

## REFLECTIONS ON THE 1991 CEDA ASSESSMENT CONFERENCE

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In August, 1991, 65 members of the CEDA community met in St. Paul, Minnesota to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the founding of CEDA and to discuss the future of CEDA. The proceedings of this conference will be published in the Spring of 1992 with David Thomas of the University of Richmond serving as editor. These proceedings will be available from Mike Bartanen, the executive secretary of CEDA. The meeting was an enjoyable one; Scott Nobles, the local host, made the meeting very enjoyable, and a sense of camaraderie among the participants developed over the course of the meeting.

Twenty years ago, few would have predicted that CEDA would grow from being a temporary regional organization to the largest college debate organization in the country. While the membership seems to be stabilizing, the organization has become secure in its position as a leader in the forensics community.

The CEDA assessment convention illustrated many of the reasons for CEDA's growth. While the individuals at the conference all emphasized the importance of education as a goal of academic debate, the individuals at the conference all demonstrated tolerance toward different ways of achieving these goals. While the deliberations demonstrated that members of CEDA may disagree on a number of items, they also agree on a number of goals. Even in its worst form, debate is still the best activity for teaching critical thinking and argument available to our students. Our debates about the nature of debate focus on how to improve the activity; in our disagreement we need to remember that debate will remain a viable activity regardless of how our disputes are resolved.

Many of the issues raised at the conference are addressed in this year's CEDA Yearbook. The article by Loge focuses on the absence of minorities in our activity, and suggests ways to address this problem. The study by Rogers provides some of the data called for in one of the resolutions about the characteristics of CEDA debate programs. Colbert's article provides data that may assist in the debate over the delivery rates in CEDA debate rounds. These issues are likely to be discussed by other essays and studies in future yearbooks.

The conference was interesting, both in what was passed and in what was not passed by the assembly. For example, a resolution that suggested that CEDA should debate resolutions with value implications was soundly debated, emphasizing that CEDA need not be restricted to value resolutions in the future. One paper suggested that there was no difference between value and policy resolutions; many delegates argued that we should debate policy resolutions, or at least make policy resolutions available to individual tournaments.

There was some discussion of the desirability of shortening the debate season, but the delegates found it difficult to agree on specific ways to shorten the season. Some delegates argued that a shorter season decreased the individual choice of directors; those wishing to have a shorter season could simply choose to refuse to attend tournaments. Others argued a shorter season would simply compact the season, eliminating any hope for taking a week off during the season. Releasing the topic later in September would harm Fall debate classes, and some programs may lose debaters in the fall who might be disillusioned since there was no topic to debate; these debaters may be involved in other activities when the topic finally comes out. Some proposals might create too short of a season. The condensed season may make it harder for lower teams to travel since the top teams would often travel every weekend during the shorter season. A Fall season that begins in October, for example, may end before Thanksgiving at some schools (because of final examinations), and once a weekend for the SCA convention is subtracted, the season may be only three or four weekends long. The proposal with the most support would create a break in the season from Thanksgiving to Christmas, which would probably be more relaxing for coaches than adding a month to the summer vacation.

The question facing the community now is where do we go now? The conference should not be seen as an end in itself; rather it can change CEDA only if the resolutions are carried out. By itself, the votes taken at the conference do nothing. Past conferences such as the 1974 Sedalia conference and the Northwestern Conference on the state of Forensics had uneven effects on the community. Some documents and resolutions were influential in shaping forensics in the aftermath of the conference. In other cases, the recommendations were ignored and had no influence on the forensics community.

I would strongly recommend that members of CEDA read the proceedings and think about the resolutions. Many resolutions raise important issues about the goals of the organization and the nature of debate. These recommendations may generate ideas; to be effective these ideas need to be implemented.

Those that did not attend the meeting may feel left out of the deliberation. My advice to these people is to get involved with the activity. The program planners at the regional and national Speech Conventions often go begging for papers; submitting papers may enable individuals to get their ideas out (and the process of writing, researching, and presenting a paper may force individuals to refine their views). Money can often be found to attend conferences from a host department or school (especially if you are presenting a paper). The CEDA yearbook can always use well thought out papers on the issues raised by the conference. In addition, many changes in the CEDA organization can be made at the local or regional level. It may take time to see how the organization works and to get to know people, but the result of that effort can be immense - both personally and to the organization. I strongly encourage readers to become more actively involved in the CEDA organization.