# INTERCOLLEGIATE DEBATE AS INVITATIONAL RHETORIC: AN OFFERING

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Is it possible to turn an activity that seems to be grounded in change, competition, and domination into an activity interested in equality, immanent value, and self-determination? Should we even try? As Foss and Griffin note, "persuasion is often necessary" (5). They merely offer invitational rhetoric, a perspective grounded in feminist ideology, as an alternative to the dominant rhetorical paradigm. Is debate one of those instances where persuasion is necessary? Perhaps. But, what can be learned by attempting to apply the concepts of invitational rhetoric to intercollegiate debate? The hope that valuable insights might be gained by those wishing to reduce the patriarchal nature of debate is the motivation behind this essay. We agree with the words of Josina Makau and believe they apply to tournament debating as well as argumentation courses:

> Clearly no one course can be expected to transform our cultural ethic. Argumentation instructors can, however, play an important role in challenging, rather than fostering, the sovereign view of power associated with so many of our global perils. Argumentation instructors have the opportunity to encourage transformations of students' vision, to invite students to consider adopting an alternative epistemic and ethical frame.
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> In this age of global peril we can no longer afford . . . [the] problems associated with traditional debate instruction. We can no longer afford to encourage our students to see others as rivals, to construct arguments monologically, or to view power as pursuit of mastery or control. ("Global Peril" 335)

Our essay proceeds by explaining the concept of invitational rhetoric, demonstrating how current debate practice works against an invitational focus, suggesting goals for debate within an invitational perspective, and exploring the practical aspects of what an invitational debate might look like when these goals are put into practice.

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## Invitational Rhetoric

Foss and Griffin suggest that current rhetorical theory is "a rhetoric of patriarchy, reflecting its values of change, competition and domination" (4). They note:

> Rhetorical scholars have prided themselves on the eschewal of physical force and coercion . . . to influence others and produce change. Although these discursive strategies allow more choice than do the supposedly more heavy-handed strategies of physical coercion, they still infringe on others' rights to behave as they choose and to act in ways they believe are best for them. (3)

Foss and Griffin offer an alternative to this perspective – a rhetoric based on a particular set of feminist values:

> Invitational rhetoric is an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination. Invitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor's world and see it as the rhetor does. In presenting a particular perspective, the invitational rhetor does not judge or denigrate others' perspectives but is open to and tries to appreciate and validate those perspectives, even if they differ dramatically from the rhetor's own. Ideally, audience members accept the invitation offered by the rhetor by listening to and trying to understand the rhetor's perspective and then presenting their own. When this happens, rhetor and audience alike contribute to the thinking about an issue so that everyone involved gains a greater understanding of the issue in its subtlety, richness, and complexity. Ultimately, though, the result of

> invitational rhetoric is not just an understanding of an issue. Because of the nonhierarchical, nonjudgmental, nonadversarial framework established for the interaction, an understanding of the participants themselves occurs, an understanding that engenders appreciation, value, and a sense of equality. (5)

Invitational rhetoric relies on two "primary rhetorical forms": the offering of perspectives and the creation of the external conditions of safety, value, and freedom (7). Offering is defined as, "the giving of expression to a perspective without advocating its support or seeking its acceptance" (7). Foss and Griffin provide the following example of offering:

> Although much rarer than we would like, offering sometimes occurs in academic settings when faculty members and/or students gather to discuss a topic of mutual interest. When they enter the interaction with a goal not of converting others to their positions but of sharing what they know, extending one another's ideas, thinking critically about all the ideas offered, and coming to an understanding of the subject and of one another, they are engaged in offering. (8)

An invitational rhetor wants to create an environment in which three external conditions exist: safety, value, and freedom. Safety allows the rhetor and the audience to feel that they are in a situation where they can speak openly. When people feel safe, they are more likely to be open to the idea of sharing their perspectives. Foss and Griffin suggest that: "You . . . help create a safe environment when you do not hurt, degrade, or belittle your audience members or their beliefs" (5).

Value occurs when rhetors view people as having immanent value – worth simply by being. Value involves moral respect for each person as a unique individual and eschews "distancing, depersonalization, or paternalistic attitudes" (11). It is also a recognition that each person's ideas have worth.

Freedom is the ability to choose or decide on one's own. Importantly, "Freedom of choice is made available to audiences, as well, in that, in invitational rhetoric, the audience's lack of acceptance of . . . the perspective articulated by the rhetor truly makes no difference to the rhetor" (12). When rhetors can truly detach themselves from an interest in the success of their persuasion, then the setting for invitational rhetoric has been set.

Thus, the role of the rhetor is different from that of traditional rhetoric because of the openness with which a rhetor approaches his or her audience. "Change may be the result of invitational rhetoric, but change is not its purpose" (6). Foss and Griffin explain, "As



rhetors and audience members offer their ideas on an issue, they allow diverse positions to be compared in a process of discovery and questioning that may lead to transformation for themselves and others" (6).

### Current Debate Practice Works Against an Invitational Focus

Naturally, the question of where intercollegiate debate currently is in relation to invitational rhetoric cannot be answered in simple black and white terms. There are some aspects of the activity that illustrate that, in its very spirit, debate is open and conducive to invitational rhetoric. However, on the whole, many popular practices and attitudes work against the external conditions of safety, freedom and valuing of persons. In this section of the paper, we will first discuss how debate already fosters invitational practices, and then we will describe how debate still works against these ideas.

Conceptually and structurally, some aspects of debate lean positively toward invitational rhetoric, so we are hopeful that significant transformation of the activity is possible. First, we believe that debaters have a capacity to enter into the perspectives offered by others. In fact, perspective taking might be one thing that tournament debate is well-suited to teach. Wilson, speaking to students of argumentation, explains:

> By mastering the skills at which the study of argument aims, you should become more aware of the possibilities involved in any area of controversy. By knowing more about argumentation you may be able to see different sides to an issue, or to envisage different courses of action . . . the study of argument can serve to extend the horizons of personal thought and action thereby helping to overcome one dimensionality . . . the study of argument can become an antidote to a restrictive and narrow perspective. . . . (10)

The contemporary academic debate tournament therefore contributes to a respect for intellectual diversity. Wall's research empirically confirmed the observation that academic debate experience reduces dogmatism and that intercollegiate debaters exceed the college student norm in open-mindedness. Second, at least in its surface structure, tournament debate seems relatively free. In offering all arguers equal procedural rights--equal speaking time, the opportunity to construct arguments, answer questions, ask questions, and offer rebuttal--tournament debate creates an environment in which one may both disagree with discussants and join-in the discussion. Therefore, debate, *prima facie*, has an invitational bias. We feel that not only is freedom possible, but in some ways it is the essence of debate.

However, due to social constructions of the institution of tournament debate, there are still several aspects of debate that hinder its being a truly invitational activity. The question of how these aspects are manifested begins with the discussion of how patriarchy influences debate. Many scholars have addressed the question of whether or not intercollegiate debate is patriarchal. Evidence of sexism, or patriarchal bias, is seen in the lack of women participating at both the competitor and coaching levels (Logue), differences in success rates between males and females (Stepp, "A Word" ; Bruschke & Johnson), the predominance of the "argument is war" metaphor (Knutson; Frank; Crenshaw), the use of inappropriate sexual metaphors (Wilkins & Hobbs), the double-binds presented to women, (Crenshaw; Stepp, "Diverse" ; Wilkins & Hobbs), and the presence of sexual harassment (Stepp, Simmerly, & Logue; Szwapa). Although with raised consciousness the community has taken steps to discourage the above practices, there is still much progress to be made. Perhaps gains in equality are coming too slowly because of the very nature of the activity itself. Fredal explains:

> Like other ideologies and practices of domination, patriarchy constantly must be reproduced and maintained rhetorically. Those engaged in this maintenance rarely perceive themselves as reproducing the cultural forms that allow patriarchy to exist. More often, cultural products are seen simply as enacting what they proclaim for themselves: news programs simply report the news, advertisements simply sell, songs simply entertain. Rhetorical critics who question those ostensible functions, as feminist critics do, are said to be reading too much into an artifact or to be finding things that aren't really there. In fact, hegemonic practices rely on this resistance to criticism in order to maintain the appearance of naturalness that they construct. (75)

Dominance, over-emphasis on competition, and limited freedom of perspective pervade the activity and act as barriers to the effective practice of invitational rhetoric. Tournament debaters and their coaches and critics seem focused on domination. Methods of intimidation and domination in and out of rounds, motivated by a competitive mindset, have been popularized by the activity. The nature of these methods ranges from techniques within the debate, to seemingly personal attacks.

One specific method debaters use during a debate to dominate their opponent is delivery. For example, current speed of delivery is seen as a way to gain power over the opposition. Debaters talk as fast as they can in an attempt to present more arguments than their opponents. Talking quickly also allows a debater to introduce so many arguments that



the opponent may not have time to sort through everything and understand it appropriately enough to respond in an invitational manner. Additionally, there is dominance through nonverbal communication. Current debate tradition trains debaters to look only at the judges, since they are the ones that a debater has to convince. Some debaters use space to intimidate their opponent as well, taking a position that has them violating the personal space of their opponent, or has them in a dominant position to their opponent. Facial expressions are also used to show domination in a round. Debaters make a face when the opposition makes a mistake to draw the judge's attention to it. Raised eyebrows are often used as expressions of disbelief in order to make light of the opponent or their argument. Gestures are used to dominate. Pounding on a desk or lectern to emphasize a point is one example. Finally, paralanguage, the vocal but nonverbal aspect of speech, reflects the desire to dominate. Debaters may raise their voice to dominate a round. They may answer questions or arguments sarcastically to show their absurdity. They may talk intentionally slow to emphasize the weakness of an opponent's argument.

But there are also methods of personal attack. A prime example of this sort of domination is the publicly sanctioned methods of "judge intimidation." The lack of courtesy that is occasionally displayed toward judges is a reflection of the lack of safety inherent in domination. It is impossible to feel safe when someone is screaming at you in anger for making a "stupid" decision. Some judges stop disclosing to avoid the possibility of this unpleasantness. That proves there is not a full level of security within the current debate framework. Similar tactics are employed against student advocates as well. Currently, debaters will, at times, demean positions or people. Even attempts to hurt, degrade, or belittle other participants are embraced by some. Often the other team is manipulated into taking weak positions. Judges sometimes fail to convey to the debaters that they respect them and any position that they offer, or that they care about what occurs in the round. Efforts at domination create an unsafe environment for the debaters and judges, and devalue them as individuals.

The second aspect of debate that runs counter to invitational rhetoric is the emphasis on competition. The culture of intercollegiate debate, based on competitive argument, "urges us to approach the world – and the people in it – in an adversarial frame of mind" (Tannen 3). Each team is deemed either "affirmative" or "negative," terms which designate the two teams as binary opposites, and automatically put participants into a competitive mode, geared toward domination. Current debate practices perpetuate the competitive mindset

through rewarding debaters for how well they compete against one another. Consequently, debaters manipulate their environment so that they can establish a competitive edge.

One area of the debate in which this frequently happens is cross-examination. In the current framework of debate, cross-examination seems to be used by the questioners as a means to set up arguments; bluff opponents into taking or giving up certain positions; posture; demean and/or demoralize the opponent; and gain extra preparation time. Further, questioners tend to cut off opponents mid-sentence as soon as they get the information that they want or as soon as they realize that they are not going to get the answer they want. Answers are often intentionally vague and ambiguous. Debaters know how to drag out the answers that they give in order to avoid other, possibly more troublesome questions. Current cross-examination technique seems to be geared towards the end of winning without regard to the process or people involved.

Debaters also adapt their style, or employ certain linguistic devices, in order to compete effectively. Stylistic practices in traditional debate formats which heighten competition and therefore work against invitational rhetoric are making one's evidence sound better than it is, the use of experts as absolute proof (a corollary to this practice is that in the absence of an expert, there is no proof), wording arguments as absolutes, running arguments as conditional simply for strategic reasons, and the use of language to denote domination.

Because of the competitive opposition between affirmative and negative, "it is easy for the communication within the debate to have a negative effect on the relationship between ourselves and our opponent" (Hill & Leeman 17). The focus in debate is currently placed on the argumentation and persuasion, with an almost total absence of focus on developing interpersonal relationships between participants. Current perspectives are worded to persuade judges to sign their ballots in favor of the debaters who present them, thus current perspectives are not offerings. Even so, there is room for change. After all, the reason debate is described constantly in terms of competition and contest is simply "because we currently teach and practice argumentation and debate in this way" (Gehrke 78).

Finally, debaters are not entirely free to offer their perspectives. Before the hegemonic dominance of "the policy making paradigm," other paradigms of tournament debate judgment – such as "hypothesis testing" – normalized initial, tentative, and conditional perspective offering. However, the more recent insistence that students identify one complete policy in the first speech and "defend it to the death" is problematic. Not only does this policy defense attitude work against the external condition of "openness"



developed in Foss and Foss, but it is also inconsistent with the conditionality of "perspective offering" (i.e., tentativeness, willingness to yield) as explained by Foss and Griffin (7-8).

Another major barrier to offering in debate might be the popular paradigms of judgement and practices of tournament debate that are strongly committed to denying reciprocity. Affirmatives and negatives are run through bizarre and distinct mazes of nonreciprocal rights: powers, burdens and presumptions which are designed to rectify the competitive imbalances created by the denial of the same symmetrical rights to the other. It seems that a lot of strategies today are designed at limiting the ground or offering of the other team.

All in all, the offering of the judge may be the most difficult part of a debate round in which to incorporate the idea of invitational rhetoric. After all, the judge's function in a traditional debate round is to render a decision, to choose who wins and who loses, and to assign speaker points. In other words, a judge should judge, which seems on face value to be in opposition to the definition of invitational rhetoric. As Foss and Griffin posit, "In presenting a particular perspective, the invitational rhetor does not judge or denigrate others' perspectives but is open to and tries to appreciate and validate those perspectives, even if they differ dramatically from the rhetor's own" (5). Nonetheless, invitational rhetoric does recognize that offerings are accepted or rejected.

While the nature of debate teaches participants to be open to new ideas, and the structure provides room for all those ideas to be expressed, the underlying influence of patriarchy on debate fosters domination, competition and limitations on offerings. However, these do not have to be inherent features of debate. Transformation is possible because cultures can and do evolve.

### Goals for Debate within an Invitational Perspective

We assume that there is interest in "righting the boat" in some way, in changing the spirit of debate to one that is more invitational in approach. Where we may disagree is on the question of appropriate solutions. One may proceed from the assumption that academic debate does not have to be essentially or inherently patriarchal – but rather, is currently a victim of a popular and problematic paradigm of debate decision making. If so, we should be cautious against "throwing out the baby with the bath water." The essential thing about debate, for many of us, is argument.

Keeping this essential in mind, we will attempt to "right the boat" and "keep the baby" by defining the goal for debate within an invitational perspective. We will also address two possible concerns that this goal might raise: how can one evaluate argument within an invitational perspective, and does an invitational perspective preclude the idea of change? Finally, we will suggest some benefits that might be gained as a result of applying an invitational perspective to debate.

While current debate practice focuses on competitive argumentation, an invitational focus on debate would lend itself to cooperative argumentation. As Makau notes, "Competitive argumentation focuses on winning something, from an audience's vote to a debate prize. Cooperative argumentation focuses on the shared goal of finding the best answer or making the best decision" (*Reasoning* 48). She continues:

> Cooperative argumentation . . . is a process of reasoned interaction on a controversial topic intended to help participants and audiences make the best assessments or decisions in any given situation. Advocates participating in cooperative argumentation share evidence and ideas with one another. They recognize that their views can only be enlightened by as comprehensive and open an exchange as possible. They view opposing advocates as colleagues potentially capable of enlightening them. (49)

The goal then for debate within an invitational perspective would be to find the best answer or make the best decision possible based upon the argumentation or offerings of the debaters.

Now, how do we go about evaluating the achievement of that goal? Is the idea of evaluation contrary to the concept of an invitational perspective? Does evaluation imply some form of competition? A better question that may need to be asked here is "competition in what?" It seems that tournament debate is frequently seen as competition in competition. We tend to reward those who are most competitive. But, there is no particular necessity to this arrangement in the activity. We could choose to reward "competition" in cooperation or "competition" in dialectical argument; that is, reward those who follow the ideas of invitational rhetoric. Critics could look for debaters who work together and affirm each other in an attempt to create a dialogue intent on getting every perspective out in the open with the ultimate reward of creating understanding and making the best decision possible. This suggestion fits well with the particular feminist focus of invitational rhetoric. Debaters could be rewarded for facilitating good discussion and decision-making, rather



than for "crushing" their opponents. Rather than simply being more tricky, competitive, or persuasive, better debating could be more candid, cooperative, comprehensive, and critical (see Wenzel).

This leaves us with the question of what happens when we achieve the goal for debate within an invitational perspective? In other words, have we violated the idea of invitational rhetoric if we, after finding the best answer, decide that change is in order?

It is important to point out that change is not at odds with invitation. The problem with change in current conceptions of rhetoric, including academic debate, is the mode of changing others through "control and domination" (Foss & Griffin 3). While Foss and Griffin contrast offering with "persuasive argument," which may seem to signal hostility towards change, there seems to be room for reason-giving within the shelter of invitational rhetoric. Foss and Griffin clarify that in an invitational mode, perspectives are articulated as "carefully, completely, and as compassionately as possible to give them full expression and to invite their careful consideration" and they observe that invitational rhetors "tell what they currently know or understand; they present their vision of the world and show how it looks and works for them" (7). One reading of Foss and Griffin suggests that such traditional debate components as sourcing of ideas and cross-examination, done well, need not conflict with an invitational environment (8).

If this is true, giving reasons for our tentative perspective ("This is what I believe and why I believe it") would not seem to be a necessarily inadmissible in an invitational environment, especially when those perspectives are subject to revision and the self-risk of a willingness to yield ("I could be wrong"). In short, it seems possible to offer argument in the service of decision-making without advancing "persuasive" arguments of the kind questioned by Foss and Griffin. Indeed, they themselves offer limited and contingent reasons for their "proposal" for an invitational rhetoric, reasons that have been refined due to the responses of others, and which offer something potentially transformative (8).

It is possible that "transformation" might be a better word choice than "change" within the invitational perspective. Foss and Griffin explain: "Participants even may choose to be transformed because they are persuaded by something someone in the interaction says, but the insight that is persuasive is offered by a rhetor not to support the superiority of a particular perspective but to contribute to the understanding of all participants of the issue and of one another" (6).

So, transformation within the framework of the invitational perspective would come about as a result of a better understanding of the issues, just as Makau's definition of cooperative argumentation would suggest. Indeed, a major benefit of offering from an argumentative perspective might be its potential for collaborative judgement. A perspective offered "represents an initial, tentative commitment to that perspective – one subject to revision as a result of the interaction" (Foss and Griffin 8) and participants adopt empathic attitudes in attempting to understand offered perspectives. Opffer describes the potential of this type of dialogue: "Through dialogue, we weave diverse voices to create a sum far greater than the parts, with greater generative capability. Yet we weave mindfully, removing, repairing, or including previously ignored threads" (1).

Benefits for debate within an invitational perspective include the possibility of producing an activity that is more able to accommodate everyone in the discussion in such a way that they feel respected, encouraged, and educated. This would foster supportive and passionate discussions. In turn, it would increase both education and interpersonal harmony within the activity. This would broaden the theoretical basis of the activity from solely argument theory to an inclusion of interpersonal theory and critical theory.

### Practical Aspects of an Invitational Debate

What might an invitational debate look like? From the above discussion, one may see several possibilities. We will discuss one. Our vision involves the evolution of debate practice to a more feminist perspective rather than an abrupt, or revolutionary, paradigm shift. As we said before, we do not want to "throw out the baby (the current benefits of debate) with the bath water (the patriarchal nature of debate)." And, to some extent, we are only "able to share new conceptions because they share the received tradition against which the innovator struggles" (Covino 312). However, if one favors a more radical shift, we certainly invite her or him to try it.[1] This section will discuss format, strategies, the affirmative, the negative, and the judge's offering within an evolutionary vision of debate practice.

[1] Melissa Maxcy Wade stated in 1996: "The coming century will require radical pedagogical reform in order to promote a healthy society, one in which citizens have the advocacy skills needed to communicate across the chasms of difference" (40). Invitational rhetoric provides methods for communicating across these chasms. With an invitational focus, our community could focus on what is important – how to help, how to better the world, and how to make a difference.



While one might suggest that an entirely different format might be necessary to accommodate invitational rhetoric, in the short-term it might be more reasonable to try for transformation within the current framework of debate: reasonable in the sense that a new division of debate might produce a product that is more exclusionary than inclusionary, and reasonable in the sense that a completely competition-free form of debate might not attract any support. Finally, it seems more in keeping with our reading of invitational rhetoric to transform a system rather than to reject a system outright.

Keeping with the idea of transformation, the format of debate rounds need change little in appearance, at least initially. Debate positions, times, speeches, and preparation time could remain the same. One possible transformation within the traditional format of debate might be the addition of a cross-examination of each team by the judge. To be consistent with the ideal of invitational rhetoric, this change should come about as a result of new understanding and insight, not because it is forced upon the participants. Other transformations might result as the understanding of invitational rhetoric becomes clearer to the participants involved.

While there are many skills involved within a debate, we will focus on cross-examination, delivery, and language to show how an invitational debate might differ from traditional practice. Participants of invitational debate would use cross-examination to increase understanding. One way that this could be accomplished is through "absolute listening," meaning that "listeners do not interrupt . . . or insert anything of their own as others tell of their experiences" (Foss & Griffin 11). Finally, in order to increase understanding, questioners, answerers, and judges would be willing to try and see from the other's perspective. Participation of more than two debaters in cross-examination, if its purpose is to create better understanding, would be acceptable.

For the invitational debater, delivery could focus on the creation of understanding between participants. Debaters would talk slow enough that their arguments could be processed in their entirety. The number of arguments would decrease, as debaters focus more on explaining their best arguments fully. Slower delivery seems to be one of the transformations which flows out of the idea of invitational rhetoric because, for there to be real understanding, arguments need to be processed in their entirety. They need to be "felt" by the other team and the judges. Slower delivery could help more people follow the debate. Debaters would make "normal" eye contact with both the judge and the other team. Debaters would not violate personal space, or purposely set up a situation in which they

become the dominant person within a spatial arrangement. Facial expressions would be used to create a sense of intimacy and mutual regard. Debaters would be encouraged to smile at each other more often, not just when they realize that the other team has made a fatal error. Gestures would be non-threatening. Instead of using gestures to dominate, they could be used to help explain ideas and to encourage the other to take an active part in the understanding process. Voices would be raised only in excitement at understanding or in trying to share a view with the other. Sarcasm would be replaced with caring voices. Essentially, delivery in invitational debate would focus on providing safety, value, and freedom to the other.

Invitational debaters would use language in such a way as to share their view of the world, how they actually see things, rather than how things need to be seen in order to win a debate. The focus would be on presenting their view, as it is at that time. Arguments would be presented tentatively, with the idea that the debater is open to other viewpoints. Debaters would still be able to use evidence to establish their position, but that evidence would be open to question even when the questioning is not backed up by counter evidence provided by experts. Since arguments are presented tentatively, there is some room for the idea of conditionality to survive within an invitational format. But the conditionality is more in keeping with some of the earlier justifications for the hypothesis testing paradigm. Arguments are designed to test the truth of a resolution, rather than to facilitate maneuverability for a given team. Within this framework, debaters' viewpoints are conditional in the sense that they are open to other viewpoints, and willing to change if they consider the change to be in keeping with their world. Finally, the practice of using language to dominate would cease. Language would be used in an attempt to encourage others. It would be inclusive, rather than exclusive.

Both the affirmative and negative teams would present an offering. They could present perspectives that are informative about the topic and about themselves as people, because one goal of an invitational debate is to understand each other as well as the topic. Without some element of self-disclosure in the selection of arguments, the understanding of one another becomes impossible. Teams would not choose to run positions they did not believe in order to gain a strategic advantage. Such positions would be misleading about who they are.[2]

[2] The idea that debaters should be free to explore perspectives other than their own as they advocate a position in debate has been a long-standing tradition. While this practice has valuable pedagogical benefits, we believe it is out of place in an invitational debate. Invitational debate involves self-risk (Foss & Griffin, 7). This lack of self-risk, among other features of traditional debate practice, is what led Brockriede to question the ethics of intercollegiate debate (3).



To begin, the affirmative team would choose a topical case area. Freedom to talk about what one wants to talk about is not inherently in conflict with traditional standards of politeness in following the "conversation." As in the past, we can continue to agree to talk about the debate topic in this particular setting. Additionally, without some level of cooperation on the topic of conversation, understanding becomes impossible. Freedom of expression does not equal randomness of expression.

The structure of the first affirmative constructive could remain much the same as in current practice. A team might decide to add three sections to their affirmative that currently are not found: First, a section which explains their personal involvement in the arguments they are making (why did they choose to offer this perspective and what does it reveal about them?); second, a section, much like you find at the end of a journal article, which expresses self-noted weaknesses and limitations to one's position; and, third, a section which invites the other team to respond – an invitation to debate. An example of this was provided by Krisitina Campos Wallace in an invitational debate at the National Communication Association (NCA) Convention in 1999:

> Observation four: The invitation to debate and personal experience. I never knew the situation facing Iraqi women and children before I began to dive into this literature. After reading some of the individual stories of Iraqi women, I found that it is not only their culture that hurts women, but also the actions of armed governments. This was definitely an eye-opening experience, and by the same token it has made me more interested in doing something about it, hence this offering. And now, knowing that Amanda [the INC] has also been researching this topic and has her own ideas about this subject, I would invite her and all of you into this discussion. I certainly don't know enough to make this decision alone. I hope that you will be willing to share your personal feelings, experiences, and ideas on ways that we can help the plight of Iraqi women. ("Invitational Debate" 2)

Once this topical and personal perspective is offered, the affirmative would be free to listen to the negative's perspective and adjust their perspective accordingly. Invitational

debate allows debaters to "risk self" – to "transform" when they see the wisdom of doing so and cooperate with the other team in developing a greater understanding of the topic.

The negative team would have the same rights, opportunities, and responsibilities as the affirmative team. They would present arguments which supported their assigned side of the "conversation." These arguments would need to reveal information about the members of the negative team. They would need to find some way to answer the affirmative's position with arguments that the negative believed.

However, the negative would need to be given more ground than might be traditionally granted. Direct clash may not be an option when the negative is asked to run a position that they hold some personal connection to. The negative should be free to critique the assumptions of the topic itself without having to argue the specific advantages and disadvantages of the affirmative proposal. The ends do not always justify the means. Arguing at a resolutional rather than a personal level, the negative could argue that the ends the affirmative is striving for are good goals, but we need to find another set of assumptions to use in reaching those goals.[3]

As with the affirmative, the negative would be free to "risk self." Cooperation, collaboration, and the willingness to explore other positions would be desirable in an invitational debate. The negative team might find it desirable to add the same "new" sections as the affirmative: (1) a statement of personal involvement, (2) a statement of limitations, and (3) an invitation to debate.

The judge's offering would follow that of the affirmative and the negative. To start, it would help for debaters to truly invite the judge to respond with an offering of his or her own. Amanda Wilkins provided the following example in a debate at the 1999 NCA convention: "Now, I . . . would like to welcome our critic. I . . . want to see what he thinks of this – what [are] his concerns. . . ? Now that you have heard what we've offered, what [do] you think? What are your perspectives?" ("Invitational Debate" 6).

If judges are willing to present their decision as a statement of how they presently see things, rather than as the correct decision or view, they may be on the right track for following the ideal of invitational rhetoric. The concept of freedom lends credence to this possibility. If the audiences' lack of acceptance of a perspective makes no difference to the

[3] This might be achieved through the invitational practice of re-sourcement: "Re-sourcement is a response made by a rhetor according to a framework, assumptions, or principles other than those suggested in the precipitating message" (Foss & Griffin, 9).



rhetor, then judges should have the right to their own view, after they have exercised diligence in listening to the debaters.

In making their offering, judges should create an environment of safety, value, and freedom. Judges can begin to demonstrate safety by receiving a debater's arguments with respect and care. Judges would not ever degrade the debaters or their positions. Debaters would feel that judges are working with them rather than against them. If a judge explains their decision at the end of the round as the way they feel, rather than as the way it is, debaters might feel safer in continuing to present their views. In offering their perspective, judges might also give the debaters a better understanding of the positions that they are running, helping them to identify possible barriers to the creation of understanding for future judges. At the 1999 NCA Convention, Jeffrey Bile provided the following example of such a critique:

> A rhetorical perspective, in itself, is viewing arguments as better because it shows a better job of getting what the advocate wants, it gets an effect from the audience. A logical perspective says that an argument is better if it conforms to some standard of good argument, which is externally referenced and owes a lot of its existence to modernity. And a dialectical perspective is one which attempts to decide that one argument is better than another because it does a better job of helping us make a decision. And on that point, it seems to me that it is friendly with invitation. The four criteria which Wenzel presents for saying an argument is dialectically preferable to an another is that it is more candid, more cooperative, more comprehensive, and more critical. So, for just a couple of minutes, I would like to talk about this debate from this perspective. First, I think that this was a very candid debate, from a debate perspective. I think this may the one area in which debate is getting better, I think with the increase in disclosure, for example, the willingness to say, "here is what my position is, I am not trying to surprise you with it or hide it." I think that was evidenced well in this debate. There was also a good deal of candidness, I think, on both sides of this debate as it progressed – the offering of the caveats in the first speech, saying here are the limitations of my perspective, these things are worthy of further consideration, the admissions made in cross-examinations – "admissions," you know I am hung up on that language, it is the way I think debate people are trained to think – if you "admit" something that the other side could use, that is somehow a mistake, but it could instead be seen as a

> sign of good argument, instead of a sign of weakness in argument. I think that those admissions were clear on both sides, but I would give the affirmative a little edge in the category of candidness because the disclosure of potential weaknesses was so straightforward, I thought that was very helpful to me as a listener. ("Invitational Debate" 6-7).

Judges may begin to demonstrate value by treating debaters more as peers in the offering process. Judges would be careful not to present paternalistic attitudes when announcing their views. Judges could try to be open-minded to debater's positions, practicing the idea of absolute listening and trying to see the position from the debater's perspective. Judges would try to treat debaters as individuals, learning their names and interests outside of the debate round. In an attempt to establish the worth of a debater, judges would make sure to affirm the good of the debaters as individuals and as arguers.

Judges may begin to demonstrate freedom by not arguing with the debaters after a round. Just as a judge has a right to their view, debaters should be accorded the right to their own views. By acknowledging that debaters have the right to make decisions, judges have given debaters freedom. Judges might also demonstrate freedom by being willing to discuss their viewpoint with debaters since freedom allows for suppositions to be challenged. Likewise, punishing debaters through deducting speaker points, or through giving them a loss for not following the idea of invitational rhetoric would seem to violate the principle of freedom.

## Conclusion

Evolving to an invitational perspective of debate will take time, practice, experimenting, and persistence. It will require individuals (coaches, debaters, and judges) to voluntarily question their current assumptions and make changes that seem appropriate to them. We hope that a large part of the community is ready for a kinder and gentler atmosphere which allows for more freedom of argument and more respect for all of the individuals involved. Please join in our conversation. Let us know what you think of the idea. Let us know of your experiences when you try the concept of invitational debate. Let us know your concerns.



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# RESPONSE

**Sonja K. Foss**

To respond to the effort to integrate intercollegiate debate and invitational rhetoric requires that I begin with an acknowledgment of my standpoint, the perspective and experiences out of which my response develops. I never competed in intercollegiate debate and, in fact, I do not recall ever seeing such a debate. I do not know the basics of debate – *taglines*, *flow*, and *power tagging* mean nothing to me, and I certainly never have experienced a fear of the dreaded counter-warrant. My only experience with intercollegiate debate has been that when debaters enroll in one of my presentational speaking classes, I inwardly groan because I think to myself that they are going to be arrogant and talk way too fast. I offer my perspective, then, from a standpoint of ignorance about intercollegiate debate.

Because I have no experience with intercollegiate debate, I have chosen as my starting point not debate but the nature of the world in which we currently live. I believe that one of the major communication problems we face is a pervasive atmosphere of unrelenting contention that Deborah Tannen calls the *argument culture*. In this argument culture, we tend to respond to people and ideas in an adversarial frame of mind with communication designed to attack, criticize, and oppose, even when our goals might better be accomplished with other modes of communication. We see evidence of this adversarial approach to understanding and approaching the world in, for example, negative political advertisements, the lack of civility that has come to characterize debate in political and legislative settings, the hostile and abusive language in which many private and public interactions are conducted, and the increasing use of physical violence as a means for resolving differences. In the face of this argument culture, I believe that communication scholars and educators have a responsibility to try to counter this culture by helping students develop the skills, knowledge, and abilities necessary to use communication to create a more civil and humane world. Cindy Griffin and I developed invitational rhetoric in part to provide an option for rhetoric rooted in respect and civility rather than domination and contention.

Intercollegiate debate seems to me to teach skills that are antithetical to invitational rhetoric and to the achievement of a civil and humane world: it is an activity that perpetuates

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