

A Survey of Top CEDA Programs--1989-90

THOMAS L. MURPHY

What characterizes a winning CEDA program? While it is easy to make generalizations about successful programs ("They have a larger budget," "They offer more scholarships," and so on), there is little data to support any claims. Recent studies have identified characteristics of forensics programs in general and program directors (Murphy & Ferri; Hunt; Porter). With the exception of one study (Watt), which was published after the data was gathered for this study, absent are descriptive studies of top CEDA programs.

As the largest intercollegiate debate organization in the United States, CEDA serves as a model debate organization for other organizations and, most likely, institutions considering or developing intercollegiate debate programs. Developing debate programs, while not incredibly complicated, requires some external guidance. The purpose of this study is to provide such guidance by identifying key characteristics of top CEDA programs.

Specifically, this study investigates characteristics of programs ranked in CEDA's top fifty for 1989-90. The top fifty were chosen because, at some point, CEDA made a decision to recognize those programs by listing them in the periodical "CEDA Executive Secretary Reports." A second basis for choosing the top fifty is that, when the membership of CEDA is combined with the large number of schools participating in CEDA but not paying membership dues, the top fifty represent approximately the top ten to twenty percent of schools participating in CEDA.

Review of Literature

The only reported study of top-fifty CEDA programs was done by Bill Watt of Ft. Hayes State University during an overlapping time period. Watt asked similar questions of top-fifty schools "as a pilot study in order to develop a data base for future investigations concerning success in CEDA debate" (1). Generating a response rate of 51 percent, Watt initially asked questions concerning the composition of programs: the number of regularly active debaters on the squad; classification of debaters; amount of

Thomas Murphy is assistant professor and Assistant Director of Forensics at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

experience of debaters; and gender of debaters. Watt's next items dealt with program demographics: the number of tournaments attended and current budgets and sources of funding. Finally, he generated information concerning size of and degrees held by the coaching staff. While specific comparisons are made below, Watt concluded that "some programs with larger numbers of debaters may be more likely to achieve a national ranking"; "squads that participate in greater numbers of tournaments may have an increased likelihood of achieving a higher national ranking"; and travel to a large number of tournaments requires a substantial budget (10).

Steven Hunt of Lewis and Clark College did a pseudo-longitudinal¹ study of the top-fifty forensics programs from 1977-1987. Rather than the top-fifty schools from a particular type of competition, Hunt selected schools subjectively on the basis of success in debate and individual-event competition on a variety of levels. Surveys were mailed to the schools in 1977, 1983, and 1987 asking questions about program staffing, student participation, financial aid, and budgeting.

While Watt's study attempted to correlate final ranking with different variable, this study attempts to generate descriptive characteristics about top-fifty programs. In that respect, it differs also from Hunt's holistic approach to describing top forensics program in a variety of activities (NDT, CEDA, individual events). While the population studied by Hunt varies greatly from this study, some of his findings make interesting comparisons. As with the Watt study, specific comparisons will be made in the discussion section below.

Research Questions

Most debate programs can be separated into three essential components: (1) staffing, (2) budgeting, and (3) participation. Staffing is defined as the "person power" required for the operation of the program. Staffing likely includes a program director, usually called the "Director of Debate" or "Director of Forensics," occasionally an assistant program director, graduate student assistants, and student assistants employed under the College Work Study Program or with departmental funds. To identify this aspect of top-fifty CEDA programs, the first research question is:

RQ1: How are top CEDA programs staffed?

¹ Instead of using the same survey population over the chosen time period, Hunt selected different schools for each of the three periods. His survey results should be interpreted in light of this deviation.

The second program component, budgeting, is defined as the amount of money required for the operation of a debate program. Most institutions finance their debate programs in three areas. First, monies are allocated for student and staff travel to debate tournaments. Second, monies are allocated for the salaries of staff members. Finally, some schools allocate monies for student financial aid most likely in the form of debate scholarships. To identify this aspect of top-fifty CEDA programs, the second research question is:

RQ2: How are top CEDA programs budgeted?

The final program component, participation, refers to the actual operation of the program. This includes how frequently the program travels to debate tournaments, which tournaments the program attends, and how many students are involved in the program. To identify this aspect of top-fifty CEDA programs, the final research question is:

RQ3: What are the participation patterns of top CEDA programs?

Method

A survey questionnaire was developed and mailed in May, 1990, to the "CEDA Top-fifty" programs for 1989-90. The questionnaire items related to program staffing, budgeting, and participation. Thirty-three usable responses were received for a return rate of 66 percent. This compares favorably to the return rate of 51 percent for Watt's recent study of the same population. The returned surveys were coded and descriptive statistics were tabulated using the ABSTAT program (Rel. 6.02).

Results

RQ1: How are top CEDA programs staffed?

Survey items 1-3 inquired about debate program staffing at the respondent's institution. For survey item 1, the responses for total staff ranged from 1 to 10. The mean of total staffing for programs in 1989-90 (director, assistants, graduate students, work study) is 3.27 (n=33). The largest number of programs, however, reported two staff members (n=9, 27.3%).

Table 1
Total Staff Frequencies

# staff	n	%
1	7	21.2
2	9	27.3
3	5	15.2
4	6	18.2
5+	6	18.2

Survey item 2 asked about the status of the program director position. Eighteen of the 33 responses indicated that the director position is tenure-track (54.5%). The second most frequent response was a non-tenure track position, with 9 respondents reporting (27.3%).

Table 2
Director Position Frequencies

position status	n	%
Tenure-Track	18	54.5
Non-Tenure	9	27.3
Graduate Assistant	2	6.1
Part-Time	1	3.0
Administrative	3	9.1

Survey item 3 asked respondents how many graduate student assistants worked with their debate programs in 1989-90. For all programs, the average number of graduate assistants was 1.3. This figure is somewhat misleading, however, because for the number of programs reporting any graduate assistants (n=16, 48.5%), the mean jumps to 2.69.

Table 3
Graduate Assistant Frequencies

# GAs	n	%
0	17	51.5
1	5	15.2
2	3	9.1
3	5	15.2
4+	1	3.0

RQ2: How are top CEDA programs budgeted?

Survey items 4-7 dealt with three holistic aspects of program budgets. Survey item 4 inquired about the total travel budget for 1989-90. Program budgets ranged from a low of \$6000 to a high of \$70,000. The mean for this item is \$24,312.50 (n=32).

Table 4
Travel Budget Frequencies

budget range	n	%
\$9,999 & under	3	9.4
\$10,000-19,999	10	31.3
\$20,000-29,999	8	25.0
\$30,000-39,999	8	25.0
\$40,000 & over	3	9.4

The next survey items, 5-6, investigated the amount and extent of financial aid provided to students for their participation in debate programs. Only 15 programs (45.5%) reported offering any financial aid in 1989-90 with the mean for those programs of 6.80 students receiving aid. Again, the mean of 3.09 students receiving financial aid

per program (n=33) is misleading for item 5. Most programs (n=18, 54.5%) reported that no students received financial assistance in 1989-90.

The final budget item, 7, asked respondents what the salary of the program director was in 1989-90. The average salary for all directors (n=30) is \$28,279.70.

Table 5
Salary Mean by Position Status

position status	n	mean
Tenure Track	16	34,087.00
Non-Tenure Track	8	25,250.00
Graduate Assistant	2	8,500.00
Part-Time	1	10,000.00
Administrative	3	24,666.67

RQ3: What are the participation patterns of top CEDA programs?

The final series of survey items, 8-12, inquired about program participation. Item 8 asked respondents to indicate the activities their program supported. In addition to participation in CEDA, 22 respondents indicated participation in individual events (66.7%), 1 respondent indicated participation in NDT debate (3.0%), and 12 respondents indicated participation in some type of on-campus debates (36.4%).

Item 9 asked how many CEDA-sanctioned tournaments the program attended in 1989-90. Of the 30 programs reporting, the average number of tournaments attended is 15.40. Again, the range was extreme with reports from 7 to 25.

Table 6
Tournament Frequencies

# tourn	n	%
0-5	0	0.0
6-10	5	16.7
11-15	11	36.7
16-20	11	36.7
21-25	3	10.0

Items 10-11 asked about participation in debate and individual events. Respondents reported an average of 10.60 (n=33) students participated in more than six debate tournaments in 1989-90, and an average of 4.55 students participated in more than six individual events tournaments in 1989-90. While 66.7 percent (n=22) of the programs surveyed reported participation in any individual events, only 54.5 percent (n=18) reported individual-event students participating in 6 or more tournaments.

Table 7
Participation Frequencies

# students	debate		IE	
	n	%	n	%
0-5	3	9.1	23	69.7
6-10	19	57.6	6	18.2
11-15	6	18.2	2	6.1
16-20	1	3.0	1	3.0
21-25	3	9.1	0	0.0
26+	1	3.0	1	3.0

The final survey item, 12, asked respondents to list the tournaments (going to octafinals or better in open division) they attended in 1989-90. Table 8 indicates those tournaments attended most frequently by top-fifty programs; the most attended tournaments were the National CEDA Tournament, attended by 29 respondents (87.8%), and the Great Salt Lake Invitational at the University of Utah, which 14 respondents attended (42.4%).

Table 8
Specific Tournament Frequencies

tournament/date	n	% att
National CEDA, Mar.3-Apr.2	29	87.8
Utah, Jan.20-22	14	42.4
Emory, Sept.29-Oct.1	13	39.4
Southern Illinois, Feb.2-4	11	33.3
Kansas, Feb.24-26	11	33.3
Central State, Nov. 10-11	10	30.3
Southwest Missouri, Oct.21-22	9	27.3
Missouri-Kansas City, Feb.10-11	9	27.3
Missouri-St.Louis, Oct.7-8	9	27.3
DSR-TKA National, Mar.9-12	8	24.2

Discussion

Structure of Top CEDA Debate Programs

The results of this survey indicate that programs are structured in one of two ways: First are the small programs with a single director and no graduate assistants (n=7, 21.2%) or a director plus another staff member without graduate assistants (n=9, 27.3%). This type of structure accounted for roughly 48.5 percent of the sample (n=16). The second type of program structure is the large program with several staff members and graduate assistants. For programs with graduate assistants, for example,

the average number of total staff was 4.53 (n=17) while programs without graduate assistants averaged 1.94 (n=16) total staff members.

With respect to the status of the program director, most directors are in tenure-track positions (n=18, 54.5%). While this percentage may seem high, it is lower than the 77 percent reported by Murphy and Ferri for all forensics programs and 73 percent reported by Porter for AFA NIET/NDT programs. Non-tenure-track positions accounted for 27.3 percent (n=9) of the respondents. This compares to 14 percent reported by Murphy and Ferri and 25 percent in the Porter survey.

While speculation about the reasons for these differences is beyond the scope of this study, this finding might be accounted for by the recency of CEDAs. During the largest period of growth in CEDAs, many established programs remained with NDT. In addition, a number of schools establishing CEDAs programs did so on a "low budget" basis in response to the larger structure of many NDT programs.

Finally, by way of comparison with Watt, the average total staff in this study was 3.27 (n=33) while his figure, 2.46 (n=26), was much lower. This probably can be accounted for by a less specific question item in Watt's instrument which excluded graduate assistants or work study students.² Likewise, while not as low as Watt's figure, the means for total staffing found by Hunt for top forensics programs were also lower: 2.7 in 1977, 2.99 in 1983, and 3.0 in 1987 (p.1315). This may indicate a trend toward greater staffing of top-fifty CEDAs programs. While this survey did not investigate the actual time commitment of staff members (such as release time), these questions should be addressed in future research.

Financing Top CEDAs Debate Programs

The top-fifty CEDAs debate programs, administratively speaking, are not inexpensive. The cumulative travel budgets of the programs reporting (n=32) totaled well over \$500,000. The mean travel budget for all programs, \$24,312.50, is a much higher figure than reported in any recent survey of this type. Watt's study, for example, reported an average budget of \$18,895.65 for top 50 programs in 1988-89 (n=23). This is probably an indication that travel costs are increasing, especially given that programs are attending an average of 15.40 tournaments. While the greatest number of programs have a travel budget between \$10,000-19,999 (n=10, 31.3%), over 50 percent of the

² This figure and others from Watt's study are my calculations from his frequency tables.

programs reporting have a budget higher than \$20,000 (n=19, 59.4%). This finding presents an interesting contrast with Hunt's study, which found most schools were budgeted between \$15,000 and \$32,000 (n=38).

The issue of financial aid for student participation provided the most varied results. Only 15 programs reported any students on financial aid (45.5%) with the average amount of aid ranging from \$500 to \$15,000 per student. Given that slightly over half of the programs in the top fifty reported zero students receiving aid (n=18, 54.5%), it might be concluded that (1) scholarships are not an absolute prerequisite for success, or (2) respondents were apprehensive about responding to this particular item.

Student Participation in Top CEDAs Programs

Perhaps the most surprising finding regarding top CEDAs programs is that, while 66.7 percent reported participation in individual events (n=22), a large number reported that they did not participate in individual events at all (n=11, 33.3%). In addition, 15 programs reported zero students in individual events traveled to 6 or more tournaments in 1989-1990 (45.5%). Only one respondent reported participation in NDT debate (3.0%). This may be an indication that some top CEDAs programs consider a singular focus to be a key to success.

Another interesting facet of participation is the amount of participation relative to the number of staff members. While respondents reported an average of 10.61 debate students attending six or more tournaments (the AFA standard of eligibility) and 4.55 individual events students attending the same, these figures differ dramatically depending upon the staffing of the program.

Table 9
Average Participation by Staff Size

# staff	n	\bar{x} debate	\bar{x} IE
1	7	10.71	2.43
2	9	7.89	4.89
3	5	6.40	4.60
4	6	12.17	3.50
5+	6	16.50	7.50

Clearly, the amount of participation increases as the staff size increases. Given that a single staff member can coach a limited number of students, this finding makes sense.

This might suggest that programs with a single director should limit themselves to CEDA, or a limited number of individual events students, if they desire success. On the other hand, programs with larger staff sizes can accommodate debate and individual events. This finding might also suggest a growing elitism within CEDA. Table 5 indicates that the greatest number of top CEDA programs travel 6-10 debate students (n=19, 57.6%) while an even greater number travel 0 to 5 individual events students (n=23, 69.7%).

These figures compare interestingly to the Watt study, which found an average of 14.27 students participating in top-fifty programs (n=26). While Watt concludes that "some programs with larger numbers of debaters may be more likely to achieve a national ranking" (10), this study seems to indicate the opposite, or at least that amount of participation is more dependent on staff size. As with the staffing variable, it is unclear how Watt defined "regularly active debater."

The participation figures generated by this study are especially dramatic when compared to Hunt's study of top-fifty programs. From 1977-1987, programs claimed averages of over 30 students per year participating in forensics activities (35.0 in 1977, 31.0 in 1983, 30-31 in 1987) (20). During the same period, most squads averaged 16-19 total debaters (19.0 in 1977, 17.0 in 1983, 16.0 in 1987) (20-22). The number of debaters attending 5 or more tournaments dropped from 14 in 1977 to 12 in 1983 and 1987 (20-22). Given that most CEDA programs are actively traveling less than 10 students (n=22, 66.7%), debate participation may be experiencing a serious decline.

The final result worth discussion concerns where top CEDA programs are attending tournaments.³ The long-held perception that CEDA has become a "midwestern" activity appears to be true; at least, in the sense that top-fifty programs are choosing to travel to midwestern tournaments. While the second most frequently mentioned tournament is in the western United States (Great Salt Lake at the University of Utah, attended by 42.4% of the respondents, n=14) and the third in the southeastern United States (Peachtree Debates at Emory University, attended by 39.4% of the respondents, n=13), seven of the top ten tournaments attended in 1989-90 were in the midwest (excluding the National CEDA Tournament); six were located in CEDA's South Central Region.

³ It should also be noted that, while not discussed here, the Watt study found that top-fifty programs attended 15.16 tournaments in 1987-88 (n=25), compared with 15.40 in the present study.

This certainly casts doubt on the finding of an earlier study (Wood 1989) indicating a lack of regional bias in CEDA (48).⁴ Given that the past two champions of the National CEDA Tournament are from CEDA's South Central region there appears to be growing evidence of a strong midwestern influence in CEDA.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to identify characteristics unique to top CEDA programs. A questionnaire was mailed to the "CEDA Top Fifty" for 1989-90 asking about program staffing, budgeting, and participation. Results of the survey indicated noticeable patterns in the structure of top CEDA programs and tournament travel.

Works Cited

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⁴ Hunt noted this shift in his research of top forensics programs: "CEDA power is based mostly in the West but is shifting toward the Midwest" (11).