

An Answer to the Call for Experimentation by the CEDA Assessment Conference: A Descriptive Study of a Peer-Judged Round

E. SAM COX AND W. CLIFTON ADAMS

At CEDA's 20th Year Assessment Conference in St. Paul, Minnesota, the collective body endorsed several resolutions that called for experimentation with alternative audience simulations. For instance, those in attendance passed two resolutions submitted by the Educational Values Task Force: 1) "CEDA should encourage tournament directors to experiment with alternate judging formats which encourage greater participation and interaction by the judge" and 2) "CEDA tournament directors should experiment with formats that expand judging pools and allow greater diversity in the audiences/points of view faced by contestants." Similarly, the conference approved the Philosophy and Resolution Task Force's resolution, "CEDA should study incentives for experimental formats including audience-centered activities."

These proposals should not be seen as capricious requests for experimentation. Instead they are best viewed as potential solutions supported by a majority of the people at the St. Paul conference following substantive discussions. The passage of these resolutions reflects the existence of a fairly unified *philosophical posture* espoused by the majority of the participants. Indeed, these resolutions "are not novel but, rather, persistent oft-repeated calls for change that have apparently been ignored by participants in the activity for nearly three quarters of a century" (Horn and Underberg 5).

This article describes a response to the Assessment Conference, specifically to two of the substantive issues considered at St. Paul: 1) the accessibility of academic debate for all segments of the diverse student population; and 2) the need to undergird the activity with rhetorical principles. These issues lead to the notion of debate in a public arena and our simulation of the public arena in one round of academic debate by use of peer judges.

E. Sam Cox is Associate Professor and Director of Forensics at Central Missouri State University and W. Clifton Adams is Professor at Central Missouri State University in Warrensburg, Missouri. The authors would like to acknowledge Majid Saadatmanesh for his assistance with the computer programming; Kendall Phillips for significant help in achieving the peer-judged round; Doug Duke and Gina Lane for handling the unique constraints necessary to tabulate the round; and the reviewers and editor who provided several beneficial suggestions. Portions of this article were presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention in Chicago in November, 1992.

Two Substantive Issues

The Assessment Conference called for changes to make CEDA more accessible to everyone in the academic community. For example, the Debate Educator Task Force asked CEDA to "encourage the recruitment and retention of traditionally under-represented minorities as debaters and educators." Also passed was a resolution stating, "CEDA should increase participation by women and/or minorities as debaters, judges, coaches, and in leadership positions in the forensics community," which was proposed by the Value/Policy Task Force.

These resolutions reflect the "oft-repeated call for change." As early as the Sedalia Conference, leaders in academic debate recognized the need "to encourage the participation of minorities in forensics activities" (McBath, *Forensics* 12). At the Evanston Conference, the American Forensics Association was encouraged to "establish a committee given the specific charge to increase and strengthen forensic participation by identifying ethnic, racial, gender, and handicap barriers which may currently inhibit student participation" (Ziegelmueller and Parson 43).

Seventeen years after the Sedalia Conference, researchers verified that academic debate remained an exclusive activity. Loge concluded that "low levels of black participation in CEDA is a problem, the remaining issue is how to solve it" (83). Stepp presented data on behalf of the CEDA Commission on Women and Minorities which showed clearly that CEDA tournaments are white-male-dominated activities ("White" 1-2). Others have supplied verification of the exclusive nature of participation in debate (Griffin and Raider; Harris and Boone; Logue, "Examination"; Logue, "Male/Female"; Logue, "Minority"; Medcalf; Stepp, *Politically*). Finally, Simerly, Biles and Scott confirmed that "little has been done to remedy the underrepresentation of minorities in intercollegiate debate" (32).

The problem of academic debate's exclusivity extends beyond the issue of representativeness. Representativeness focuses on the end product. A deeper problem may be the artificiality that permeates the activity and flavors the process. As noted by Frank, "the debate tournament has been 'cultivated and maintained for its own sake'; novice debaters must learn the 'mysteries' of academic debate if they are to achieve competitive success" (6). Horn and Underberg provided some understanding of this polluted process in their discussion of jargon, delivery and "gamesmanship designed to avoid clash (trick cases, the spread, etc.)" (23-28). Additionally, DeMougeot identified how mutual preference selection of judges has produced "a strange world somewhat akin to Alice's Wonderland" (135). In a similar manner, McGough likened the contest of debate to the fantasy world of "Dungeons and Dragons" (191). These individuals and others (Brownlee and Woolsey; Decker and Morello; Friedley; Henderson; Swinney;

Zeuschner) suggest that debate has created norms which not only repel others but also have no similarity to everyday occurrences. When associated with artificiality, the diversity issue compliments other resolutions passed at St. Paul asking that pedagogically relevant practices of the rhetorical tradition be returned to debate. One example: "That CEDA debate competition should be taught and managed as an educationally accountable activity rooted in critical thinking and the rhetorical tradition. As such, student participants should have instruction and experience in: invention of argument, organization of argument, appropriate style for a variety of audiences, preparation for competition, and presentation." Ideas embedded in other resolutions which also could be labeled as part of the rhetorical tradition include: "an audience-centered format"; "that education is the primary goal of CEDA rounds"; "actively discouraging the use of inhumane and incomprehensible delivery and verbal aggression"; "discouraging tag-team tactics"; and "qualifying of sources."

Again, the substance of these resolutions was not new. The Sedalia Conference passed several resolutions intended to make forensics more socially relevant by training students to analyze controversial issues and present positions to various audiences. For instance: "Forensics should develop students' communicative abilities, especially the ability to analyze controversies, select and evaluate evidence, construct and refute arguments, and understand and use the values of the audiences as warrants for belief" (McBath, *Forensics* 16). Then, "ten years later, the Evanston conferees reaffirmed the primacy of communication in forensics, sharply criticizing tournament practices that subvert the essential character of the activity" (McBath, "Rationale" 8).

In spite of resolutions from three national conferences, academic debate continues to drift away from practices that simulate speaker-audience situations (see Horn and Underberg). Sillars and Zarefsky provide a rationale for this drift. They note that forensics has followed the field of speech communication in moving away from public speaking as the paradigm for communication (86). While the paradigm of communication has expanded, it has not abandoned rhetorical principles as its foundation (Brockriede; Colbert and Biggers; Ehninger and Brockriede; Horn and Underberg; Howe; Kully; Matlon and Keele; McGlone; Mills). As Brockriede suggests, public speaking is a part of "the total process of people communicating arguments, a process that requires both dialectical and rhetorical dimensions" (95).

Regrettably, current practice has often taken debate beyond any paradigm of communication. We must ask why debate practice continues to depart from the expectations established by three national conferences. One possibility is that many practitioners do not accept the *philosophical posture* espoused within the resolutions passed by these conferences. Wood illustrates the extent to which the position has been rejected in quoting one judging philosophy statement: "[T]here are few things that I enjoy

more—since I can no longer debate—than sitting on a panel and seeing a 'slow' judge ignored and spewed out of the round" (72). While the language of this quotation focuses on speed, its tone attacks the basic principles of rhetoric. Obviously, there is at least one philosophical position in opposition to the one expressed at St. Paul.

Another explanation for why practice has not followed the *philosophical posture* endorsed by sponsoring organizations is that the definition of debate has lost its rhetorical linkage. We propose that the best focus for the definition of debate be centered on the term *reasoned communication*. The specific coupling of these words is intentional. We argue that "communication" is the noun that should govern debate while "reason" is the adjective that qualifies the kind of communication to be practiced in a debate round. In other words, debate should not be primarily an exercise in logic but should be preeminently a communication event. This analysis is in concert with Ehninger and Brockriede (6-7). As such, debate becomes an activity which transpires in the public arena.

Debate as a Model of the Public Arena

Both exclusivity and the departure from the rhetorical tradition are symptomatic of academic debate's loss of its appropriate model—the public arena. For an arena to be public, there must be free access to and open participation in the communication regarding social issues. Given these characteristics, communicators must be sensitive to sound rhetorical principles, since advocates are accountable to diverse publics. Being accountable to diverse publics is similar to the need to adjust to the "universal audience" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca). To develop this position we will reflect on the public arena's salient characteristics and relationship to debate.

Public Arena's Characteristics

A determining quality of the public arena is its openness (*Black's Law Dictionary* 1227; Ehninger and Brockriede 13; Goffman 9; Hart, Friedrich and Brooks 23-25; Schmidt and Graham 1-42). As Goodnight explained: "While public discourse makes open and common collective preference, it also provides an arena where interests conduct controversy and openly struggle for power" ("Public" 429). Similarly, Hauser defined necessary conditions of the public sphere: "It must be accessible to all citizens. Whenever individuals or groups are denied the opportunity to participate actively in discussions that affect their lives, they are left to the mercy of special interests and institutional forces" (438-39).

Along with the accessibility within the public arena comes the reality that prudent communicators will be responsible and ethical (Foss, Foss and Trapp 252-63; Golden, Berquist and Colman 438; Goodnight, "Public" 430-31; Gronbeck 13; Nilsen; Rodger; Wallace 6-9). Schmidt and Graham capulize the reason that practitioners within the public arena must be concerned with the integrity of their argumentation: "This process is also irreversible and nonrepeatable. Once you have said something, you cannot take it back. It is out there; it has been received. Consequently, you must be particularly thoughtful and prudent when talking to the public" (44). It is within the public sphere then that rhetorical principles are most valid, because within this sphere, decisions are made based on the soundness of arguments presented (Goodnight, "Personal" 219-22).

Public Arena and Debate

Debate is an essential part of decision making within the public arena. For example, Ehninger and Brockriede describe debate "as an instrument for settling differences and making collective decisions *critically*" (16). Ziegelmuller, Kay and Dause state: "The notion of full and free public debate on the vital issues facing society is deeply rooted in the documents and ideas comprising the American conscience" (4). Freeley concurs: "We need debate not only in the legislative assembly and the court room but in all areas of human activity, since most of our liberties are directly or indirectly dependent on debate" (5). Accordingly, academic debate, in order to serve as a laboratory to train for participation in the democratic process, should be modeled after the public arena.

Using Peer Judges to Approximate the Public Arena

Admittedly, academic debate does not take place in a public arena. Issues are not debated before a tribunal which makes the actual decisions. Instead, academic debate should function as a laboratory which models the public arena. Or, given the problem with laboratory analogy addressed by Thomas and by Aden, a *simulation* needs to be created for competitive debate. As early as 1916 Davis stated: "Debating, according to this conception, is an approximation of actual conditions, or 'real life'" (173). Again in 1964, Mills recognized that "school debate" was structured to simulate political, judicial, philosophical and legislative debates (33).

Traditionally, then, the debate arena was not seen as a micro reality; that view is of more recent origin. The acceptance by some of academic debate as a micro reality has hurt the case for the educational benefits of debate because generalizability is so limited.

Thus, the debate-as-reality position has made the purely-a-game approach to debate seem the more reasonable view. Many practitioners seem to prefer the games-only approach over the *philosophical posture* advanced by the organization's leaders. Indeed, the games-only approach seems to have prevailing influence in current practice. Unfortunately, both the games-only and the micro-reality approaches generate the problems which necessitate the request for reform articulated at St. Paul.

If everyone could accept the contest as a simulation in which the ideal reality of the public arena is modeled, instruction in rhetorical principles would be retained without sacrificing the motivational aspects of competition. Wenzel's analysis of argumentation suggests this same model: "The discussants are in fact particular persons, but the critical procedure enjoins them to represent the idealized universal audience" (123-125).

By approximating the idealized universal audience, academic debate would reflect the vitality of the healthy public arena. Debate's artificiality would be attenuated and the girder of the rhetorical tradition refurbished. Such reasoning constituted the *philosophical posture* of the St. Paul conference and provides justification for experimentation with audiences.

Given the apparent acceptance of both the games-only and the micro-reality positions, a drastic alteration in current practice seems to be required for any hope of effecting a successful simulation of the public arena. This alteration would have to be sufficient to enable the participants to transcend their normal conceptual positions toward tournament debating. Only then might they be able to experience the contest in accordance with the characteristics of the public arena and see the event as advancing the resolutions passed at St. Paul.

To achieve this drastic alteration, a key possibility appeared to be the use of peer audiences (see Cox 154; Cox and Jensen; Cox and Phillips; Horn and Underberg 29-33; Jensen and Preston; McBath, *Forensics* 13-32; Swanson; Weiss). Peer audiences, drawn from the general undergraduate population, would seem to have the potential to provide the drastic alteration needed to affect the perceptions of members of the debate community, both debaters and their coaches. The central question of this research, then, is—would this experience prompt either coaches or debaters to see this alteration as advancing the resolutions?

Using undergraduates as audience or adjudicators provides an approximation of contrasting interests characteristic of the public arena. Undergraduates qualify as peers of debaters from the perspective of the public arena because they are part of the same social milieu which would be affected by policy decisions. Peers in this case are not limited to other debaters just as peers in the public arena are not limited to advocates who articulate opposing view points.

To generate data relevant to how the practitioners of debate would perceive the relationship between peer judging and the resolutions, the first round of the Missouri Mule Tournament used panels of undergraduates who were responsible, through a majority vote, for determining winners of the round. This round provided an experience which more closely simulated the public arena than normal CEDA rounds.

Assuming our interpretation of the *philosophical posture*, the use of peer judges should advance key resolutions from St. Paul. We would hope that the debate community would perceive that peer judging would advance many of the St. Paul resolutions. However, the values of the public arena are not widely accepted in academic debate (Horn and Underberg; Frank). Furthermore, despite three national conferences, the practice of tournament debating still does not embody a rhetorically sound *philosophical posture*. Given this history, we concluded that practitioners are unlikely to perceive peer judging as advancing the resolutions. Further, we reasoned that the more involved the individuals are in tournament debating, the less likely they would be to perceive modifications of audience formats as advancing the St. Paul resolutions. Based on this reasoning we advanced the following hypotheses for our study:

- 1) Experience in collegiate debate will be significantly related to the perception of extent to which peer judging advances the St. Paul resolutions;
- 2) Number of rounds of participation in collegiate debate will be significantly related to the perception of extent to which peer judging advances the St. Paul resolutions;
- 3) Success in collegiate debate will be significantly related to the perception of extent to which peer judging advances the St. Paul resolutions;
- 4) Number of rounds judged will be significantly related to the perception of extent to which peer judging advances the St. Paul resolutions;
- 5) Number of years of coaching experience will be significantly related to the perception of extent to which peer judging advances the St. Paul resolutions.

To test these hypotheses, we began with listings of the resolutions passed at St. Paul. From these resolutions, we selected the 14 which dealt with the two issues discussed earlier in this paper. We converted each resolution into an item appropriate for eliciting responses from the coaches and debaters. For example, the resolution: "Resolved: CEDA should increase participation by women and/or minorities as debaters" was converted into: "Rounds like this will increase the likelihood of participation by

women and/or minorities"; another resolution, "CEDA should study incentives for experimental formats including audience-centered activities," was reworded into: "Allowing students to decide this round is an incentive for an audience-centered format." To each of these 14 items was added a 5-point scale ranging from "much more than normal CEDA rounds" to "much less than normal CEDA rounds." These 14 items with the accompanying scales constituted the first section of the debaters questionnaire and the critics questionnaire. To the debaters questionnaire were added demographic questions pertinent to their experience, their participation, and their success in debate. To the critics questionnaire were added demographics relevant to their participation and experience in judging debate. The design of these instruments was such as to ask the debaters and critics to provide belief-oriented responses that represented their perceptions of the extent to which this particular round advanced the St. Paul resolutions (Fishbein and Ajzen 12).

During the first round of the Missouri Mule, 76 debaters presented their respective cases to panels, ranging in number from 7 to 15, of undergraduate students from general-education courses. Although in each of these debates a vote of the panel decided the winner, an expert critic provided comments for the debaters. At the end of the debate, a "foreman" distributed questionnaires to the debaters and the expert critics who responded using the 5-point scales. Usable responses were obtained from 65 debaters and 18 critics. The responses obtained on these 83 questionnaires provided the data for our analysis.

The 83 sets of responses were analyzed using the statistical procedure of factor analysis to ascertain which items were interrelated in a reliable manner. This procedure reveals which items cluster in a mathematically consistent manner (termed factors) and thus can be considered unified in a conceptual/theoretical sense. When items factor in ways which correspond to the theoretical constructs under consideration, support is generated for accepting the validity of the theoretical constructs.

The factors produced by this analysis determined which scales were summed to produce measures of the students and critics perceptions. The resulting scores then represented the extent to which participants perceived peer judging as advancing the St. Paul resolutions. To test Hypothesis 1, students with more than one year of collegiate debate experience were contrasted with those having less than one year. To test Hypothesis 2, debaters who participated in seven or more tournaments were compared with those who had competed in six or less. In testing Hypothesis 3, individuals who always advanced to elimination rounds were differentiated from those who rarely or never advanced. For Hypothesis 4, critics who judged at least 18 rounds were contrasted with those who judged 12 or less. Finally, in testing Hypothesis 5, responses from experts with at least three years experience were compared to those with less than three. To

determine significance in these cases, t-tests were calculated. For all calculations, a .05 significance level was accepted.

When the items representing the CEDA resolutions were factored, four factors emerged. Within these four, eleven items loaded clearly (see Table 1). Eight of these items, which established the first factor, reflected the unified *philosophical posture*, discussed early in the paper when we suggested the existence of a unifying orientation within the discussion at St. Paul; therefore it was labeled "Philosophical Posture." The remaining three items were tactics, sources, and judges' preferences, respectively.

Table 1—Factors Relevant to CEDA Resolutions

Measurement Items	Factor Loadings			
	Philosophical Posture	Tactics	Sources	Judges' Preference
Educational value	.777	.194	.006	.286
Tag-team tactics	.045	.873	.060	.015
Qualifying sources	.279	.082	.757	.150
Rhetorical tradition	.613	.330	-.247	-.119
Diversity of viewpoints	.591	.071	.278	.178
Audience-centered format	.755	.037	-.005	-.055
Judges preference	-.091	-.078	.115	.871
Participation by majority	.701	-.049	.312	.090
Ballot as educational tool	.850	-.002	.159	-.106
Education as primary goal	.845	.070	.081	.022
Encourages judge participation	.676	.277	-.120	.269

In terms of Hypothesis 1, experience affected perception of the extent to which peer judging contributed positively to Philosophical Posture. First-year debaters were more neutral (25.89), while their counterparts were more negative (20.33) on the question of whether the round advanced the core CEDA resolutions (see Table 2).

Table 2—T-tests for Debaters Based upon Experience

Philosophical Posture	N	Mean	SD	t	p
1st year	35	25.89	8.88	2.81	.0067
Others	27	20.33	6.70		
Tactics	N	Mean	SD	t	p
1st year	35	3.03	1.20	1.49	ns
Others	27	3.56	1.50		
Sources	N	Mean	SD	t	p
1st year	35	3.26	1.22	1.43	ns
Others	27	2.78	1.37		
Judges' Preference	N	Mean	SD	t	p
1st year	35	2.56	1.46	.43	ns
Others	27	2.40	1.53		

In the test of Hypothesis 2, students who went to six or less tournaments per semester had a more positive attitude (12.68) than those who attended seven or more (8.78; see Table 3).

For Hypothesis 3, debaters who rarely or never broke at tournaments had a significantly more positive view in terms of Philosophical Posture (27.84) than did those who often or always broke (22.22; see Table 4).

In terms of Philosophical Posture for Hypothesis 4, the critics were statistically differentiated based on the number of rounds judged per semester (see Table 5).

Table 3—T-tests for Debaters Based upon Participation

Philosophical Posture	N	Mean	SD	t	p
6 or less tournaments*	47	25.57	8.21	3.68	.0007
7 or more tournaments*	18	18.44	6.46		
Tag Team Tactics	N	Mean	SD	t	p
6 or less tournaments*	47	3.28	1.28	.274	ns
7 or more tournaments*	18	3.17	1.50		
Sources	N	Mean	SD	t	p
6 or less tournaments*	47	3.06	1.29	.171	ns
7 or more tournaments*	18	3.00	1.37		
Knowing the Judge's Preference	N	Mean	SD	t	p
6 or less tournaments*	47	2.68	1.45	.148	ns
7 or more tournaments*	18	2.06	1.55		

* per semester

Table 4—T-tests for Debaters Based upon Success

Philosophical Posture	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Never or Rarely Break	19	27.84	7.60	2.46	.0181
Often or Always Break	32	22.22	8.33		
Tag Team Tactics	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Never or Rarely Break	19	3.16	1.34	.47	ns
Often or Always Break	32	3.348	1.41		
Sources	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Never or Always Break	19	3.16	1.21	.26	ns
Often or Always Break	32	3.06	1.37		
Knowing the Judge's Preference	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Never or Rarely Break	19	2.21	1.36	.75	ns
Often or Always Break	32	2.53	1.67		

Table 5—T-tests for Experts Based upon Participation

Philosophical Posture	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Judged 12 Rounds or Less*	6	30.67	3.50	2.61	.019
Judged 18 Rounds or More*	12	22.58	9.49		
Tag Team Tactics	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Judged 12 Rounds or Less*	6	3.33	.52	1.34	ns
Judged 18 Rounds or More*	12	2.67	1.56		
Sources	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Judged 12 Rounds or Less*	6	3.16	.98	.88	ns
Judged 18 Rounds or More*	12	2.75	.86		
Knowing the Judge's Preference	N	Mean	SD	t	p
Judged 12 Rounds or Less*	6	2.17	.75	.16	ns
Judged 18 Rounds or More*	12	2.08	1.37		

* per semester

Low participation judges (12 or less rounds) viewed the round as contributing positively (30.67) to the values expressed at the CEDA Assessment Conference while the high participation judges (18 or more rounds) were relatively negative (22.50) on this variable.

For Hypothesis 5, the number of years of judging experience differentiated the critics on the single-item factor of "Knowing the Judge's Preference" (see Table 6). Judges with two or less years experience were less negative (1.16) on this factor than those with three or more (.71).

In viewing these results, the first four of the hypotheses found statistical support. While there was a significant finding in relation to Hypothesis 5, the finding did not speak to the thrust of the theoretical position advanced earlier in this article.

Table 6—T-tests for Experts
Based upon Experience

Philosophical Posture	N	Mean	SD	t	p
2 Years or Less Judging	10	24.40	10.30	.48	ns
3 years or More Judging	8	26.38	6.99		
Tag Team Tactics	N	Mean	SD	t	p
2 Years or Less Judging	10	3.10	1.29	.71	ns
3 years or More Judging	8	2.63	1.41		
Sources	N	Mean	SD	t	p
2 Years or Less Judging	10	2.70	1.16	1.10	ns
3 years or More Judging	8	3.13	.35		
Knowing the Judge's Preference	N	Mean	SD	t	p
2 Years or Less Judging	10	1.50	2.71	2.78	.0186
3 years or More Judging	8	2.88	1.25		

Implications

Having participated in the round, the more involved individuals believed that the round did not promote the Philosophical Posture while those less involved thought that it did. Perhaps, these two groups saw the outcomes differently. For example, some thought the event contributed to the achievement of an audience-centered format, while others thought it distracted from such a format. However, it seems more likely that there exists a different interpretation of the criteria used in making the assessment. For the above example, a difference exists in what constitutes an audience-centered format.

While it might be reasonably argued that those highly involved are in the best position to evaluate the appropriateness of any innovation, such an argument assumes an acceptance of the values underlying the criteria of evaluation. Our hypotheses were based on the assumption that the more involved participants become, the less likely they were to share the values of the *philosophical posture* advanced at St. Paul and the preceding conferences. The empirical support for these hypotheses provide a basis for the acceptance of the assumption that key differences exist in the recognition of an

appropriate model to govern academic debate and thus the appropriate values for assessing its practice.

In addition to the general support for this conclusion provided by the overall results, indications of its validity came from comments written, by both critics and debaters, on the response forms. In effect, these comments suggested that we had offered a complex question by asking whether the round *advanced* something the participants did not see as positive, that is, the values of the CEDA Assessment Conference's *philosophical posture*. These individuals seemed to be expressing their frustration at not being able to state directly that the values were inappropriate for debate. Indeed, one individual vehemently criticized the item about encouraging participation by women and minorities as being an inappropriate concern for anyone.

Given both the statistical analyses and our analysis of participants' comments, we must agree with the observations made by others (Frank 6; DeMougeot 135; McGough 191) that participants prefer, and have been permitted to create in academic debate, a climate of artificiality. This climate reflects what is best termed a "Protected Arena." This Protected Arena exists for individuals who wish to argue among themselves and to award trophies according to criteria that they alone control and thus are often in flux. Those criteria reward private knowledge of norms developed within the Protected Arena. Obviously, the criteria have little to do with the practice of public communication. As such, a knowledge of the skills of our profession are less important for success in this arena than is knowledge of the arena itself.

As reflected in the resolutions from the CEDA Assessment Conference, there is a need for change within the CEDA community. We need to demand that debate be evaluated on its potential effectiveness in persuading intelligent audiences. Only when debate is so evaluated can we justify it as an activity which should be funded as part of an education budget, much less as a laboratory of communication.

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