

support, school systems have begun to allocate funding from their budgets, and community and corporate foundations have expressed interest in supporting these initiatives.

Future Goals and Challenges

The greatest challenge facing both new and existing urban debate league programs is sustainability. There is sustainability needed both in terms of funding and long term technical assistance. OSI's plan is to provide seed funding to strengthen existing Urban Debate Leagues and launch new ones. It is hoped that this support will set the stage for school systems and foundations to recognize the importance of supporting competitive debate in these communities. In addition to securing funds for these programs in the long term, there needs to be a support mechanism to help these schools institutionalize their debate teams, as well as provide ongoing assistance as the schools become competitive in their local debate circuits.

Partnership with University Debate Programs

In successful Urban Debate League models, local university debate programs play a crucial role as the centers of training, mentorship, and outreach. The universities serve not only to provide the training for teachers and students, but university debaters play an invaluable role as coaches in local high schools. These students provide a support mechanism for high school teachers as they move into the role of coaches. In addition, college debaters comprise the judging pool at Urban Debate League tournaments. These tournaments provide a practice ground before joining the local debate circuit. As judges, university debaters play a pivotal role in students' learning and debate maturation.

As the momentum for Urban Debate Leagues spreads, university debate programs will continue to be the nuclei for new initiatives. It is important, however, that before new programs are started, that program initiators take time to understand the challenges and successes of other program models, as well as the perspectives of the proposed program participants (the teachers, the students, and the larger urban community). It is hoped that the Ideafest II, being hosted by the Open Society Institute, can serve as a starting point for sharing information and gaining experience about the challenges of expanding urban debate in the United States.

REFLECTIONS ON THE NEW YORK URBAN DEBATE LEAGUE AND IDEAFEST II

William Baker

A movement started in Atlanta and Detroit. It has taken root in New York. Existing models are expanding in Chicago and Tuscaloosa. New programs are starting in St. Louis and Kansas City. There have been inquiries about starting new programs in several places including Waco, Los Angeles, Tallahassee, Oklahoma City and San Antonio. In four years, there will be a population of between two hundred and eight hundred debaters from the inner-cities with skills and abilities that will transform their vision, their goals and our understanding of how the world is and functions. This reality is the Urban Debate League initiative.

An academic analysis of the importance of this project would fail to convey the depth of commitment and sincere joy that this league provides. In the eighteen years I've been involved with debate, and six years I've been involved with the United Nations, opportunities to open doors and dramatically change a society create my most treasured moments. The New York Urban Debate League (NYUDL) represents one of those cherished experiences. This pilot program funded by the Open Society Institute in partnership with the Emory University Barkley Forum sought to replicate the Atlanta Urban Debate League model in New York. The IMPACT Coalition, a non-profit career development organization using debate as a mentoring base at the collegiate level, provided local support and consultation to the NYUDL on debate instruction and the administration of tournaments.

There were concerns: Atlanta is different from New York. Are there trade-offs between competition and inclusion? Can programs survive the rigors of policy debate over the long haul? How will we select and retain teachers? Yet when all was said and done, the only question was, how can we bring this wonderful program to the attention of those who need to know? Logistical questions may linger but there is no doubt that Urban Debate

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Leagues using policy debate produce results and engage students that other resources have failed to reach.

Policy debate in the collegiate world prides itself on the excellence of competition and the ability to approach issues in a dispassionate manner. Many feel that those needing passion may find outlets in individual events or the drama club on campus. The trend away from passionate rhetoric is unfortunate in two ways. First, it excludes, albeit unintentionally, a spectrum of individuals who wish to believe strongly in what they advocate; and second, the model presumes that evidence and emotion are mutually exclusive.

The New York Urban Debate League challenges those assumptions and restores passion in unimaginable ways. The awards assemblies are humbling as you watch students jump up and down, thrilled to receive the twenty-fifth place speaker award (college debaters tend to reserve their glee for the top ten places, except at National championships). The atmosphere mirrors a pep rally before the start of the NCAA Basketball Championships referred to as "March Madness." In the debates themselves, we watch individuals from disenfranchised homes discuss global warming, oil imports from Australia and a series of geopolitical implications that only a few months ago would have been the farthest thoughts from their minds. More importantly, the students are reporting better grades, watching CNN, and learning, in some cases for the first time, that knowledge is power and debate is the tool for exercising that power.

My own understanding of the debate world and its utility has shifted dramatically. For years, I viewed debate as a specialized skill that some were able to perform and but others could not. When students from New York's "worst" high schools, students facing challenges like teen parenthood, delinquency, and poverty, not only learn policy debate quickly but excel in its practice, it has become clear to me that debate is a tool for all people and our job as educators must be to find the right message to entice those who do not yet understand its magic.

The students who are part of the IMPACT Coalition network of debaters find new skills as teachers and mentors. To the ones who went to top caliber high schools or hail from sheltered suburban communities, the program has become a way of finding new meaning in their own debating by sharing a common bond with people they might have feared or misunderstood. To some of my students of color, debate has become a land of hope that people who looked like them would no longer be few and far between. Edward Lee from

the University of Alabama noted that he fulfilled a personal dream at the most recent New York Urban Debate League tournament when he judged a round consisting of four African American women debating complex issues in domestic energy policy.

Our excitement and our energies focus at the Ideafests. These annual gatherings allow coaches, debaters, and concerned individuals in the debate community and beyond to assess what they are doing to propel these initiatives forward and to learn experiential lessons from their colleagues.

As one of a very small number of African American coaches, I am heartened by these exchanges. For myself, Ede Warner, and others like us, we have no choice but to devote a significant portion of our lives to community service and the search for excellence. There is no longer a choice about whether we want to live in an interracial world or not. The only choice will be whether we choose to pursue a dysfunctional or a functional existence within it.