

CHARACTERISTICS OF TOP FIFTY CEDA PROGRAMS AT THE DAWN OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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Administering and directing debate programs is always a difficult task. Aside from the day-to-day tasks of coaching, traveling, and recruiting debaters, debate directors must constantly evaluate their program's development and justify to school administrators both the existence of their debate programs and any increase in resources for the program. To assist in this process, several studies (Hunt & Inch; Murphy; Rogers; Watt) have attempted to describe characteristics of successful debate programs.

However, several changes have occurred in the debate community which warrant updating and adding to this body of research. The decision by the Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) and the National Debate Tournament (NDT) to share a common topic, the declining number of schools involved in two-person policy debate, and the need for updated statistical information for directors to compare their programs to other successful programs are just a few of the factors.

To update and add to this field of research to reflect the many changes that have occurred in the policy debate community since the early 1990s, this study investigates the characteristics of programs ranked in the CEDA Top Fifty national sweepstakes rankings. While the CEDA Top Fifty sweepstakes rankings are not the only standard to determine which debate programs are the top programs in the nation, this group of programs has been studied in detail entirely or in part by previous studies (See Murphy; Rogers; Watt). As a result, this study will continue to examine this particular population to add to this body of research.

Review of Literature

A few studies have examined the Top Fifty CEDA debate programs. The first was done by Watt, using the national rankings for the 1988-1989 season. Watt's study was a "pilot

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study in order to develop a database for future investigations concerning success in CEDA debate" (1). While examining programs' composition, demographics of the program, and coaching staff, Watt concluded that programs with large numbers of active debaters, frequent attendance at large number of tournaments, and a large travel budget have an "increased likelihood of achieving a higher national ranking" (10).

Rodgers surveyed top-ranked CEDA programs for the 1989-1990 season. While examining a different population of top CEDA debate programs,¹ Rogers investigated student participation, number of graduate assistants, scholarships, frequency of tournaments attended, size of budgets, and sources of funding. After comparing the mean of the top national and regional programs, Rogers found that "without proper funding and resources, competitive success is elusive if not impossible" (12).

Hunt and Inch also examined top forensics programs, but used a quasi-longitudinal study of the programs from 1978 to 1992.² Like the previous studies, Hunt and Inch examined programs' staffing, student participation, financial aid, and budgeting characteristics. The researchers found that certain intangibles such as quality of director/coach, favorable geographic location, and tradition played a distinct role in competitive success. However, primary characteristics such as staff and squad size, scholarships, and budget size seemed to play significant roles as well.

Murphy surveyed the Top Fifty CEDA programs based on the 1989-1990 final sweepstakes standings. In his study, Murphy examined three essential components of the programs: staffing, budgeting, and participation patterns. Murphy concluded that Top Fifty programs consisted of programs with either a small coaching staff (a single director with no graduate assistants) or a larger program with several staff members and graduate assistants. Additionally, Murphy found that top programs required larger travel budgets to remain competitive in CEDA and that larger student participation required larger coaching staffs to accommodate the size of the program.

This body of research suggests that both strong financial and administrative support is necessary for competitive success in policy debate. However, this body of research does not

¹ Rodgers study examined the characteristics of both the CEDA Top Twenty sweepstakes award programs and the top ten regional CEDA programs.

² Unlike previous studies, Hunt and Inch did not select their sample from the CEDA top sweepstakes awards. Instead, they selected programs based on competitive success in CEDA, NDT, NFA, and other forensics activities.

reflect several recent changes that have occurred in the policy debate community that might change both the financial and administrative support necessary to succeed in the new millennium. Since the 1996-1997 season, CEDA and NDT tournaments have shared a common debate topic and have made significant strides in forging a single policy debate community. As a result, it is likely that the inclusion of traditionally successful NDT programs with substantial financial resources or well-established programs has "raised the bar" necessary to remain within the Top Fifty.

Another change that has occurred within CEDA is increased competition from other national debate organizations such as National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) and the National Educational Debate Association (NEDA). With the financial costs and workload to operate and travel a debate program increasing, many programs may be exploring other forensics activities as an option to CEDA/NDT debate. This trend has raised concerns that CEDA membership numbers are decreasing due to the high financial and staffing requirements to remain competitive (Hunt and Inch). Because the previous research was conducted prior to a significant migration of former CEDA programs to other debate organizations, new research is necessary for both directors and national executive officers to access the possible impact of the costs associated with operating a competitive policy debate program.

Finally, directors need the most updated research on the resources necessary to remain competitive in policy debate. This information allows directors to compare their programs to other successful programs to evaluate various factors, such as travel schedules and size of the team, that may affect the competitive success of the program. Also, this information allows directors to illustrate to administrators the rising budgetary requirements needed to field a competitive program. Relying on a body of research that is at least six years old does not provide an adequate snap-shot of the current policy debate world that will justify budget and staffing increases to remain competitive in the next millennium.

Because previous studies have already correlated high resources with competitive success, this study will describe the characteristics of top debate programs to further define what resources and requirements may be necessary to continue to succeed in the future. In addition, as we enter the new millennium, it is important as a debate organization to see the directions that the policy debate community has taken during the last ten years.

Research Questions

This study examines three essential components of debate programs that are defined in previous research: staffing, financial and administrative support, and participation. In addition to these components, this study also examines the technological research aids that the Top Fifty CEDA program use. The first component, staffing, constitutes the size and status of the people needed to direct the debate program, which includes Directors of Forensics or Directors of Debate, assistant directors or coaches, graduate student coaches, and any other employed coaching assistants. To analyze this component of the Top Fifty CEDA programs, the first research question is:

RQ1: How are top CEDA programs staffed?

The second essential program component, financial and administrative support, is defined as the amount of money needed to run a debate program and the institutional support (other than through hiring decisions) given to the debate program from the school's administration. To analyze this component of the Top Fifty CEDA programs, the second research question is:

RQ2: How are top CEDA programs financially and administratively supported?

The third component, participation, includes the frequency of tournaments attended, which tournaments are attended, and how many students are active within the program. To identify this component of the Top Fifty CEDA programs, the third research question is:

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

The final component, electronic research aids, is operationally defined as computer research tools used for gathering debate research, such as Lexis/Nexis,[®] the internet, and Westlaw.[®] To identify this final component, the fourth research question is:

RQ4: What types of electronic research aids do the top CEDA programs use?

Methodology

A survey questionnaire modeled after Murphy's 1990 survey was developed and mailed in May 1999 to schools listed as the Top Fifty programs in the 1998-1999 CEDA sweepstakes competition, as identified in the final rankings for that season. The

questionnaire items focused on programs' staffing, budgeting, participation levels, and use of technology. Thirty-one usable surveys were received for a return rate of 62 percent.³ To insure confidentiality, all data are reported using aggregate means.

Results

How are top CEDA programs staffed? Survey items one through three asked respondents to report staff size and to describe the job status of the program's Director of Debate.⁴ For survey item one, respondents indicated that the total number of staff members who directed, assisted, or worked with the debate program during the 1998-1999 season ranged from 1 to 11, with a mean staff size of 3.69 (n=31). While the largest number of respondents reported having three staff members (32.2%), the lowest number of respondents reported a staff of one (9.7%). Response distributions are reported in Table 1.

Table 1
Staff Size Frequency Distributions

Total Staff	N	Pct
1	3	9.7
2	5	16.1
3	10	32.2
4	4	12.9
5	9	29.0

Survey item two asked respondents to indicate the status of the Director of Debate position for their program during the 1998-1999 season. The largest percentage of responses indicated that the director's position was tenure status (64.5%). The remaining respondents indicated that their directors were non-tenure (25.8%) or administrative positions (9.7%). None of the respondents reported having a part-time or graduate student director. Item two responses are reported in Table 2.

³ This return rate compares well to previous studies of the Top Fifty programs. Murphy received a 66 percent return rate, while Watts received a 51 percent rate.

⁴ Staff were defined as any person, other than an undergraduate, who assisted full-time in coaching or helping operate the debate program.

Table 2
Director Status Frequency Distributions

Position Status	N	Pct
Tenure-track	20	64.5
Non-tenure	8	25.8
Administrative	3	9.7
Part Time	0	0.0
Graduate Assistant	0	0.0

Survey item three asked how many graduate students worked with the debate programs during the 1998-1999 season. Fifteen of the 31 respondents had graduate assistants working with their programs (48.4%). The mean (n=31) was 1.1 graduate student assistants. However, when the programs reporting no graduate assistants are excluded, the mean (n=15) increases to 2.27. Item three response distributions are reported in Table 3.

Table 3
Graduate Assistant Frequency Distributions

Graduate Assistants	N	Pct
0	16	51.6
1	5	16.1
2	5	16.1
3	2	6.4
4+	3	9.6

How are top CEDA programs financially and administratively supported? Survey items four through eight examined five different aspects of the program's financial and administrative support: total travel budget, endowments, student financial aid, salary of directors, and administrative support. Survey item four asked about the total travel budget for the programs during the 1998-1999 season. Total travel budgets for responding programs ranged from \$15,700 to \$95,000, with a mean reported travel budget of \$41,209.68 (n=31). The largest number of respondents had travel budgets in excess of \$40,000 (41.9%). Five of the programs within this range had travel budgets exceeding \$60,000 (16.1%). Item four responses are reported in Table 4.

Survey item five asked respondents if their program was funded through endowments. Eleven of the 31 respondents indicated that their program was funded partially or entirely

through an endowment (35.5%). The size of the endowments ranged from \$6,000 to \$1,000,000.

Table 4
Travel Budget Frequency Distributions

Budget range	N	Pct
\$9,999 & under	0	0.0
\$10,000-19,999	4	12.9
\$20,000-29,999	6	19.4
\$30,000-39,999	8	25.8
\$40,000 & over	13	41.9

Survey item six examined the number of students who received financial aid and the extent of that aid during the 1998-1999 season. Twenty-four of the thirty-one respondents (77.4%) provided financial aid to their debaters with a mean of 6.25 students per program receiving financial aid. The total amount of financial aid that programs provided to students during the 1998-1999 season ranged from \$2,500 to \$93,000.

Survey item seven asked respondents what the salary of the program director was for the 1998-1999 academic year. The mean salary for all directors (n=29) was \$39,155.17. The salary gap between tenure and non-tenure directors was small at \$1,770.83, while administrative positions earned more in salary than both tenure and non-tenure positions. On average, administrative positions earned \$4,770.83 more than non-tenure positions, while earning \$3,000 more than average tenure positions. Mean director's salaries are reported in Table 5.

Table 5
Salary Means by Position Status

Status	N	Mean
Tenure-track	18	\$39,333.33
Non-tenure	8	\$37,562.50
Administrative	3	\$42,333.33

Survey item eight asked respondents to rate their school's administrative financial and attitudinal support for the debate program on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (outstanding) to 5 (poor). The mean rating of 1.97 indicates administrative support slightly more

favorable than "above average." The vast majority of the respondents rated their administration's support as either "above average" or "outstanding" (86.7%). One respondent rated their administration's support as "average," two rated the support as "below average," and only one respondent rated the support as "poor."

What are the participation patterns of the top CEDA programs? The next series of questions, items nine through fourteen, investigated program participation in various forensics activities. Item nine asked respondents to indicate, prior to the CEDA/NDT shared topic, how frequently they attended CEDA or NDT tournaments. Seventeen of the 31 responses indicated that their program exclusively attended CEDA tournaments prior to the shared topic (54.8%). The second most frequent response was that the program attended all NDT tournaments (29.0%). Overall, 67.7 percent of the respondents indicated that they attended all or nearly all CEDA tournaments prior to the shared topic. Item nine responses are reported in Table 6.

Table 6
CEDA/NDT Tournament Frequency Distributions

Response	N	Pct
All NDT	9	29.0
Mostly NDT	0	0.0
About Even	1	3.2
Mostly CEDA	4	12.9
All CEDA	17	54.8

Item ten inquired about the types of forensics activities the debate programs participated in other than CEDA or NDT policy debate during the 1998-1999 season. Almost one-third of the respondents (32.3%) reported participating in individual events activities. Slightly more than one-quarter of the respondents (25.8%) reported participating in parliamentary debate, slightly fewer than one-quarter (22.6%) reported participating in public forum or on-campus debates, and only four respondents (12.9%) reported that their program participated in Lincoln-Douglas debates. In addition to supporting intercollegiate debate, five respondents (16.1%) indicated that their program sponsored Urban Debate Leagues for high school students.

Item eleven asked how many CEDA-sanctioned tournaments the program attended during the 1998-1999 season. The mean number of tournaments attended was 13.97. The

range was extreme, from a low of eight CEDA-sanctioned tournaments to a high of twenty-five. The largest number of respondents (46.7%) indicated attending between eleven and fifteen CEDA-sanctioned tournaments during the course of the season. Item eleven response frequencies are reported in Table 7.

Table 7
Tournaments Attended Frequency Distributions

Tournaments Attended	N	Pct
0-5	0	0.0
6-10	6	20.0
11-15	14	46.7
16-20	9	30.0
21-25	1	3.3

Item twelve examined the number of students participating at six or more tournaments during the 1998-1999 season. Respondents indicated an average of 10.45 students attended that number of tournaments during the season. The most frequent responses indicated that 6-10 students attended six or more tournaments during the 1998-1999 season (54.8%).

Survey item thirteen asked about the total number of students, both active and inactive, participating on the debate team during the 1998-1999 season. Respondents indicated a mean of 18.19 total students on the team. The most frequent response was a total number of team members in the 11-15 range (2.0%). When comparing this average to the average for item 12, the top CEDA programs have 7.74 students that participated at fewer than six debate tournaments or participated on the team through alternative means. Student participation frequencies for items twelve and thirteen are reported in Table 8.

Table 8
Student Participation Frequency Distributions

Total Students	Item 12 N	Pct	Item 13 N	Pct
0-5	1	3.2	0	0.0
6-10	17	54.8	5	16.1
11-15	8	25.8	13	42.0
16-20	4	12.9	3	9.7
21-25	1	3.2	2	6.5
26-30	0	0.0	5	16.1
31+	0	0.0	3	9.7

Survey item fourteen asked respondents to indicate the specific tournaments they attended during the 1998-1999 season that broke to octofinals or higher in the open division. The tournaments most frequently attended by the Top Fifty programs during this season are listed in Table 9. The most frequently attended tournaments were the national CEDA tournament (80.6%), Wake Forest University (58.1%), and the NDT national tournament (51.6%).

Table 9
Specific Tournament Frequency Distributions

Tournament	N	Pct
National CEDA	25	80.6
Wake Forest	18	58.1
The NDT	16	51.6
Kansas	13	41.9
Kentucky	13	41.9
William Jewell	12	38.7
Harvard	12	38.7
UMKC	12	38.7
South Carolina	12	38.7
Southern Illinois	11	35.5
Baylor	11	35.5

What types of electronic research aids do the top CEDA programs use? The final two survey items examined the types of electronic research aids the Top Fifty programs used during the 1998-1999 season. Item fifteen asked respondents to indicate which electronic research aids they had access to at their schools, while item sixteen asked which aids they had access to while attending tournaments. Table 10 lists the aids available to the programs both at school and on the road. Interestingly, response frequencies for school access and access on the road were identical. The data indicate that the vast majority of the top programs have access to electronic research aids, with 87.1 percent of the respondents reporting access to Lexis-Nexis Universe® and an identical number reporting internet connections at both locations.

Table 10
Electronic Research Aids Frequency Distributions

Research Aid	School N	Pct	Road N	Pct
Lexis Universe	27	87.1	27	87.1
Internet	27	87.1	27	87.1
Lexis/Nexis (standard)	19	61.3	20	61.3
Westlaw	2	6.5	2	6.5

Discussion

Staffing of Top CEDA Programs. The results of this study indicate that top CEDA programs have larger coaching staffs working with their programs. The average staff for the responding Top Fifty programs during the 1998-1999 season was 3.69, with the largest number of respondents having a staff size of three (32.2%). While the mean and mode indicate a typical staff size of three, the second largest number of respondent had staff size of five or more (29.0%).

When comparing these results to previous studies, overall staff size for top debate programs has risen over the years. During the 1989-1990 season, Murphy reported that mean staff size of the Top Fifty programs was 3.27, while Watt's data from a year earlier found a mean staff size to be 2.46. However, Watt's survey excluded graduate assistants and work-study students, which might explain the difference in reported staff size. Based on our research, mean staff size has increased slightly over the last nine years by almost one-half staff member per program. Hunt and Inch also noted an increase in average staff sizes between 1978-1992. During this time frame, their survey data reported that mean staff size grew from 2.7 in 1978 to 4.0 in 1992.

While these findings demonstrate a slight, but steady, growth in overall staff size, major differences exist in the number of Top Fifty programs with larger than average staff size. In the 1989-1990 season, Murphy reported that only 18.2 percent of the programs had five or more staff members. During the 1998-1999 season, this percentage jumps to 29.0 percent. Additionally, in 1989-1990, Murphy found that 48.5 percent of the programs had two or fewer staff members, while in 1998-1999, only 25.8 percent of the programs had two or fewer. While the overall average number of staff would suggest gradual growth in size, the number of programs with one or two coaches is rapidly decreasing.

These findings suggest that previously noted structures of top CEDA programs are changing. Murphy observed that debate programs are structured in one of two ways: small

programs with a single director or single director with one staff member and no graduate assistants, and large programs with several staff members. Our survey shows a substantial decline in the number of small programs. Hunt and Inch reached a similar conclusion, finding that by 1992 the number of programs with just a single director dropped significantly, from 12 reporting programs in 1983 to just 2 in 1992.

The increase in staff size does not appear to be explained by increases in number of graduate student assistants. The findings of this study report a 2.27 average number of graduate assistants, which is largely consistent with the surveys from nine years earlier, in which Murphy found an average of 2.69, and Rodgers' found an average of 2.50. Furthermore, our survey found that about half of the responding programs had no graduate assistant coaches (51.6%), which is consistent with Murphy's findings (48.5%). Although our survey did not inquire about the employment status of staff members other than the director of debate, the increase in staff size and relative stable number of graduate assistants would suggest that top debate programs are hiring more faculty members or staff from outside of their schools. Future research should inquire about the status of staff members other than the director of debate to determine the composition of program staffing. Overall, our findings suggest that nationally competitive CEDA debate programs have increasingly larger number of staff members.

Status and Salary of Directors of Debate of Top CEDA Programs. The majority of responding directors of top CEDA programs hold tenure status at their schools (64.5%), while 25.8 percent hold non-tenure positions and 9.7 percent have administrative positions. This finding is consistent with Murphy's findings that 54.5 percent of directors reporting during the 1989-1990 season had tenure status, 27.3 percent had non-tenure status, and 9.1 percent held administrative status. Initially, these findings seem to suggest that having a tenure-track Director of Debate might be an important characteristic for top debate programs. However, Murphy noted that these percentages are low when compared to the 77 percent for all forensics programs (both debate and individual events) and the 73 percent for AFA/NDT programs. Given these results, tenure status for directors of top CEDA debate programs appear to have a weaker correlation with national success than in other forensics organizations.

Salary for directors of top debate programs has changed radically since the early 1990s. Our survey found the reported mean salary for responding directors to be \$39,155, a \$10,876 increase over the \$28,279 mean reported by Murphy for the 1989-1990 season.

When comparing the average salaries in relation to director's status, there are significant increases as well. According to Murphy, the average salary for tenure directors of responding top programs in 1989-1990 was \$34,087, while in 1998-1999, the average tenure status salary was \$39,333.33, a 15.4 percent increase. Murphy noted that average salary for non-tenure directors in 1989-1990 was \$25,250, which rose to \$37,563 by 1998-1999, a 48.8 percent increase. Making the most significant increase in average salary were administrative positions. The 1989-1990 survey by Murphy reported an average salary of \$24,667 for administrative positions, while in 1998-1999 the average rose \$17,666 to \$42,333, a substantial 71.6 percent increase.

The increase in overall salary can be explained partially by a rise in overall college salaries, cost of living factors, and different programs being studied by each survey (as the composition of the Top Fifty changes each year). Despite these factors, dramatic changes occur in the narrowing gap between tenure, non-tenure, and administrative salaries. According to this study's findings, administrative positions earned \$3,000 more in average salary than tenure positions, and non-tenure positions only trailed tenure average salaries by \$1,770. This is a significant change from Murphy's findings, where non-tenure positions averaged \$8,837 less than tenure average salaries, and administrative salaries were \$9,420 less than the average salary for tenure status directors. However, with only three respondents in each study reporting administrative status, it is difficult to draw conclusions from the difference in comparative reported salary. That being said, these findings still suggest that, on average, a director's status may not be as important in determining relative salary was the case a decade ago. Although not specifically examined by this study, it may be possible that "quasi-tenure" positions are developing in which directors are not meeting the requirements for tenure status, but are financially rewarded for their work and success with the debate program through much larger salaries. Future research in this area should investigate more specifically the reasons why the salary gaps are narrowing to determine if tenure status has less importance to director's overall salaries than in the past.

Financing Top CEDA Programs. The financial resource requirements necessary to operate a Top Fifty CEDA program are rising with each season. The average travel budget for the 31 responding Top Fifty programs during the 1998-1999 season, \$41,209, is much higher than the averages reported by earlier studies. Watt found an average budget of \$18,895 for 1988-1989, while Murphy reported an average budget of \$24,312 for the 1989-1990 season, although with only a year separating the two studies, the \$5,417 difference is

likely to be a product of the studies having surveyed a different set of respondents. For comparison purposes a more realistic figure for the period would split the difference at \$21,603. Even the high-end Murphy figure, however, is substantially lower than the \$34,700 budget Hunt and Inch reported from their survey of top debate and IE programs in 1992. The mean reported travel budget for the 1998-1999 season of \$41,209 reflects an increase of 18.8 percent over the 1992 mean, and an increase of 90.8 percent over the combined Watt/Murphy average for 1988-1990.

Besides the significant increase in the average travel budget, the number of programs with comparatively larger budgets is rapidly growing, while the number of smaller budgeted programs in the Top Fifty is decreasing. During the 1998-1999 season, 41.9 percent of the respondents had travel budgets over \$40,000, while five of those 13 programs had budgets over \$60,000. This is markedly larger than the 9.4 percent of the respondents with budgets over \$40,000 that Murphy reported for the 1989-1990 season. As for smaller budgeted programs, in 1989-1990, 13 of 33 respondents (40.7%) had travel budgets under \$20,000, while by the 1998-1999 season, the number shrank to four of 31 programs (12.9%). These findings suggest that it is increasingly difficult to compete in the Top Fifty sweepstakes with travel budgets in the \$20,000 or lower range. This is a substantial change from the Hunt and Inch 1992 survey, which reported that most programs (44.4%) had travel budgets in the \$20,000-\$30,000 range. The budgetary threshold for success in the Top Fifty now appears to lie near \$40,000. This is potentially alarming for financially challenged programs. As Rodgers noted for the 1989-1990 season, a CEDA program needed an average travel budget of \$41,346 to compete in the Top Twenty sweepstakes rankings. Now, nine years later, a CEDA program needs a similar sized budget just to compete in the Top Fifty. These findings probably demonstrate that it is becoming increasingly expensive to travel teams to tournaments, especially given the decline in number of regional tournaments in many areas. As a result, Top Fifty programs need much larger travel budgets to be successful.

The number of programs offering financial aid to students is rather large. The findings of this study indicate that 77.4 percent of responding programs offer financial aid to an average of 6.25 students. This percentage is larger than reported in previous studies. For example, Rodgers found that 50 percent of the Top Twenty programs in 1989-1990 offered financial aid to students, while 45.5 percent of the Top Fifty respondents to Murphy's survey offered financial aid. Our data also indicate a slight increase over the 71.1 percent figure reported by Hunt and Inch in 1992. The average number of students receiving

financial aid does not appear to have changed substantially. The only study that specifically examined the number of students that received aid – Murphy – reported a mean of 6.80, which is similar to the findings of our survey. While the percentage of programs offering financial aid has not changed significantly since 1992, this percentage is much larger than in the 1989-1990 season. Although previous researchers (Hunt and Inch; Murphy) argue that scholarships are unlikely to greatly affect the competitive success of top debate programs, the steady increase in percentage of programs offering financial aid indicate that it is a growing characteristic associated with these programs. Future research should examine more specifically the effect scholarships have in relation to competitive success. It is likely that future research may find that scholarships lead to higher student retention rates, which could increase overall success of the program.

Participation Patterns of Top CEDA Programs. The composition of the Top Fifty CEDA programs has noticeably changed since the 1996-1997 season, when CEDA and the NDT decided to share a common debate topic. According to the findings of this survey, nine of the 31 respondents traveled exclusively to NDT tournaments prior to the joint topic. Initially, this finding would suggest that programs which were primarily NDT programs prior to the 1996-1997 season had little difficulty adjusting to CEDA competition (a finding further illustrated when Northwestern University, a well-established NDT program, won the 1997 CEDA national tournament; the first CEDA nationals using the joint topic). Furthermore, this finding may be a variable affecting the significant increase in travel budget, staff sizes, and Director of Debate status since the traditional NDT programs included in the 1998-1999 CEDA Top Fifty may be well-established programs immigrating from an environment in which sizeable budgets and large numbers of coaching staff are the norm. Murphy suggests something along this line when he argues, "during the largest period of growth in CEDA, many established programs remained with the NDT. In addition, a number of schools establishing CEDA programs did so on a 'low budget' basis in response to the larger structure of many NDT programs" (52). Given that more NDT programs are entering the Top Fifty CEDA rankings, future research might compare programs that were exclusively NDT or exclusively CEDA prior to the shared topic to see how the two samples differ in the three components studied here.

Top Fifty program participation in different types of forensics activities has changed significantly in recent years. During the 1998-1999 season, only 33 percent of the respondents indicated that their program participated in individual events, a substantial

decline from the 1989-1990 season, when Murphy found that 66.7 percent of the Top Fifty programs participated in both policy debate and individual events. Rodgers' survey of the Top Twenty CEDA programs found that 50 percent participated in both activities. Hunt and Inch found participation in individual events increasing, with programs shifting from participating mostly in policy debate and a little in individual events in 1983, to participating less in policy debate and more in individual events in 1992. Our survey findings suggest that this trend has reversed, at least in respect to the Top Fifty CEDA programs. Although our survey did not specifically investigate whether the non-IE programs had terminated such competition or never participated in individual events, the results imply that the increasing cost of operating a successful debate program may be forcing some programs to cease participating in individual events and deterring other programs from beginning to participate. It is also likely that the attitudes and preferences of debate directors and students may affect their decision to participate in individual events, and that the costs of operating other debate activities, like Urban Debate Leagues, directly compete with funding for to participate at or host IE tournaments. Likewise, the paucity of tournaments offering both individual events and policy debate makes the cost of participating in both activities too expensive for most programs. Future research should inquire into the history of Top Fifty programs to find out how many have ever participated in individual events and the reasons why they chose not to participate.

Top Fifty CEDA programs attend a large number of tournaments during the season. Our survey found that the average responding program attended nearly fourteen CEDA-sanctioned tournaments during the 1998-1999 season, with responses ranging from eight to twenty-five. While this seems like a particularly large number of tournaments, it represents a decline in the number of tournaments reported by previous surveys. Murphy's 1989-1990 Top Fifty survey found that responding programs attended an average of 15.4 CEDA-sanctioned tournaments, and Rodgers survey of the Top Twenty programs for the same season reported that programs attended an average of 21 tournaments. When comparing the substantial increase in travel budgets to the average number of tournaments attended, the findings suggest that Top Fifty programs are spending a substantially larger amount of money while attending fewer tournaments each season. This finding may demonstrate that the declining number of regional tournaments available to programs may be increasing the cost of competing in the Top Fifty. Likewise, it is possible that, regardless of availability of regional tournaments, the cost of attending tournaments simply is increasing. Another

explanation may be that more teams are traveling to tournaments outside of their region, which raises the cost of travel significantly. Future research might inquire why programs are attended fewer tournaments each season to find if general costs of travel, fewer regional tournaments, or other causes are relevant factors.

Our survey found that the average number of students participating at six or more tournaments during the 1998-1999 season was 10.45. The average total team size (active and inactive students) was 18.19, with a mode of 11-15 students. This finding is similar to the Murphy 1989-1990 data, which reported an average of 10.6 students attending six or more tournaments. These findings, however, differ from Watt's survey of the 1988-1989 season, which reported that an average of 14.27 students per responding program participated in tournaments on a frequent basis. This suggests that Top Fifty programs have about four fewer students actively participating in tournaments. The quasi-longitudinal study by Hunt and Inch supports this observation. For the debate programs responding to their survey, the number of students actively participating steadily declined, from 14 in 1977 to 12 in 1987. These findings are likely due to the increasing amount of time and energy required by both students and coaches to be competitive in the Top Fifty rankings. Thus, to be competitive in the Top Fifty, having a larger number of actively participating students does not appear to be a requirement. Instead, it appears that concentrating more time and resources on fewer students is more important to the success level of the program. Furthermore, the finding that the size of the coaching staff is increasing while the number of actively participating students is decreasing suggests that remaining competitive in policy debate may require more staff members coaching fewer students. Given the drop in number of students actively participating in Top Fifty programs, the rise in overall average travel budgets becomes even more significant. Because programs are traveling with fewer students to fewer tournaments, the question of where the additional travel money is being spent becomes a highly relevant question for future research to explore.

The final participation item that warrants discussion is the list of large tournaments Top Fifty teams traveled to during the 1998-1999 season. The most striking findings are that eleven of the tournaments listed were attended by more than one-third of the respondents, and that one invitational tournament, Wake Forest University, was attended by nearly 60% of the responding programs. Murphy's 1989-1990 Top Fifty survey asked the same question, and the results were significantly different. Of the ten octofinals tournaments Murphy listed, only four (CEDA Nationals, Utah, Emory, and Southern Illinois) were

attended by as many as one-third of the responding programs, and the University of Utah tournament was the only invitational tournament attended by as many as 40% of the Top Fifty programs. While our survey did not ask respondents to list every tournament they attended during the season, our findings are consistent with the fact that a "national circuit" has developed and that Top Fifty CEDA programs regularly travel to those tournaments. Various factors may explain this. For example, the decline of large regional tournaments (octofinals or larger) may force programs to travel to a select few national tournaments during the season. Furthermore, since CEDA and NDT began sharing a topic, more programs are competing for first- and second-round bids to the NDT, a process in which the quality and reputation of tournaments attended are important factors. As a result, top debate program directors may feel forced to travel to larger, more prestigious tournaments during the season. This, in turn, increases the need for large travel budgets. Future research should explore the various reasons why a national circuit has developed and the factors that cause several schools to attend similar national tournaments.

Conclusion

This study identifies three important changes to the characteristics of top debate programs over the last decade. First, top debate programs substantially larger travel budgets which are spent on traveling fewer students to fewer tournaments. Second, top debate programs are devoting more staff positions to coaching fewer students, which suggests that coaching a nationally successful program requires much more work than in the past. Third, participation patterns in the types of tournaments attended confirm that Top Fifty programs regularly travel to "national circuit" tournaments.

Given these findings, several important observations can be made that directors of debate, policy debate organizations (e.g., CEDA and the NDT), and the larger debate community may wish to consider. For directors of debate programs wishing to compete at the Top Fifty sweepstakes level, their programs need more staff members to help coach and administer the program. The tradition of operating with a staff of one or two coaches no longer seems to be the norm for top programs. Directors may wish to make stronger cases for hiring additional assistants, besides graduate assistants, to help meet the rising standards for success on the national level. Furthermore, although the number of tenure status directors seems to be rising, comparative salaries are not keeping pace. Our suspicion is that directors have "quasi-tenure" status, in which they hold a non-tenure faculty or

administrative position, but are paid on a par with their tenure status colleagues. This may limit the desire for directors to attain tenure, accepting instead a professional coaching position in exchange for the job security and pay normally associated with tenure.

Equally important for directors of debate is the rising cost of competing in the Top Fifty. As the average travel budget necessary to compete on the national level rises, directors must find even more resources for their programs in order to be competitive. Small budget programs with an average travel budget of \$20,000 or less are unlikely to be able to compete for a Top Fifty ranking in the near future. As a result, directors of small budget programs may be rethinking their CEDA sweepstakes aspirations, if not their desire to continue participating in the CEDA organization.

Finally, directors need to be aware that participating in national circuit tournaments is increasingly important. Our survey data document that there are a set of identifiable tournaments attended by a large number of Top Fifty programs. Although the reasons why Top Fifty programs seem to attend many of the same tournaments are unclear at this time, traveling this circuit appears to be a defining characteristic of these programs.

The findings of this study also illustrate several potentially problematic trends that may be developing in the debate community. Given the rising cost necessary to compete in the CEDA Top Fifty, community members should explore ways to help less well-endowed programs compete. Because wealthy programs are able to travel a national circuit and stay competitive for national sweepstakes honors, smaller programs might be given different tournament options that are more reasonable for their budget size, or efforts should be made to include more of these programs into national circuit tournaments. Because these smaller programs are likely to be the same programs are on the verge of leaving policy debate, these programs may affect the overall health of the debate community.

Finally, researchers should explore the reasons why a national circuit of tournaments is developing. This development could have important implications for the larger debate community, such as the continuing demise of regional tournaments, which would further increase the cost to competitive success and, once again, cause several regional programs to leave the policy debate community.

As the debate community moves into the new millennium, directors continuously will be challenged to find the ways and means to compete for a Top Fifty national ranking. As our research demonstrates, larger staff-size and travel budgets, with fewer tournaments and fewer active students, are the defining features of the Top Fifty teams for the 1998-1999

season. As each decade passes, the threshold for success continues to rise for programs aspiring to Top Fifty sweepstakes honors.

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