

Arguing for Debate: Introducing Key Components for Assessment of Intercollegiate Debate Programs

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Assessment is a growing trend in higher education. This essay argues that stakeholders in intercollegiate debate programs should proactively begin assessment. Programs should follow a four-step cycle of assessment by establishing expectations, reviewing team practices, gathering evidence, and evaluating the results. A significant portion of the essay focuses on types of evidence suitable for assessment of debate programs. Importantly, programs should choose evidence that is closely linked to their programmatic expectations and goals. This essay encourages programs to use the vast array of evidence already available and to gather other easily obtainable data to measure assessment goals. Such proactive assessment practices may allow programs to justify maintenance and expansion of their teams to administrators who have no direct knowledge of intercollegiate debate.

Assessment of programs in higher education is a growing trend. Rather than view such requirements as a threat, debate and forensics programs should view assessment as a highly effective way to “reach out to the public and explain the value of their pursuits” (Heiland & Rosenthal, 2011, p. A34). Good assessment promotes faculty thought and encourages critical reflection on their educational practices, methods, and results (Wagenaar, 2011). Carey (2010) suggests that effective assessment works for an institution by demonstrating the quality of its academic practices to the outside world. In debate, assessment should be used for the same purpose. Indeed, assessment gathers information about the success of student learning in relation to various educational objectives (Heiland & Rosenthal, 2011). Assessment

works best when “faculty members are involved in the design, implementation, and analysis of student learning” and “will only be effective . . . when faculty fully embrace the process” (Wang & Hurley, 2012, p. 1). Indeed, “faculty ownership of the process” is necessary to use assessment to promote learning (Johnson, 2012, p. 465). Debate faculty and other stakeholders should be proactive in producing assessment practices that reflect the multifaceted nature of the activity. To engage in assessment effectively, debate programs need to begin gathering and using the vast array of empirical and experiential data available to them.

What Shulruf (2010) identifies as a “lack of empirical data in analysis of extracurricular activities” is also true in college debate (p. 606). Debate assessment should examine “aspects of participation including what motivates participation, how and why students participate, and how such participation impacts on their outcomes” (Shulruf, 2010, p. 609). While participation in extracurricular activities is positively correlated with academic achievement, more research needs to be done on assessment of extracurricular programs that are academic in nature such as debate (Branch, 2003; Broh, 2002; Cooper, Valentine, Nye, & Lindsay, 1999; Gerber, 1996). Good assessment rests on the ability to provide evidence and measure outcomes. Rather than relying on “faith” that debate and forensics positively affect students, debate programs should “find solid evidentiary support” for their claims to programmatic success (Heiland & Rosenthal, 2011, p. A34). Such evidence-based assessment practices are more and more frequently required to meet accreditation standards. However, they also provide an opportunity to improve debate programs and to explain the innovative, high-impact, and academically valuable practice of intercollegiate debate to administrators and others who

may have limited exposure to the activity. In this essay, I contextualize some basic aspects of programmatic assessment in the context of debate. I do this by identifying a broad cycle of assessment and examining each stage of this cycle in terms of debate.

Understanding Assessment as a Cycle

As debate programs begin to consider assessment, understanding its cyclical nature is paramount. Anwar, Ahmed, and Al Ameen (2012) outline a basic assessment cycle in an academic setting. They write,

The assessment process is an essential part of a typical instructional cycle encompassing certain tasks; namely, planning, teaching, assessing, analyzing, and improving . . . This cycle enables various stakeholders to make informed decisions for making students' learning experiences more interesting and valuable. (p. 279)

As stakeholders in debate, debate faculty members should begin to conceptualize the variety of ways that assessment can be used to improve their programs. While institutional assessment guidelines vary, all assessment should be viewed as "an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student learning" (Angelo, 1995, p. 7). According to Angelo (1995), the key steps in the academic assessment process are: (1) to set "explicit and public" expectations for the program; (2) to "set appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality;" (3) to collect and examine evidence "to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards;" and (4) to use the results to "document, explain and improve performance" (pp.7-9). Angelo's (1995) description of the assessment cycle assumes an academic program rather than an extracurricular program. However, assessment of debate programs both inside and outside the classroom should

follow a similar trajectory.

Additionally, Janak (2012) discusses three steps of assessment including: “(1) choosing key competencies; (2) developing a rubric for student understanding; and (3) choosing and developing the measures that will be used” (p. 24). Janak (2012) recognizes that there are “hundreds upon hundreds of competencies that we can expect to impart to our students and thousands of definitions to evaluate their growth” and suggests that evaluators emphasize “the critical five or six competencies that are most pertinent to your unique campus and program” (p. 24). He elaborates, stating that definitions of success should be tailored to each individual program. To evaluate these competencies, stakeholders must examine a variety of tools and choose those that work best for a particular debate program. Janak (2012) suggests the use of various measurement tools to provide a complete analysis while not overtaxing a program. In addition to implementing Janak’s (2012) three steps of assessment, using the assessment data is imperative. Indeed, Pike (2012) suggests that a clear understanding of how the data will be used is essential to designing an effective assessment process.

In this essay, I draw on Angelo (1995), Janak (2012), and Pike (2012) as models to propose a four stage cycle of assessment for debate programs as extracurricular activities. First, debate programs should establish written statements of expectation, which may be referred to as objectives, purposes, or mission statements depending on the linguistic preferences of the host institution. What is it that a particular program seeks to accomplish? As there are a multitude of possible outcomes, they should be written down, limited in number, discrete, and assessable. Second, programs should examine their practices in relation to their desired outcomes. Is a program providing the experience

necessary to reach stated expectations? Third, programs should identify assessment tools and methods that best assess the desired outcomes. These measures will vary greatly based on the stated goals. Fourth, careful consideration of the uses of results should lead programs to improve their practices and possibly garner additional resources.

Establishing Written Statements of Expectation

Initially, debate programs should establish specific statements of expectation. Statements of expectation may be referred to as missions, visions, outcomes, etc. by various institutions. Each school will have a different vocabulary and slightly varying definitions of these terms. For the purposes of this essay, I use *statement of expectation* as an all-encompassing term referring to a program's desired results. Creating statements of expectation is a vital step in preparing for program assessment. Stassen, Doherty, and Poe (2001) explain,

A clear statement of . . . objectives serves as the foundation for the entire plan – shaping the kinds of questions you will ask, the assessment methods you will employ, and determining how useful your assessment results are for making programmatic changes. (p. 9)

Writing guidelines for what a program would like to accomplish is directly linked to determining the metrics for a particular program's evaluation. Such written statements encourage the program to focus activities to achieve the desired outcomes. For example, a debate program that has an expectation of broad participation and promotion of greater public understanding of debate in everyday political discourse will establish statements of expectation different from a program that seeks competitive success on a national debate circuit. While these are common aspirations, there are myriad possible

approaches for debate programs tied to the nature of their host institution. Statements of expectation should be written down, used to guide everyday activities, and should determine the best types of evidence used later in the assessment process.

In each case, “assessment practices” should be “tailored as carefully as possible to meet the defined need” (Broadfoot, 2005, p. 128). It is important to remember that assessment is a broad and complicated enterprise that seeks to understand the complexity of human learning and growth. Therefore, stakeholders in debate assessment processes should remember that “assessment is . . . not, and can never be, a science: it is a craft and a social process” (Broadfoot, 2005, p. 129). Indeed, assessment of debate programs should be carefully tailored to fit individual teams and their universities.

Before conceptualizing desired expectations, debate programs should seek out assessment documents from their institution. Assessment is intended to promote the “educational values” sought after by a particular program within the context of the broader educational values of the host institution (University of Central Florida, 2005). Each institution should have its own assessment documents or guidelines, which may contain institution specific vocabulary. Some universities will stress visions or mission statements while other will focus on desired outcomes. Additionally, institution-specific documents may also have templates for goals and mission statements. While some schools publish their assessment documents on their websites, others maintain them internally. So, I recommend a visit to the appropriate assessment office to gain an understanding of the process at a particular debate program’s institution. Understanding institution-specific vocabulary and how it is used in the assessment process

allows debate programs to function within the particular assessment rubric of their host institutions. This could translate into great time savings as written statements of goals, missions, and outcomes can be crafted in institution specific language for internal audiences. In this way, such documents may be prepared in the most efficient manner possible while maximizing the chance that they will be persuasive to internal institutional audiences.

Second, debate programs should consider the many possible benefits of participation on a debate team. A few examples of such benefits are: improvements in critical thinking, development of argument and strategic thinking skills, knowledge acquisition, competitive success on a variety of levels, and civic engagement. While the above benefits of participation are fairly academic in nature, debate is a multifaceted, experiential activity. Therefore, it is important that statements of expectation reflect the depth of debate's impact on students' lives. To this end, they should be developed through consideration of several factors including: (1) type of debate and forensics activities (e.g., individual events, parliamentary style debate, policy debate, online debating, debate across the curriculum, or public debate); (2) the purpose of the style or format a particular team chooses to engage (e.g., promoting public deliberation, developing research skills, developing various computer skills, promoting competitive success, heightening student learning in the classroom, etc.); (3) the particular skills or outcomes students may achieve (e.g., public speaking, eloquence, rapidity of thought, research skills, knowledge in particular areas, etc.); and (4) the diversity of learning environments and student exposure to those environments (e.g., research, tournament travel, practice debates, public forums, online forums, etc.). Additional considerations include educational and career outcomes

the students will reap from participation (e.g., access to graduate school, admission to law school, specialized internships reserved for debaters, etc.), possible direct benefits to the students from their involvement in undergraduate mentoring and research for your program, and spillover academic success, personal growth, etc.

A program's statement of expectations should also highlight the distinctive nature of the debate program. Some questions to consider when answering this question include: Does the competitive academic nature of the program provide students a nexus between academic and real world experiences? Does the program provide the students with essential training that cannot be accessed through other activities or is more effectively accomplished than in other pursuits? In what ways does the experiential nature of the debate and forensics world differ from other programs offered at the institution? Does the high-impact nature of debate make it a particularly influential experience for students?

Statements of expectation will vary depending on the type of team they are written for. A well-funded policy debate team from a private university that plans to engage on top tier competition (ABC) may have significantly different expectations than a regional policy team housed in a public university that has more limited travel opportunities but also engages in public debate (XYZ). I provide sample statements of expectation for each below in Figure 1. While these statements are modeled on the University of Central Florida's (2005) assessment documents, they are instructive as general examples. In every case, programs should adjust the statements to reflect the format and priorities of their host institution. However, the differences between the two samples are useful for understanding the ways that statements of expectation are linked to choice of evidence for assessment.

Figure 1: Sample Statements of Expectation

Sample Statement of Expectation for ABC

University Debate Team: The intercollegiate debate team at ABC University seeks to train highly skilled students in the research, speaking, and analytic thinking skills necessary to obtain top levels of success in policy debate through travel to 8-12 nationally competitive policy style tournaments each year. Outcomes for students include: (1) Enhancement of student's academic success through research and critical thinking skills; (2) Developing networks of future colleagues; (3) Preparation for entry to top tier graduate or law schools, and access to specialized internships in policy fields; (4) Top tier competitive success in academic debate. ABC Debate promotes the development of critical thinking skills, knowledge of policy issues, speech writing skills, and high levels strategic thought and understanding necessary to success in a variety of business, legal and political careers. In addition to highly transferrable skills, the intensity of the program seeks to provide students with the ability to experience and excel in a fast paced, intellectually demanding environment. The debate team at ABC University is unique because it is an extracurricular program that includes the excitement and competition common to sporting activities in a highly academic environment. It thus prepares students for upper echelon professional success after graduation.

Sample Statement of Expectation for XYZ

University Debate Team: The public and intercollegiate debate team at XYZ University seeks to train a broad cross section of students in research, speaking, analytic thought, public debate and deliberation to promote participation in both regional policy debate and public debate forums. Regional travel and a series of well-

publicized on-campus debates will round out the students' experiences. Outcomes for students include: (1) Enhancement of student academic success through research and critical thinking skills; (2) Preparation for entry into graduate or law schools, the workforce, and access to specialized internships in policy fields; (3) Enhancement of public dialogue and deliberation in the campus community. XYZ Debate promotes development of critical thinking skills, an understanding of public deliberation and democratic discussion of various ideas, exposure to policy issues, and ability to analyze issues in a variety of fields (e.g. legal, political and social). In addition to producing actively engaged citizens, XYZ Debate helps students prepare for success in a variety of legal, business, and political careers. The debate team at XYZ is unique because it provides both competitive academic experience and direct engagement in the campus community. Each of these learning environments prepares students to be engaged and productive citizens after graduation.

While there are some similarities in the statements in Figure 1, the ABC University statement suggests a program that has a relatively large budget, high levels of coaching support, and continuous, high-level success in intercollegiate policy debate. XYZ University, on the other hand, reflects a program that may have less money for travel, less coaching support, and be in a university that expects large numbers of students to participate. The point here is not to assess the relative merits of each type of program. Rather, it is to recognize that individual debate programs have varying expectations contingent upon many factors such as budget and type of institutional host. Given the diversity of programs, it is essential to understand that distinct statements of expectation influence the data a program chooses to use

in assessment.

After completing a statement of expectation, a director should outline specific goals. Guidelines for establishing goals include,

- Identify three or more goals that are important (i.e., strongly related to the mission and that will help to achieve the vision).
- Goal statements should describe the expected performance of the student or specific behaviors expected from graduates of the program.
- Don't identify too many goals, particularly when first starting out. (University of Central Florida, 2005, p. 23)

Goals should direct the methods for assessment and activities the program engages in during the period of assessment. At least three goals should be identified. But, programs should remember that too many goals may interfere with the ability to accomplish them. New goals may be established as initial goals are met or the nature of the program changes. "The general format of a goal statement is: 'To (action verb) (object) (modifiers)'" (University of Central Florida, 2005, p. 23). With a focus on "student learning and not the . . . activity," goals should reflect the program's statement of expectations and be possible to assess (University of Central Florida, 2005, p. 23). In each case, the goals should express the unique qualities of the program's statement of expectations. To illustrate, I use the University of Central Florida's (2005) assessment document as a model to outline sample goals for both ABC and XYZ University Debate Teams in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Sample Goals

Sample Goals for ABC University Debate Team:

Goal One: To provide core students with extensive experience in a dynamic, fast-paced, and intellectually demanding environment.

Goal Two: To prepare students to enter graduate school, law school, specialized internships, or other areas of advanced training.

Goal Three: To have students complete their debate education with high levels of competitive success in national venues and transferrable skills such as critical thinking, speech writing, and research.

Goal Four: To prepare students to network and succeed in a variety of demanding business, legal, and political professions.

Sample Goals for XYZ University Debate Team:

Goal One: To provide a wide variety of students with exposure to the dynamic, fast-paced, and intellectually demanding environment of intercollegiate debate.

Goal Two: To prepare students to enter graduate school, law school, specialized internships, or other areas of advanced training.

Goal Three: To have students complete their debate education with regional competitive success and additional skills in critical thinking, speech writing, and research.

Goal Four: To prepare students to engage in their communities and the democratic process through the practice of public deliberation.

While the goals for both teams are similar, there are key differences. For ABC University Debate, goal one specifies extensive experience in policy debate for a few core students, while for XYZ University Debate, it specifies the desire to expose a large number and variety of students to some intercollegiate debate. Goal two is the same for both programs. Goal three differs in degree of acquisition of the stated skills and expectations of competitive success. While goal three for ABC University requires very high levels of competitive success for a small number of students, goal three for XYZ University asks the program to seek to provide limited competitive success and improve the skills of a larger number of students. Finally, goal four varies significantly for XYZ University highlighting the democratic deliberation aspect of the program. Whereas ABC University Debate intends to prepare students to excel in a wide variety of professional jobs, XYZ University Debate is primarily interested in producing engaged and informed citizens. The means to achieve these goals will be quite different. A school such as ABC University would need an extensive travel schedule to the most competitive tournaments, plenty of practice and research from the students, and large amounts of one-on-one coaching time to perfect students' ability to compete. XYZ University might travel to a few regional tournaments a semester with less one-on-one coaching time and more group preparation, while choosing to develop an extensive series of on-campus debates stressing deliberation of public issues. I will not develop a full explanation of the programmatic differences here except to note that such variations require different choices about what evidence to use in programmatic assessment.

Programmatic Practice: Aligning Activities and Expectations

After a program has established a statement of

expectation outlining particular visions, mission statements, desired outcomes, etc., it is important to examine the program's practices for consistency with goals. Referred to as "constructive alignment," this involves "the process of synchronizing teaching methods, learning activities, and assessment tasks with [a] course's learning outcomes" (Keshavarz, 2011, p. 3). Each part of a program's activity should work to fulfill parts of the program's expectations. Programs need to ask honest questions such as: Are the activities the program engages in directly tied to meeting programmatic expectations? In what ways? Are there activities that the program engages in that distract from meeting expectations? Are there beneficial activities the program engages in that are not represented in the statement of expectation? If stakeholders in a debate program engage these questions and find that there are activities that do not add to the mission of the program or are not fully reflected in the statement of expectations, then they may wish to adjust their practices or statements of expectation. Such adjustment might include revising the statement of expectation to reflect more accurately the activities the team engages in or reducing time spent on activities that distract from or do not contribute to meeting programmatic expectations. For example, a debate team that highlights civic engagement and public debate ought to prioritize these activities while downplaying travel for competitive purposes. On the other hand, a debate program with expectations that are focused on national rankings may choose to spend less time developing public debate opportunities. In each case, the debate program should focus the majority of its efforts on activities that produce outcomes consistent with stated expectations.

Gathering Evidence: Assessment Tools and Methods

Once expectations are established and practices

are aligned with expectations, debate programs should examine the expectations in relation to the available means of measurement. In assessment, evidence-based analyses show that your results are “scientifically sound” or accurate (National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices [NREPP], 2012). In addition to quantitative measures, I argue for qualitative assessment, which incorporates a wide variety of types of evidence that can be used to support program assessment. Indeed, assessment should “include qualitative and quantitative, and mixed methods” (Wise & Barham, 2012, p. 27). In fact, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2009) stresses, “assessments must include quantitative and qualitative methodologies as appropriate, to determine whether and to what degree the stated mission, goals, and student learning and development outcomes are being met” (p. 35). For debate programs, this means assessment may be measured in a variety of ways. In particular, stakeholders should choose methods that best assess their ability to provide results consonant with their stated expectations.

Because debate can be described both as experiential learning and as a high-impact educational practice, assessment tools should reflect the broad values inherent in these concepts. As experiential learning, debate “promotes learning through direct experience, often outside the classroom” (McKenzie, 2013, p. 26). Experiential learning is “applied action” outside the classroom that allows students to “better develop one’s personality. . . and be better able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgment, and personal responsibility” (McKenzie, 2013, p. 27). It can “be transformative, creating new knowledge, skills and attitudes for students that neither theory nor practice alone can accomplish” (Qualters, 2010, p. 55). As a high-impact educational practice, debate trains students who thrive “in a world

of strong global focus,” can “think in cognitively complex ways,” are information literate, and have “strong communication skills” (Leeper, 2009, pp. 154-155). Accordingly, assessment methods must measure the complexity of debate as a learning process. In general, “assessment instruments are no longer confined to the simple, act-oriented, lower level cognitive process achievement test. The old “marking” yardstick . . . is clearly no longer adequate” (Drews, 1962, p. 11). For debate, the notion of evidence-based assessment should encompass a variety of types of non-traditional evidence such as photographs and videos, which allow programs to convey the dynamic fast-paced nature of the activity. Such evidence should be integrated with statistical and other data because it demonstrates the richness and intensity of student engagement in a way that numbers alone cannot.

When choosing which type of evidence to use for assessment purposes, a program must consider its ability to measure or demonstrate particular team goals. For example, ABC University Debate’s first goal is: *To provide core students with extensive experience in a dynamic, fast-paced, and intellectually demanding environment.* To assess this goal, a program must consider a few factors: What is extensive experience? Where is the student population drawn from? What aspects of the debate experience convey the dynamic, fast paced nature of the activity? In this case, the program might choose to use various types of evidence to document team performance in relation to the goal. For example, time logs can show the extensive nature of the experience. To assess the quality of students participating in a program, assessors might look at average grade point averages in comparison to the student body population, previous debate accomplishments, or other academic and extracurricular activities.

For XYZ University Debate, goal one differs somewhat. XYZ Debate's first goal is: *To provide a wide variety of students with exposure to the dynamic, fast-paced, and intellectually demanding environment of intercollegiate debate.* In assessing this goal, a program must measure the number and diversity of students participating on the squad. Diversity factors might include demographic factors such as age, race, socioeconomic background, sex, student interests, individual pursuits, and chosen majors. In addition, the number of students participating can demonstrate that the program is reaching a cross-section of the undergraduate population. To assess the nature of the involvement and intellectual rigor, time logs, photographs, videos, and samples of debate evidence or work product may be used. Goal two is the same for both ABC Debate and XYZ Debate. It is: *To prepare students to enter graduate school, law school, specialized internships, or other areas of advanced training.* The most direct and compelling way to measure this goal is to keep a record of alumni accomplishments.

For ABC University, goal three states: *To have students complete their debate education with high levels of competitive success in national venues and transferrable skills such as critical thinking, speech writing, and research.* Several types of evidence assess this goal. Initially, the competitive success aspect of the goal can be directly supported with tournament results such as records of speaker awards, team awards, team rankings, etc. Since this goal calls for success in national venues, a program would also want to provide evidence that the tournaments that the team participated in were truly national events by examining the number of teams participating in a particular tournament and their geographical diversity. To assess transferable skills such as speech writing and critical thinking, and

research, directors might choose to implement pre- and post-tests. There are standard tests for measuring critical thinking skills, some of which are discussed in later in this essay. Because debate is a unique activity, programs should explore alternate formats for such tests such as videotaping speeches. For example, a program could assess speech writing skills on a yearly basis by recording a student's practice speech at the beginning and at the end of a debate season and providing written assessments for each. Programs should retain all research produced by the team. This can be assessed by examining at the variety of topics, the depth of research into topics, and the page count produced in a single year.

For XYZ University Debate, goal three is similar. It reads: *To have students complete their debate education with regional competitive success and additional skills in critical thinking, speech writing, and research.* Initially, critical thinking, speech writing, and research skills may be measured in the same way as for ABC Debate. Goal three differs for XYZ debate because it asks for regional competitive success, which can be measured through individual results, team results, and points standings. Regional and national tournaments can provide fruitful evidence for analysis. For this type of assessment, a program might examine their results in relation to the results of peer institutions. Cumulative results sheets can track individual debaters over time, noting improvements in win percentage, speaker points, elimination round participation, etc.

Finally, goal four for ABC Debate states: *To prepare students to network and succeed in a variety of demanding business, legal, and political professions.* In this case, a program monitors the career successes of alumni. For XYZ Debate, goal four reads: *To prepare students to engage in their communities and the democratic process through the practice of public deliberation.* For XYZ

Debate, goal four requires alumni contact, but asks the director to keep track of slightly different information. Contact with alumni, perhaps even periodic alumni surveys, should allow programs to gather information about public engagement.

While the benefits of debate in general are being studied quantitatively, individual programs should develop assessment measures that are relevant to their programmatic expectations (Anderson & Mezuk, 2012; Colbert, 1995; Gregory & Holloway, 2005; Mezuk, 2009; Mezuk, Bondarenko, Smith, & Tucker, 2011). It is increasingly important to offer evidence that collegiate debate programs provide substantial benefits to the student populations they serve. To that end, I discuss some tools for engaging in evidence-based assessment. Depending on programmatic expectations, there are a variety of types of assessment measures that demonstrate student development through debate. These measures should be closely tied to the individual program's statement of expectations and goals. Media coverage, team photographs and videos, students' academic performance, time logs, student evaluations, pre-tests and post-tests, self-report surveys, diversity measures, portfolios, tournament cumulative results sheets, rankings and awards lists, and alumni success can all be used to provide evidence of a thriving program.

Media coverage. One type of evidence that is available to debate programs is external media coverage. If programs can show that they consistently produce positive press for the university, the debate team may be seen as a valuable recruiting tool and a public relations asset. This type of coverage can be encouraged through frequent press releases, including high quality digital photographs and well-advertised public debate events on hot topics. News releases should highlight the prestige, scale, and difficulty of the tournament. Naming peer

institutions, rivals institutions, or high profile institutions the team has defeated is an effective way to draw attention. Press releases should also include interesting non-debate related information. For example, a debate article I wrote about Harvard was picked up by our local media because the debaters were stuck in Hurricane Sandy. Additionally, planning cross curricular debates with other academic units can promote debate across the curriculum and might bring additional positive attention to the debate team.

Photographs and videos. Second, while photographs alone do not provide a measure of student learning, they can and should be included in assessment materials. Photographs can convey the nature of the team environment and student involvement in a manner that purely written analyses may miss. Photographs humanize team members, display trophies, and convey the intensity of the debate activity in a fashion that might be difficult to do through other assessment tools. Videos of individual speeches or whole debates can be used in a similar way. Such videos provide examples of student participation and may be evaluated for signs of student growth and advancement.

Because debate is a unique activity, programs should explore alternate formats of assessment such as recording and evaluating speeches. For example, a program might assess speech analytic speech skills on a yearly basis by recording a student's practice speech at the beginning and at the end of a debate season and providing written assessment for each. Not only would this practice provide excellent evidence for assessment, it would benefit the team by promoting debate success as students and coaches formally reviewed student speeches and suggested areas for growth and improvement.

Academic performance. Third, programs should closely monitor students' academic performance. Statistics, such as completion rates of debaters in comparison to the broader student body population, can provide evidence. Additionally, programs can track academic performance by comparing the debaters' grade point averages to the averages in the rest of the student population. Programs may also choose to examine students' grade point averages prior to debate participation and after involvement with debate. If it can be shown that debate participation enhances learning in non-debate environments, programs will be one step closer to effectively proving the worth of their activity and communicating its value to those not directly affiliated with debate.

Time logs. Fourth, to show the extensive nature of the experience, programs might require students to keep logs of time spent working independently, time spent working with coaches, time spent traveling, and time spent in competition debate. Such numbers can become impressive quite rapidly. For example, assume that a two person team traveled to five 8-round tournaments a semester, did two practice debates a week, and spent 10 hours a week preparing and researching arguments. In a 16 week semester, that team has logged 256 hours of preparation time alone. Factoring in travel time of 25 days and actual competition time of 120 hours (assuming 40 debates at 3 hours per debate), the intense nature of the participation becomes clear.

Student evaluations. Fifth, Rowland and Atchison (2009) argue that "every successful debater has a story about a director/coach who changed his/her life" (p. 67). Indeed, coaching performance is at the heart of a debate team's ability to meet expectations. Yet, "traditional measures of teaching effectiveness such as student evaluations are rare for a director's/coach's

debate related activities” (Rowland & Atchison, 2009, p. 67). While Rowland and Atchison (2009) note that standard teaching evaluations may not “be appropriate for determining the teaching effectiveness of a director/coach” (p. 74), I suggest that evaluations crafted for a debate team can provide a good gauge of many aspects of a program such as team climate, director and coach behavior, effectiveness of coaching, etc. Although an incomplete measure, student evaluations may be used with other assessment tools to address performance in relation to written expectations for individual debate teams. Student evaluations can and should be administered to debaters each semester. Programs might choose to have all coaches evaluated by the students. Evaluations can be customized to ask a variety of questions in order to assess any particular metric of concern. Evaluations are valuable because they provide anonymous feedback from program participants. Programmatic evaluations that are not dependent on evaluating a particular coach might also be employed. Questions could rate the participation level and the students’ overall perceptions of various components of the program including their tournament and non-tournament experiences.

Pre-tests and post-tests. Sixth, programs can implement pre-tests and post-tests for yearly topics and for programmatic participation. Each year, debaters learn an enormous amount of information on a specific topic area. Programs can develop a short test designed to measure the debater’s knowledge about the topic area before commencing research. Administering the same test at the end of the season will give the debaters an opportunity to demonstrate clearly their advancement in knowledge of the debate topic. Eventually, debate organizations such as the Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) may begin to publish pre-tests

and post-tests for each topic cycle. Currently, the CEDA Working Group on Assessment is exploring the development of such measures. However, for now, debate programs would need to develop such tests themselves. Additionally, programs can develop a standard test for students entering the program. Such a test might include debate questions, general political knowledge, and questions designed to measure critical thinking ability in addition to incorporating more open ended questions that identify expected outcomes and what the debaters feel that they have actually accomplished through programmatic participation. To assess transferable skills such as speech writing, critical thinking, and research programs might choose to implement pre-tests and post-tests.

A third option is to use a standard test of student skills such as critical thinking. Much qualitative analysis supports the claim that debate develops critical thinking skills (Lundberg, 2009; O'Donnell, 2009). Individual programs wishing to demonstrate this among their debaters might employ a standard test such as the *Critical Thinking Assessment Test (CAT)*. The CAT measures students' information analysis skills, creative thinking skills, learning and problem solving skills, and communication skills (Stein & Haynes, 2011). In developing the test, faculty enumerated "a core set of skills they believed to be important components of critical thinking across disciplines" (Stein & Haynes, 2011, p. 45). The advantage of a test such as the CAT is that "considerable work has been done to establish the CAT's validity by comparing student performance on the test with other measures of academic performance and measures that might reveal critical thinking skills" (Stein & Haynes, 2011, p. 46). In other words, most administrators should find the CAT compelling. Another advantage is a standard scoring system allowing

programs to assess their students in comparison to a much broader student population drawn from 50 schools nationwide (Stein & Haynes, 2011). However, the CAT requires internal faculty to score the test and costs \$200 for each year the test is used, in addition to a \$5 fee for each test administered. Despite the cost, the CAT is one potential tool for programs wishing to demonstrate the critical thinking skills learned in debate. Because “critical-thinking skills are regarded by many faculty as the most important outcome of an undergraduate education” (Stein & Haynes, 2011, p. 49), such a tool could prove invaluable for a program wishing to demonstrate debate’s remarkable power in developing critical thinkers.

Self-report surveys. Seventh, self-report surveys are a relatively efficient and effective method of assessment. Gregory and Holloway (2005) implemented self-report surveys for social work students who participated in debates as part of the curriculum. Students filled out surveys rating their knowledge about the topic, their understanding, their argumentation skills, their confidence, and the experience as a group process (Gregory & Holloway, 2005). Their results included comments such as “it gave me an insight that may not have been presented in an essay. It gave two sides to each argument” (Gregory & Holloway, 2005, p. 626). Over the course of debate, students shifted from 80% reporting okay understanding and 20% reporting poor understanding to 3% reporting excellent understanding, 48% reporting good understanding, 45% reporting okay understanding, and 3% reporting poor understanding after the debate. In combination, open-ended responses and quantitative self-report measures can present a fuller picture of student growth. Similarly, a debate program could implement a self-report survey at the beginning and at the end of the debate season asking students

to rate their knowledge of the topic or current events, understanding of the issues involved, critical thinking skills, strategic understanding, partnership skills, speaking skills, etc. Giving students a chance to provide open-ended responses can provide additional qualitative data. Such data is a robust resource for assessment. This method allows programs to ask students about issues that closely linked to their expectations and is simple to implement.

Another option is to use an existing measure such as the *Bases of Competence* test, which is a self-report survey designed to measure “generalist skills needed by higher education graduates” (Berdrow & Evers, 2010, p. 420), with a focus on skills such as learning, organization, problem solving, analytic thought, listening, communication skills, decision making, leadership, conflict management, organization, conceptualization skills, and creativity. These and other skills are compartmentalized under “four bases of competence, *Managing Self, Communicating, Managing People and Tasks* and *Mobilizing Innovation and Change*” (Berdrow & Evers, 2010, p. 432). Berdrow and Evers (2010) make this self-report assessment available in their article, which focuses on implementation in a business school environment. Because this test measures “skills important to employees and employers in today’s workplace” (Berdrow & Evers, 2010, p. 432), it may be persuasive to administrators. The test can be administered as a paper survey or online and may be used to assess changes in student performance over a longer period of time. Debate programs that wish to use this test might choose to emphasize measurement of debate related skills.

Programs wishing to survey the students should focus on priorities that reflect their statements of expectation. To avoid overwhelming the students, “consider keeping

surveys short and doing the assessment more often but with fewer questions” (Wise & Barham, 2012, p. 28). Additionally, programs should think about presenting assessment questions in “modes that consider how students best like to interact” such as “scaled or open ended questions on Facebook, Twitter or blog sites” (Wise & Barham, 2012, p. 28). Done right, a survey can be a powerful tool to measure student learning outcomes and competencies developed through debate.

Diversity measures. Eighth, many institutions are trying to promote diversity. Debate programs wishing to include diversity as a measure should remember that promoting diversity includes both encouraging a diverse student body and promoting principles and practices that embrace diversity. The first can be measured by assessing demographic diversity factors among team members. The second may be assessed through measurement of diversity inclusion factors in the practices of a team. But, it is important to heed Ghosh’s (2012) advice and to remember that,

Diversity alone is not excellence, but excellence is enhanced and enriched by diversity. After all, diversity is a fundamental characteristic of human and natural life; indeed, it assures our achievement of excellence, which can only come through our difference and capacities to respond to the many challenges that characterize our existence and survival. (p. 363)

As a principle, diversity can contribute to academic success. Ghosh (2012) stresses that “diversity and excellence reinforce rather than contradict one another” (p. 350). Enhancing diversity in student populations and in the practices of a debate program can heighten excellence and become a persuasive way to measure programmatic success.

Indeed, promoting a diverse team can directly affect academic success among ethnic minority populations. Despite increased enrollments in undergraduate institutions, many ethnic minority populations struggle to complete undergraduate degrees. Pinel, Warner, and Chua (20005) write, “more ethnic minorities enroll in college than ever before Despite this increase in enrollment, less than 50% of all African Americans, Native Americans, and Latinos/Latinas enrolled in college . . . complete college” (p. 481). Debate programs wishing to promote diversity as a primary expectation can anticipate the ability to provide all students, and particularly students in ethnic minority groups, with the academic skills and other support to graduate in substantially greater numbers. This effect has been well documented in high school debate. For example, “students who joined a debate team were 42% more likely to graduate from high school. Among African American males . . . debaters were 70% more likely to graduate and three times less likely to drop out than nondebating peers” (Belanger & Stein, 2013, p. 17). Promoting the value of diversity among the student population can increase academic engagement for all learners (Rose, 2007). In other words, diversity promotes greater engagement among all students affiliated with a program regardless of their demographic classification.

For assessment, a program seeking to demonstrate inclusion of a diverse population must keep records tracking the number and diversity of students participating on the squad. Diversity factors might include age, race, socioeconomic background, ability status, religion, veteran status, sex, etc. as “there are many ways that people differ from one another” (Wynne, 2012, p. 32). Over time, a program that graduates students from underrepresented populations in a greater

proportion than the average student population will develop a powerful argument for their effectiveness as a team. For example, based on the statistics above, assume an institution graduates less than 50% of their African American students. In a population of 10, that would be five students. A debate program that could show an 80% graduation rate among African Americans would have compelling evidence of their effectiveness as eight out of 10 of their African American students graduated. I believe the graduation rates in an effective program might be even higher. This type of evidence should make diversity-minded administrators take note.

Diversity can also be measured by student interests, individual pursuits and chosen majors. A simple survey can be used to gather this type of information about a team. In addition, the number of students participating should be counted to demonstrate that the program is reaching across the undergraduate population. Debate programs should generally reflect the diversity of the student body population. In some cases where diversity is a primary expectation, a debate program may be more diverse than the population of the host institution as a whole. Debate programs that have an imbalance in representation of the diversity at their universities should closely examine their practices.

In addition to diversity in the demographic factors of a debate team, programs can measure their ability to promote “diversity as a learning goal” (Bowers, 2009, p. 3). Some institutions such as the University of Oklahoma are moving in this direction. To bring assessment practices into line with OU’s “Core Values,” they developed a statement to guide examinations of diversity including,

- Respecting others includes demonstrating an interest in . . . knowledge of others . . .

- To value diversity of opinion is to consider all opinions in decision making and problem solving.
- Freedom of expression occurs in a social and cultural environment that is supportive of the same . . .
- To value other ethnic and cultural backgrounds, one must appreciate the complexities of the same and understand that our interactions with others are informed by our conceptions of a wide variety of differences (such as notions of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, veteran status, nationality, religion [sic], age, ability status, sexual orientation, and so on). (Bowers, 2009, pp. 3-4)

Practices that promote diversity as a learning goal can be measured through survey research. For example, Nelson Laird (2011) measured inclusion of diversity factors in college courses by surveying instructors on 12 different items such as “Students gain an understanding of how to connect their learning to societal problems and issues,” and “You address your potential biases about course-related issues during class” (p. 574). Debate programs may choose to use measures developed by their host institution, to create their own measures, or to use Nelson Laird’s (2011) diversity inclusion measures as a model to develop questions for a survey that could be administered to debate students. In every case, providing substantive data measuring diversity in the practices of the team could be beneficial to programs trying to meet institutional and programmatic expectations for diversity.

Portfolios. Ninth, according to Paulson, Paulson, and Meyer (1991), a portfolio is “a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student’s efforts in one or more areas” (p. 60). Such a collection of work is designed to illustrate “a complex and comprehensive view of student performance in context” (Paulson et al., 1991, p.

63). Portfolios could be developed by individual debaters or for a team as a whole. The ability to demonstrate a high level of complexity makes portfolios particularly suitable for use by debate and forensics programs. As an added benefit, “if carefully assembled, portfolios become an intersection of instruction and assessment: they are not just instructions or just assessment but, rather, both” (Paulson et al., 1991, p. 61). Debate programs generate many work products suitable for use in portfolios such as videos, photos, media coverage, and evidence. While Burch (2011) cautions that “it is widely accepted that portfolio assessment requires a considerable investment of human resources and time” (p. 1029), she argues that “a less resource intensive strategy could be a feasible option” (p. 1030). Debate teams are already producing many items that would be appropriate to the creation of richly textured, multi-layered portfolios for program assessment purposes. Thus, the time investment to produce stunning portfolios may not be enormous. Instead, it would be a matter of gathering, analyzing, and presenting products most programs already produce.

Silveira (2013) notes that “paper-based portfolios are still viable” but that e-portfolios are preferable to “provide . . . a thorough student profile supported by documented evidence of skills developed over time” (p. 16). Additionally, Andrade (2013) refers to e-portfolios as “a high-impact educational practice that can be used to document learning in progress as well as its culminating effects” (p. 1). Andrade (2013) states that e-portfolios are a good way to mix qualitative and quantitative evidence, which provides great “appeal for documenting evidence of learning to both internal and external stakeholders” (p. 1). Electronic portfolios are suited to current debate practice because most evidence, photographs, videos, and media coverage are created digitally or easily accessible in a digital format.

Portfolios require direct student involvement. Banta (2007) describes the process that will best integrate learning and assessment in portfolio creation. She writes,

The most authentic assessment will be achieved through electronic portfolios for which students themselves develop the content . . . Students select graded, written, spoken, and artistic works from courses throughout their college careers, as well as photographs and videotapes of speeches, work-related events, and other leadership experiences on and off campus to illustrate their achievement of the expected outcomes. They write reflective essays to demonstrate the connection between portfolio artifacts and expected outcomes. (Banta, 2007, p. 12)

It is clear that the process of creating a portfolio is a learning process for the student. If a program chose to ask students to create portfolios, it would help students to grow academically and as debaters. According to Andrade (2013), “as students engage in the process of gathering and reflecting on evidence of their learning, they make connections across general education and major coursework and even co-curricular involvements” (p. 1). The contents of the portfolio should be carefully chosen to “to exhibit student effort, progress, and achievement . . . [and] . . . can include any number of assignments or creative tasks the students have completed” (Silveira, 2013, pp. 15-16). For debaters, portfolios could include recorded speeches, photographs, media coverage, selected flows, notes on decisions, and evidence. Leeper (2009) notes, “Debaters produce an enormous quantity of research over the course of a year. Much of this work is exhaustive and very high quality. After the season, the work typically goes into a file and stays there” (p. 153). Portfolios might be one way to demonstrate evidence as a work product to administrative and other audiences.

The final requirement for effective portfolios is evaluation designed to demonstrate student progress. Silveira (2013) explains, “Ideally, each artifact in the portfolio has been chosen to document student growth and has been assessed by both student and teacher against a detailed rubric” (p. 16). Fortunately, in debate, coaches and students are constantly evaluating performance. The portfolio itself might include video of decisions in practice debates, coach evaluations of evidence, ballots, or other instructive demonstrations of debate’s evaluative process. Indeed, graphs measuring student growth in win percentages or speaker points might complement videos of debate speeches demonstrating the student progression over time.

Cumulative results sheets, rankings, and awards.

Tenth, debate competition and pedagogy are linked. Rowland and Atchison (2009) posited, “competition serves a pedagogical function” (p. 72). They explain,

In debate . . . the competitive aspects of the activity are a means to a pedagogical end. Debaters are motivated by the competition to do an enormous amount of work researching and preparing arguments, work that they would never do in the same quantity or with the same intensity without the competitive motivators. (p. 72)

Put differently, debaters work very hard and learn a gigantic amount in the process of preparing, refining arguments, and debating. In addition, Segal (2009) observes, “Administrators have a stake in claiming debate success for the larger university reputation. This already occurs when school presidents and academic provosts cite accomplishments of the debate team as evidence of the school’s academic excellence” (p. 201). Because of its educational and reputational benefits, debate success should be an integral part of the assessment process.

To demonstrate success, programs have a built in assessment resource in tournament results sheets. Cumulative results sheets provide a vast amount of information that can be measured in a variety of ways. This information can measure the success of individual teams through total win-loss, affirmative win-loss, negative win-loss, number of debates participated in, the schools debated against, and the schools beaten. For example, a program could determine an individual team's number of victories against peer institutions and aspirational institutions. Assuming a team has a high win percentage against their peers, this information can be used to make a case for competitive success.

Additionally, cumulative results sheets can track the progress of individual debaters. Programs may choose to examine debaters' improvement over the course of single year or his or her debate career. If a program graphs each debater's success in wins and speaker points across the course of his or her debate career, it can begin to make claims about its impact on students' long-term learning outcomes. For example, a program may be able to claim that a large percentage of students (hopefully 100%) show significant improvement on one or more performance measures over time. Rather than merely stating such outcomes, the ability to provide data including graphs injects these claims with the verity that only evidence can provide.

Another way to incorporate results sheets into assessment is to make them available to those examining the success of the program. The sheer amount of information available on these sheets is often impressive to those outside the debate community. It demonstrates the magnitude of the debate undertaking to external reviewers. Programs can use cumulative results sheets to determine total amounts of participation. Number of debates, hours spent debating, days spent participating,

and numbers of competitors encountered can all provide numerical means for explaining the merits of the program to administrators and other audiences.

Programs should keep records of awards for individual debaters and cumulative lists for teams. Knowing the total number of awards won in a year, the number of first place awards, the number of awards during the director's tenure, the number of awards won by an individual throughout his or her career, etc. can be used to demonstrate impressive levels of success for those evaluating the team. Additionally, programs should monitor the rankings throughout the year and print evidence of their highest rankings. This can be done for individual teams as well as for the squad. It can be done for both regional and national rankings and for the different published ranking systems.

Alumni success. Finally, much anecdotal evidence exists suggesting that debate contributes to success after graduation. Lists of former debaters include individuals such as Lamar Alexander, Jimmy Carter, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Lee Iacocca, Lady Bird and Lyndon Johnson, John F. Kennedy, Franklin Roosevelt, Theodore Roosevelt, and many others (Segal, 2009). Loudon (2009) explains that "the most compelling evidence for the benefits of a debate education comes from our alumni-those for whom involvement in intercollegiate debate had a profound impact on their lives" (p. 57). Testimonials affirm the value of debate. For example, Washington Quarterly Editor Alexander Lennon (2010) said, "policy debate has been an indispensable element of my education" (p. 58). While such work reifies the importance of policy debate in particular, it cannot be used for assessment of programs that successful individuals did not attend. However, it points in a productive direction for assessment of debate teams. Segal (2009) writes, "The successes of debate alumni are fertile ground for

administrators seeking to enhance perceptions of their university and looking for models from which to draw inspiration for current student bodies” (p. 201). Indeed, alumni accomplishments should be used to assess individual debate programs.

I recommend that programs stay in touch with alumni at all levels of participation and follow their progress after separation from the team. An overwhelming number of debaters continue on and obtain advanced education or become successful in a variety of fields. Not only are these alumni a team’s most successful and powerful advocates, their success also reflects positively on the team itself. Most programs will find that very high percentages of their four-year participant alumni were successful after graduation. Contrasting these numbers with the statistics describing the general student population at a particular institution will allow programs to provide empirical evidence measuring their teams’ ability to accomplish their goals.

A debate program should maintain close ties with alumni for several reasons, including programmatic assessment. Initially, a program should examine alumni achievements at different levels of participation. In other words, is there a difference between success levels for alumni who participated for one semester and alumni who participated for four years? Programs may find that alumni who participated for at least one semester have higher admission rates to graduate school and law school and are more likely to receive internships and funding for such participation than the average undergraduate. Additionally, the relationship between debate participation and post graduate and professional studies will become stronger for students who maintained longer associations with the debate program as undergraduates. In many cases, I expect that programs will find extraordinarily high rates of participation in advanced

training and very high rates of graduate funding for four year program participants.

Contact with alumni, perhaps even periodic alumni surveys, should allow programs to gather information about public engagement including: participating in or organizing community volunteer activities, running for city, state or national office, leadership positions in the community, popular blogs, etc. To this end, debate faculty should maintain contact with alumni and provide alumni with information about the program. An alumni newsletter can both keep alumni in contact with one another and provide updated information about the alumni that can be used to assess the programmatic effect. In each case, stakeholders should remember that such results can be compared to available statistics about the wider student population at their institutions. This information can also be used to nominate alumni for awards from the university and to generate media coverage of a program. Finally, Segal (2009) points out that “the most successful debate programs have, not coincidentally, been the ones to make the strongest effort to develop alumni relations” (p. 200). So, in addition to aiding in assessment, alumni networks can become powerful advocates for and supporters of a debate program.

Considering Results: Where Do We Go From Here?

Once assessment materials have been completed, the program should examine the results closely. Stakeholders need to review the evidence of programmatic success as well as areas for improvement and decide “what responsive actions, if any, will be taken” (Johnson, 2012, p. 466). This stage is particularly important where problems are identified because it allows swift and appropriate corrective action. Assessment provides programs with an opportunity “to review and utilize the

assessment results by suggesting changes that might be necessary to improve the quality and standard of future offerings . . . with the aim of enhancing overall effectiveness” (Anwar et al., 2005, p. 284). This logic applies to debate programs as well. If debate programs use assessment results in a proactive way, then they can identify concrete avenues for changing their practices in a way that has the greatest potential to enhance students’ experiences. Such enhancements might improve competitive results and help to raise a program’s profile in a variety of venues.

Assessment results may also provide evidence that a debate program requires additional resources. As stakeholders examine results and develop a plan, they should consider questions such as “How do they plan to use the assessment results to improve the course? Who shall be responsible for implementing the plan? What resources will be required to carry out the plan?” (Anwar et al., 2005, p. 284). Thus, the process can provide evidence of a job well done, a plan for future growth and development, and a venue for requesting resource augmentation. In addition to making the case for university resources, assessment results can draw alumni in. Positive results give alumni a sense of pride and accomplishment and promote a feeling of connection to the program. Debate teams with strong alumni networks might also use this information to aid university development officers in “establishing, improving, and maintaining alumni relations” (Segal, 2009, p. 201). As Segal (2009) clarifies, the resources alumni provide include but go well beyond financial support. Segal (2009) suggests alumni can aid in career placement, external marketing, maintenance of institutional memory, team operations, coaching, and establishing lasting relationships with the program. When debate stakeholders honestly engage each step

of the assessment process, they have the opportunity to enhance the already rich learning environment of debate and to raise the profile of their programs among internal and external audiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, while I have identified a basic cycle of assessment for debate teams and included several areas for gathering evidence, my ideas are not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, I hope to spark a conversation about assessment and provide a starting point for programs to claim ownership of the process. Debate programs are in control of their assessment destinies. Rather than seeing assessment as a threat or an inconvenience, programs can begin to use and gather evidence that is already available to them. In this way, programs can use assessment to communicate the incredibly complex, experiential, high-impact, exciting, and challenging nature of debate to those outside the activity. Ideally, evidence that debate positively affects students' lives and accomplishes lofty goals may help some to secure additional funding and others to justify their continued existence. As stakeholders in the debate activity, we have a vast amount of experience making arguments. Now, let's take the time to gather the evidence and to use assessment to make arguments for debate.

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