to promote their brands and explain how they built an empire; and rising politicians like the opportunity to talk with young people about their political views. Ambassadors are also likely to accept your invitation, and they can even sponsor your event if they come from a wealthy country. Professional writers promoting a recent book may also be willing to appear at your event if you promise them a nice turnout. Same goes for established politicians during reelection campaigns.

Asking celebrities from TV, film, sports, or music to speak at your event or do a question-and-answer session also works well, although they may ask you for money. The angle is to invite them to talk about something they wish to be known for or turn the lights away from the same old topics they are tired of. For example, ask them to talk about their charity (if they have one) or about their political views (if they have them). Some celebrities really might surprise you by being interesting, humble, and fun, so give them a chance to show a different side.

Be aware, though, that the policies about these visits can vary from university to university, and even from department to department. We have seen a dean speaking at the opening ceremony of a political party congress held at his School saying that he believes it's the role of the university to welcome these events to foster students' political awareness. But we have also seen a university forbid a conference just because one of the speakers was a former TV celebrity, and so the administration deemed the event unsuitable. Always know your institution's policies: their house, their rules.

Also consider whether you can join forces with other groups. If your university has a film club and you decide to hold a film+debate event, why not ask them to co-organize it with you? In most cases your interests and theirs will be compatible, and you may have a few more people in the audience and a bit less work promoting the event.

SOCIALS

Creating a fun atmosphere around a debate society may be important in overcoming the “nerd” effect. We know that many students join a group because they have a friend there, but none will stay if they don’t make friends.

Most of the debate in a debate society takes place after the formal debating events. It is usually done in a social setting, between snacks and drinks, where people can speak freely without having to make “a point.”

It may be hard to manage a debate society in which most of your board members have become your personal friends, teams are also romantic couples, and you can’t have “those two” in the same room because of something that happened years ago. But it’s a lot harder to put people at work for no money, no career prospects, and long nights if they don’t feel they are also doing it for their friends too.

If you are hosting a tournament, it’s a good idea to create settings where people can chat and relax after a day of debates. After a regular evening of debate training, you can just ask where they feel like grabbing a bite or drinking a pint. But make sure that new members don’t feel awkward by entering a setting filled with private jokes they don’t get. Pay attention to making them feel welcome, if they are made to feel like outsiders, they won’t return.

TRAINING SESSIONS AND WORKSHOPS

You learn a lot and develop all sorts of skills by debating. But attending debate workshops is also a great way to improve your skills. Debate trainings and workshops should focus on particular aspects of debating, like specific team and speaker roles strategies, theories, kinds of motions, etc. Especially to ensure you have good debaters, it's important to have regular trainings and workshops where they can work on their weaknesses, but of course all can benefit from them.

It's a very good idea to bring in experienced debaters and trainers for these sessions since a good trainer can help participants improve significantly in only a few sessions. It's hard for debaters to improve if they don't have trainers who can teach them the skills they need, so bring in these people or go to where they are. Of course, it's a lot cheaper to fly one trainer to a workshop than to fly 10 people to the trainer.

Of course, unless you are sitting on a gold mine, you can't afford to fly in trainers, and, at least in the beginning, you won't have that many great debaters in your society you can use as teachers. Many debate societies in that position just don't do training sessions and workshops, but we think that's a bad idea, especially since you have some options:

1. You may not have many experienced debaters, but you may have some theater, rhetoric, or communications professors who can teach lots of skills useful in debating.
2. If you are near another debate society, your group may be able to attend its training sessions or send a good debater there so

she can learn and then teach the rest of club. Maybe your groups can organize common training.

3. If you know something about debating or about a certain topic that pops up in debates, if you have a certain skill useful in debating, if you have something to share, you have something to teach. Do your research and prepare, but don't make a big deal about giving a formal workshop.
4. You don't have to be a debating specialist, you just need to be able to give people something new to think about—for instance, a couple of worthwhile different perspectives on justice and morals, a report on the situation in the Middle East, or a few lessons in games theory.

You'll find lots of free materials for your research online. Without wanting to discourage you from searching for other good, or even better, resources, we recommend the following:

<u>Alfred Snider's Channels on Vimeo</u>	debates and lectures on video
<u>Deatabase</u>	pros and cons on many topics
<u>Debate Motion Central</u>	all motions of all big tournaments
<u>Debatepedia</u>	Wikipedia of debating, pros and cons on many topics
<u>Global Debate</u>	news
<u>idebate</u>	calendar, social network, news, motions, and more
<u>ProCon.org</u>	pros and cons on many topics

SELECTING MOTIONS

One issue facing many debating societies is how to choose the motions to debate. The websites we listed above contain hundreds, if not thousands, of motions. So, until you feel comfortable writing your own, use one of those. They were most likely crafted by experienced debaters, so they should be good.

A good motion is clear (it points the debate in a set direction so that teams have a clear idea of what they will be debating); it doesn't require specific knowledge (an average educated person of any academic and cultural background can understand the issues at stake); it is balanced for both government and opposition (it doesn't set an disproportionate burden on either government or opposition); it has sufficient material to present on both sides to make for an interesting one-hour debate; and it focuses on one set of issues (never debate "This House would legalize drugs and prostitution").

Great motions are usually slightly provocative; they talk of big issues and propose radical solutions. Some say that motions shouldn't be about taboo topics, but in most countries there aren't many of these and pushing the envelope of what is debatable in conservative societies can be fun. Still, having a public debate on the motion "This House would allow young children to consent to sex" is probably pushing too far unless you don't mind risking being the target of moral outrage.

It's often a good idea to start with debates on topics to which people can relate. Initially, you will find that many debaters think it's hard to find arguments, so begin with debates on a current or recent issue. These will be easier for speakers to debate and for audiences to engage with the debate.

Also, try some timeless topics, such as abortion, assassination of dictators, invasions, death penalty, limitations on free speech, or legalization of drugs or prostitution. These issues can give you eight good speeches no matter how often you debate them.

HIGH SCHOOL

Debating is an activity where experience counts. Someone who has debated in high school will have a significant advantage over other university freshmen and, with proper training and guidance, will be able to keep that advantage and become a great debater. Some high school kids are incredibly smart and civically engaged. They shouldn't miss out on the opportunity to debate.

Here are some of the advantages of starting a debate program in high schools:

- Starting a debate program in high schools (you could start even earlier, but it usually starts in high school) can be a very effective way to get better debaters at the university level.
- Offering training to high school kids can also be a way to finance your debate society or to compensate your best debaters. They can serve as trainers if you can get the parents or the schools to pay for the training sessions.
- You can reach students who may drop out of the educational system before university. By encouraging these young people to become involved in debate, you have an amazing opportunity to positively affect the lives of those students.
- If you are able to start a debate movement in high school, you might be able to marshal an army of teachers in support of

debate or even make debate part of the curriculum. In that case, in a generation's time, debating would be a part of your country's culture.

- Training high school kids is a great way to improve debating and training skills. So you can end up with a team of very cool debaters and trainers.

Unfortunately, problems always arise:

- It's hard to have autonomous and self-governing high school debate societies. Typically, students don't have enough maturity to manage a club, and schools give them little autonomy in any case, so you need a great deal of support from teachers who are already exhausted and don't feel like spending additional time at school for no additional compensation.
- You must have the school board's permission to do most things and, while some members may like the idea, others will be suspicious.
- Debaters need certain skills and knowledge that many kids in high school do not have and that can take a long time and a huge effort to acquire.
- You need debaters/trainers who not only have good debating skills, but who are also committed to the project and know how to deal with kids who might not be much younger than they are, immature, or interested in debate.
- You could be using your wonderful resources in your core business, university debating, where benefits could more easily, directly, and quickly be perceived.

GOING TO DEBATE TOURNAMENTS AND DEBATE ACADEMIES

Debating really turns into a competition when you represent your university in the outside world. It's important for any debate society to attend, to get the most out of, and to bring good results home from tournaments, IVs, and debate academies. Here are a few reasons why going is so important:

- Going to a big debating event is a great motivator. It's only once you go to a big tournament that you understand what it means to be a part of such a large community and that you start to perceive yourself as a debater.
- Mixing with the people they watched videos of is a great incentive for young debaters. Most debaters improve significantly after going to their first real tournament. They become more confident in their own skills, and many theoretical concepts become real.
- Experienced debaters don't have much room to improve in internal competitions where they know they will be the best. For them to keep growing, they need to face opponents who are better than they are. They need to go outside their lake, into the sea, and have the humbling experience of realizing how big the sharks really are.
- You need good, internationally experienced, successful debaters in your debate society. You need their knowledge and their authority as debaters to train and to judge debates.
- You need these events to promote your society, your university, and your sponsors.
- Big international competitions, such as Australs, Asian BP, or Worlds, allow debate societies to compare themselves shoulder

to shoulder. Part of your image to your peers, your university, and your sponsor depends on international victories, and especially those in these large competitions.

- Tournaments and IVs are great places to put abstract principles into practice and for debaters to train with their partners, while debate academies allow you to learn a lot both on a theoretical and on a practical level in a very complementary way. Academies are useful for debaters with almost all levels of experience, but especially important for those taking their first steps.
- You can really learn a lot from the cultural exchanges that take place at in international tournament. Culture and debating are both fields where perspective is paramount; getting to know different cultures can make you grow not only as a debater but also as a person.

But, as always, there are some issues you should consider:

- When you put too much emphasis on the competitive part of debate, you may lose sight of your ultimate goals. The fact that in competitions you have ways to measure success might make you believe that your success depends on the number of points you win in Worlds. Debate is, or should be, about much more.
- Debating is not an expensive sport. You don't need a car, a horse, clubs or balls; you just need a pen and a few pieces of paper. A cell phone with a stopwatch might help. But when it comes to going to international competitions, debate becomes a rich men's game. Unfortunately you won't be able to afford to send every debater to all the tournaments they want to attend—or even to pay for the best debaters to participate in every tournament they deserve to. It's sad and unfair to see good debaters not growing

as fast as they could because they don't have the money to have the international experiences that would allow them to jump to the next stage, but that's a reality you have to live with.

- Air travel is still very expensive. Sending a team to Worlds can easily cost more than any other budget item, and so you must think carefully before sacrificing your internal activities to send two people to the other side of the globe.
- Investing in a team is a high-stakes and high-risk endeavor. You must start early to give them a chance to improve with time, but they might never really jump to the next level despite all the tournaments they participate in—or they can just click in a tournament and make you proud for years afterward.
- Debate is not just about the big competitions. A team can learn a great deal from first going to a smaller competition where they can fail safely, go home, and analyze what went wrong. If learning is more important to you at this stage than international building a reputation or comparing yourself to other significant debating societies and climb the IDEA ranking, small, local, weekend tournaments might be a great solution. Your debaters get a big piece of the experience for a small fraction of the price.

We often hear from people trying to start their own debate societies that they don't go to international competitions because they aren't ready yet, but we wonder if they aren't ready because they don't go to international competitions. Going from zero to hero while training in isolation makes a nice plot for a kung fu film, but it never happens in debate. You need contact with and experience in important tournaments to become a better debater.

Let's face it, going to a tournament with some of the best teams in the world can be scary, but it's not like you will be facing Oxford A in your first debate (though that happened to us once). In all tournaments, you have good teams and bad teams, and most of us will climb our way from bad to good (or at least to not so bad) during our debating career. So it's normal if you don't see your name in the tab in the first couple of pages. Don't despair and think it was all in vain—after all, we're sure you have learned a lot, even if that isn't shown in the tab.

And, if you get into a good room and lose what's the big deal? You will have participated in a good debate, hopefully learned something, and you know you will be in an easier room next round because tournaments are organized using a "power match" system that pairs teams according to their performance in previous rounds.

Someone once said that shyness is a subtle form of narcissism. It makes us believe that how we look, how we talk, or how we act is terribly important to absolute strangers. But by the end of a five-round tournament, you probably won't remember clearly with whom you debated (let alone how each performed). And, probably, most people will sympathize with the fact that you are a novice debater and willingly give you advice.

We wish we could tell you that next time will be better. Most of the time it will, but your skills don't evolve along a straight line, and many variables determine your success in a tournament (the motions and your knowledge of them, how you approach them, your relationship with your partner, your self-confidence, how your attitude got read as confidence or arrogance by the adjudicators, how much they know about the issue, etc.) so you probably won't always do better and better. But that doesn't mean you are not improving as a debater.

Have realistic expectations about your performance and accept the fact that you can't control every aspect of it. This doesn't mean you shouldn't prepare! Going to training sessions is very important (especially if they are in English), talking to other debaters helps a lot, asking adjudicators for personalized feedback is essential. Reading newspapers and international magazines before the tournament is always a good way to stay up-to-date; discussing issues with your partner and preparing motions and case files together is also great. In addition, recording, listening, and adjudicating yourself can help you. If language is an issue, as it will be for all ESL and EFL speakers to one degree or another, make sure you grab every chance to practice, read books, and listen to audiobooks in English, watch TV series without subtitles, serve as a mentor to an exchange student at your university, Skype with your foreign friends, etc.

After you do these things, you should trust in yourself and in your own abilities, and take advantage of the amazing opportunities for personal growth that lie in a tournament. Once you come back home, your knowledge and experience will then be crucial to the development of your debate society.

So, regardless of your level of experience, register for the next big thing coming, prepare for it, and just go.

DOMESTIC TOURNAMENTS AND NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

We can't stress enough the absolute necessity of attending the national or regional circuit. It's very hard to thrive in the desert, as it is very hard to start a debate club in an area that doesn't have debate societies.

After you've established yourself and created awareness and support for debating activities in your University, or in the area around you, you might be tempted to stay in this oasis. Don't. The problem with an oasis is that not only can't it sustain the most complex forms of life but also that a single storm can wipe it out. A debate society that isolates itself from the world will inevitably never reach its full potential, will suffer from heavy brain drain, and could end very quickly with a just a couple of bad leaders in a row.

What do we mean by "circuit"? We refer to a network of debate societies that interact with each in an integrated way, benefiting all those involved, while maintaining significant autonomy in internal affairs; societies that work in circuit coordinate their efforts and create synergies. As in wolf packs, there might be some competition within the group, but it is always in a context of collaboration.

A national circuit allows you to specialize, focusing on the kind of activities you are really good at organizing and where you can deliver great quality at a great price, and participate in activities others organize for you at similar advantageous conditions. One city may have low-cost flights, which are important in hosting a big international open, another may have more expensive flights but provide bigger hotels and larger universities to host a Euros, and a smaller city might be ideal to organize a national debate academy because it has cheaper hotels. Different cities also have different high and low seasons, so you can try to coordinate who organizes what and when so you can have a diverse range of events nearby, all year long, at the lowest possible price. Plus, you can organize larger activities than you ever could if you were working alone by reaching out to other debating societies for people to adjudicate or volunteer.

With a circuit, your debaters can get the experience of an international competition for a fraction of the price. One of the biggest advantages of having other societies close by is that you don't have to organize events all the time to have regular activities for your debaters. If you have 10 debate societies in a 300 kilometer radius and each one organizes just one competition a year, you don't need a lot of money to have your debaters compete each month. They would have a huge edge over debaters who compete just once or twice a year in big tournaments. A healthy regular competition between domestic societies can foster excellence.

Participating in a national circuit has advantages for your group beyond giving your debaters experience. It's easier to create value for national sponsors when you offer them exposure in a national context. You can also get your university more interested in debating if your debate society helps attract students that the university finds desirable. Most universities compete nationally, and so they are interested in showing that they are good in a national comparison.

Working in a circuit enables you to share equipment, know-how, and human resources. Maybe another debate society has a couple of extra computers, maybe they know how to organize an IV and have some cool international contacts, maybe they have a good trainer you would like to invite for a workshop.

You will end up seeing people in your circuit a lot and you will forge friendships with some of them. Personally this is valuable, of course, but institutionally it's also very good to know that even if you screw up in organizing an event, you still don't have to cancel it because you have debater friends across the country you can rely on.

A domestic circuit is your best insurance in case something goes wrong. The fact that somewhere nearby another society is thriving

will help get people interested in your group, and it's a lot easier to get help from experienced trainers, judges, organizers, and debaters when they don't have to take holidays to meet you, you don't have to pay for expensive flights, they speak the same language you and those around you do, and they are bound to you in some kind of weird cultural moral tie that makes us care more for what's near and looks familiar.

If you can create a context in which collaboration and competition exist among societies, reinforcing the best in each and creating a debating culture throughout the land, there's a good chance it becomes self-sustainable.

ORGANIZING TOURNAMENTS AND STUFF

Debating activities don't all have to look alike. In fact, it's good to have different programs for different people with different tastes, so that everyone can find something they love. Some people would like to combine debating with nightlife (imagine an Ibiza IV with no morning rounds!), others with cultural visits to historical sights (imagine a debate workshop in Rome, with a whole day of guided tours in small groups throughout the city), or with ski and snow (book me for Kitzbühel Debate Academy!). It's nice to live in a world with diversity, where you have the "Crazy IV" (Strathclyde University) with Harry Potter motions.

CONCLUSION

We presented much of what we have learned in the past few years in the hope some of it might be useful to someone, someday, somehow. We hope we have given you some ideas that will help move your project forward, and we expect that you might contribute to this guide as well. As we've said already, we would like this guide to be a dynamic repository of debate organizing know-how, so please feel free to send us any comments, critiques, ideas, and suggestions you might see fit to.

Starting and running a debate society is an amazing adventure that will lead you to amazing people with great ideas and wonderful experiences in beautiful places. You will face many obstacles, but it might shape your community for the best and it will definitely shape you.

Just don't forget to make it fun.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ary Ferreira da Cunha was the founding president of the University of Porto Debate Society, and of the Portuguese National University Debate Council; as well as Vice-President of the European University Debate Council. As a debater, domestically, he won three competitions and reached the final of one more; internationally, he reached the ESL Final of the Oxford IV ('12), and was EFL World Champion ('13), as well as best EFL Speaker in the tournament, and in the Final. As an adjudicator, he was CA of several domestic competitions, including the two national tournaments ('12-'13), and judged in the ESL Semi-Final at the Cambridge IV ('12). Ary is a doctoral student at the University of Porto, and a researcher and the Centre for Legal and Economic Research (CIJE), at the Faculty of Law. He has a BA in Law ('10), and an MA in Legal and Economic Studies ('12), with a dissertation on Anti-Corruption Public Policy. He was also visiting doctoral student at the University of Oxford ('12).