Putting Debate Back Into Debate: Digital Debate and Evidence

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Digital debate has enabled debaters to seamlessly file, read, and utilize mass quantities of evidence at a level unthinkable under debate's traditional paper medium. This shift has altered how evidence is both produced and tested. A dominant trend in debate has been to view evidence's chief function as making claims. As a result, most debate research in a digital age is characterized by the "production" of specific claims; finding and constructing precise wordings to fit strategic expectations takes priority over providing and comparing the reasoning aspect of argumentation. This approach, which I dub "debate as information production," leads students further away from developing the skills of critically evaluating and judging competing truth claims in evidence. In this paper, I attempt to rectify this imbalance by arguing for prioritizing the perspective of "debate as argument-judgment" over one of "debate as information production," while articulating a set of best practices that educators can call upon to improve debates about evidence when moving forward.

The 2012 National Debate Tournament (NDT) final round between Northwestern University and Georgetown University was the first championship final to feature two teams who were "paperless," or delivered all of their evidence off of computers. A majority of the published ballots also negatively commented on the sufficiency of the evidence presented by either side. The brevity of the negative's evidence was a central feature of the two dissenting critics. Heidt (2012) noted that "this under-highlighting problem is true for a good deal of the negative's evidence" and that greater analysis may have swung his vote (para. 5). Mosley-Jensen (2012) laments "the increasing need to highlight evidence until nearly all of the warrants are stripped out" and argues that

now is the key time to discuss how contemporary policy debate presents evidence (para. 25). This was not the first time that a judge felt compelled to discuss evidence quality in the final round at length (Hardy, 2011), nor the first instance of "bad" evidence being read in a high-profile debate. However, the fact that a chorus of such highly respected educators felt compelled to comment on the inadequacy of evidence on the highest stage in intercollegiate policy debate signals that Mosley-Jensen's (2012) invitation to discuss evidence should be accepted with haste.

A discussion of the role of evidence in contemporary policy debate is long overdue for two reasons. First, the near-universal shift to a paperless format of debate happened very quickly. In 2008, one team at the NDT was paperless; in 2012, all but a handful of teams were, and as of this current debate season, nearly all of those squads had transitioned to a paperless format. While there have been several attempts to assess the consequences of a digital shift in debate throughout the last two decades (Bauschard, 2006; Polk, 1995; Voth, 2003; Wastyn & Stables, 1995), the speed of technological change has already rendered them largely obsolete. Second, discussions of paperless debate in the community have thus far not evaluated the role that evidence plays during the research and competition phases of debate. There has been a sustained focus on the socio-economic and ethical implications of the format, both in terms of its dangers (Massey, 2013; Willis, 2013) and benefits (Hanson, 2011; Hardy, 2012). The impact paperless has had on traditional debate staples like flowing, oral delivery, and "block-centric" preparation have also been discussed widely (Batterman, 2010; Galloway, 2010, 2012; Hardy, 2010b), but little attention has been paid to the role of evidence, with one exception (Hester, 2010). Given the countless ways that paperless (and digital

debate in general) has enabled debaters to seamlessly file, read, and utilize mass quantities of evidence at a level unthinkable under the traditional paper medium, there is a clear need to evaluate how evidence is typically used.

I argue that an emerging trend of paperless and digital debate is to view the function of evidence as an exercise in producing claims (both claim-finding and claim-making). I dub this approach "debate as information production." There are three major manifestations of this perspective. First, digital processing tools and paperless debate's lack of material constraints has allowed researchers to manipulate text to render information suitable to a debate. Second, contemporary debate often privileges evidentiary claims over the presentation of reasons for believing a claim, something that has been compounded by the recent phenomenon of judges reading along with the debaters' speech documents during a round. Third, contemporary debate privileges evidence production over arguments about evidence through a synthesis of deference to argument-from-authority and the information saturation that characterizes modern life. Each of these trends (to varying degrees) undermines the skills needed to develop argumentative judgment because they incentivize tactics which have limited relevance outside the realm of contest debating. Such tactics include testing evidence through electronic searches for specific wording and emphasizing the wording of claims over the quality of reasons. To rectify this issue, I propose an alternative way of relating to evidence which I call "debate as argumentative judgment."

I make this argument in three sections. First, I describe some of the central features of "debate as information production" and some of the problems that accompany it. I also argue that the dangers of reactionary responses to paperless debate are equally

unhelpful. Second, I argue that debate educators should prioritize a skill-set and curriculum that is more capable of encouraging debates about evidence and making judgments between competing fact claims. The alternative view of "debate as judgment" is established as a possible starting point to accomplish this goal. I suggest some new practices that will aid students in making judgments and comparisons about evidence in their debates while still achieving competitive success. Finally, I conclude by considering some possible objections.

Debate as Information Production

If someone entered a contemporary college policy round after having been away from the activity for a decade, many of the accepted tests or challenges of evidence would strike them as quite strange. "I want a line in your evidence that says…" is a commonly heard challenge in cross-examination. Conversely, evidence is often defended with the ardent assertion that "my evidence literally says…" Often, so much textual information is provided that debaters resort to using the "find" feature in Microsoft Word or a web browser as a way of proving or disproving the presence of a specific claim. Debaters have become increasingly less engaged in the process of comparing the reasons offered for believing any particular claim. Instead, they seem to be searching out argumentative essences, using electronic search tools as some sort of litmus strip to determine the presence or absence of content. But why have these practices become more common?

This behavior and the problems of excessive highlighting and underdeveloped warrants that Heidt (2012) and Mosley-Jensen (2012) targeted in their final round ballots are not isolated examples. Instead, they are an increasingly common part of collegiate debate

practice at both the regional and national level. Viewed holistically, these practices constitute a worldview for how many students and researchers relate to evidence; the ways in which evidence is used conveys how they view its purpose. In this section, I explore "debate as information production," calling attention to the ways that evidence is not simply processed or applied, but how claims are *produced* as the central element of debate. Evidence is produced through the digital manipulation of the text, the prioritization of advancing evidenced claims over reasoning, and through a synthesis of deference to argument-from-authority and the information saturation that characterizes modern life. To describe these trends, I draw upon observations from the 229 debates I judged during the 2010-2013 debate seasons, as well as from analysis of the open-source debate documents from the 2013 Dartmouth College Round Robin.

First, evidence is produced through the digital manipulation of the text. Debaters have always searched out the best language or claims provided by an author, but the shift to an entirely electronic method of evidence production has made several problematic practices commonplace. It is now accepted to underline only partial clauses or chunks of a sentence and link them to other partial clauses. Doxtader (1989, p. 423) comments on how the process of "selective highlighting" distorts an author's voice by magnifying the claim and destroying the qualifiers or hedges that are offered, but contemporary practice accelerates these problems. Linking together different claims and clauses while still presenting it as one single card plays into ritualized assumptions of what makes for strong evidence (specificity of wording and predictive claims from authorities) while largely being a product of the debater's making. Evidence is not fabricated per se, but contemporary practice certainly constructs it according to community expectations.

Producing evidence in this manner creates a by-product of unused words and content that is shrunk down to a miniscule size. In the past, surrounding contextual evidence was omitted through the use of ellipsis and reproducing single sentences. Such evidence was always vulnerable to challenges because it lacked a supporting context for the judge to evaluate. Now, however, large bodies of contextual information are provided but the source's supportive reasoning and grounds are reduced to a font size that makes evaluating that information difficult. To be clear, this phenomenon was not uniquely created by the shift to a paperless platform; many of the teams that are still reading evidence printed on paper engage in this practice. However, both traditional and paperless teams prepare digitally, using electronic sources or scanning software to convert printed materials to digital text. This aspect of digital evidence production has been prominent in college debate for about a decade and was the result of cheap scanning technology, improved optical character recognition software, and a greater availability of digital books and academic journals. Although it is part of a broader digital shift, paperless has compounded the problem of unused text by removing any material constraint on the quantity of data a debater can take to a tournament because tub-space and luggage fees are no longer a factor.

The lack of agreement about what should be read by the judge when assessing evidence further compounds the problem of manipulating information. This problem is hardly new, with some discussion in the past about whether judges should be reading evidence at all (Butler, 1983). Paperless debate has also stimulated an ongoing discussion regarding whether judges should obtain the speech documents before a speech begins. While there are disagreements over when evidence should

be transferred to the judge and how much they should consider when checking claims, there is often consensus that judges should only read what portions of the evidence have been read by the debaters. This creates a Catch-22 that further discourages evaluating the quality of a student's interpretation of evidence; what is read by a judge is only what the debater has selected. If digital research enables a high degree of evidence manipulation, judges will only be assessing claims that have been constructed in some sense by the debaters.

Rendering arguments from evidence in turn undermines the traditional tools that debaters have to challenge evidence quality. Some might suggest that the best solution to the problem of shrunken text or manipulative highlighting is to simply leave it to the debaters to read the non-highlighted portions and make arguments about the evidence. A quick look at the quantity of data involved in a typical speech from the Dartmouth Round Robin demonstrates the limits to this approach. The average number of words of evidence text in the first affirmative constructive was 21813 words, while only 2402 of those words were actually read. Among the four open source teams that were analyzed, no team read more than 11% of the evidence text in their affirmative case. Matters improved on the negative, but not by much. Critical arguments (kritiks) had the highest percentage of words read at 18.5%, followed by on-case attacks at 16%, but counterplans (10.7%) and disadvantages (12.6%) were still very low. Relying on debaters to locate weaknesses in their opponent's evidence in the non-highlighted portions is tantamount to handing them a copy of an article from the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* and asking for a list of criticisms and counter-arguments after nine minutes. Relying on what the opponent has selected of their evidence to ground their challenges does not resolve the issue either, given

that selectivity is what has created the problem of waste text in the first place. Thus, the opportunity is there for a debater to read and challenge evidence based on what is not read, but there is such an overwhelming volume of textual information provided that such content is present but functionally absent.

Second, contemporary debate produces evidence through a structure that dramatically downplays the need for providing the reasons for believing a claim. Before discussing how contemporary debate falls short of providing complete arguments, it is first necessary to lay out the traditional model of argument. At a minimum, an argument must consist of advancing a claim and providing at least one reason for believing it to be true (Schiappa & Nordin, 2013). In everyday conversation (and some debate contexts), it is normal and appropriate to omit some pieces of the argument to facilitate efficient communication (Ziegelmueller & Kay, 1997). Given competitive debate's pedagogical focus on enhancing argumentation skills, however, a debater should clearly communicate their claim, evidence, and reasoning. Ziegelmueller and Kay (1997) argue that all arguers must meet a burden of proof by proving their assertions, while Freeley and Steinberg (2000) note that evidence and reasoning should accompany every claim. Rowland (1987) establishes the triad of claim, evidence, and reasoning as the "minimum standard" of argumentative viability:

> The most appropriate standard for evaluating burden of proof is argument comprehensibility. The debate judge should evaluate probabilistically any argument which is defended with *both* a reason *and* evidence that the judge perceives as supporting the argument. (p. 195, emphases added)

Anything falling short of this baseline should be strictly

disregarded by the judge, according to Rowland (1987).

If a structurally complete argument consists of a claim and the evidence and reasoning to believe that claim, many debaters' arguments would be graded as incomplete or failing in the classroom. Because so much emphasis is placed on locating precise language and entering such claims into the debate's record, much evidence fails to conform to most conventional interpretations of a complete argument. In place of reason-giving, debaters utilize tag-lines in a variety of manners. Sometimes, the tag is used to make a factual statement, such as "Incentives inevitable" (Georgetown University, 2013) or "SMR grants were just given out" (Wake Forest University, 2013). The worst examples of this practice are those cards that are unhelpfully tagged as "extinction" or "more evidence." Most often, a single claim or series of linked claims are presented without reasons for believing any of them. For example, the following tagline makes five distinct claims and zero reasoning for why those claims are true: "Obama pushing immigration NOW – should pass – avoiding political divisions key. Guns and Money fights now won't thump it. Fighting for high-skilled workers, path to citizenship, and a guest worker program" (Emory University, 2013). Another tactic is to advance a series of claims about the strategic function of the argument for resolving the debate with little to no reference to content. "Solves every advantage except Development and avoids Politics and the ITER DA – the perm links" (Wake Forest University, 2013) and "50 state energy policy solves better, sparks federal modeling, and solves leadership warrants" (Wake Forest University, 2013) are two examples of this. Each tag makes three distinct claims about what the argument accomplishes in the debate game with no basis for understanding why.

The above examples are not outliers. An aggregate

analysis of the 1AC and 1NC speech documents from the Dartmouth Round Robin shows them to be the overwhelmingly preferred method of advancing arguments early in a debate. "Extinction" or "nuclear war" was advanced as a legitimate argument over 20 times throughout the 1ACs and 1NCs by the open source teams that were analyzed. More importantly, the vast majority of tags do not meet the basic rule of thumb of being phrased as a "because…" statement. Operationalizing Rowland's minimum standard of a claim, evidence, and reasoning makes it clear how common this practice is among the activity's best teams. Affirmative teams presented reasons in their tag-lines only 20% of the time. On the negative, disadvantages contained the fewest reasons, with 89% of tag-lines using only a claim. Kritiks and on-case attacks were once again significant exceptions, only omitting reasons 52% and 65% of the time. However, presenting reasons for only half of the evidence that is being read in a speech is hardly a level to be satisfied with.

The dearth of explicitly flagged reasoning may help to explain two major phenomena associated with paperless debate. First, the lack of flowing by debaters (Gordon, 2012; Hardy, 2010a) might be because there is a greatly diminished value to flowing. If the debater's primary task is to identify and challenge an opposing argument, flowing no longer yields the essential information due to the dominant method of tagging and delivering evidence. While some form of flowing will always occur in order to reduce competitive liabilities against analytic arguments that are not included in the speech document (Morris, 2012), declining flowing skills will likely remain as long as structurally incomplete arguments thrive.

Second, the lack of orally presented reasoning may explain why some judges have found it helpful to obtain speech documents before a speech begins. Many highly

respected and well-preferred judges have argued that this practice helps to improve cross-examinations, speed up the decision time, and make cheating (e.g., card-clipping) easier to catch (Green, 2012; Harris, 2011; Morris, 2012). Harris unequivocally states how significant the practice has been for him and his judging:

> I find myself far more engaged in the debate from beginning to end when the speeches are jumped to me. I feel completely reenergized as a judge. I no longer have the experience of having to read cards after the round just to figure out what the debaters are talking about. (2011, para. 2)

This statement also says a lot about the nature of a typical contemporary debate round *without* the judge having the evidence in front of them; it suggests that rounds are disengaging, de-energizing, and filled with moments where the judge has no idea what the debaters are talking about. That certainly describes many of the debates I have judged over the past few years. My goal is not to settle the debate over whether judges obtaining documents ahead of time is desirable, but challenging debaters to orally present their reasoning in a manner that is easily comprehended might be a helpful corrective that does not run the risks of accepting less clarity or reasoning (Morris, 2012), increasing judge intervention (Gordon, 2012) or undermining the tenets of face-to-face debating (Hester, 2010).

Third, evidence is produced through a synthesis of a trained deference to argument-from-authority and the information saturation of the digital age. Debate practice has long relied on "expert testimony" to provide the grounds for debate evidence for a few reasons. The topics selected are often complex and require the authoritative voices of experts in the field to help sustain debate. Additionally, the need to have a publically

accessible literature base to facilitate preparation and clash between colleges necessitates the use of published evidence.

While utilizing evidence and research is essential for healthy policy debate and is one of the chief assets of the activity, the broader cultural shift towards digital information has created a crisis for our traditional understanding of argument-from-authority because it has challenged the very concept of expertise. The means of information production online are vastly more democratic, allowing the circulation and creation of arguments from sources that fall well short of possessing either expertise or journalistic credentials. The ability to publish information directly through tools such as blogs is utilized by both experts and non-experts alike. Sources are also increasingly more specialized in terms of topics, ideological interests, and political interests.

This new digital landscape has enabled debaters to research in new, creative ways and helped to introduce new voices into debates as well as remove some of the barriers that previously kept experts from contributing their perspective on current and breaking events. The most compelling example of these new possibilities may be the 2011-2012 democracy assistance topic; professors and fellows at major organizations like the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace utilized blogs and social media to weigh in on the rapidly unfolding events of the Arab Spring. The 2006-2007 courts topic also exposed these same challenges and illustrated the opportunity and problems that surround the use of non-reviewed, expert evidence (Bauschard, 2006).

The problem occurs when we map over our ritualized assumptions about authority onto the new landscape of digital information. A few decades ago, it was perfectly reasonable to associate published evidence with

expertise because most sources were either directly from experts, had passed some level of external review, or were products of a professional media and internally qualified. There was also a much smaller literature base to draw from. This association no longer obtains in today's information saturated world; there is not much hyperbole in stating that one can find just about anything on the internet. The problem is compounded by the activity's emphasis on advancing specific claims. If expertise is assumed and the reasons for an argument are not required to be provided, there is very little basis on which to judge some claims better than others. Moreover, argument-from-authority by its very nature is often misunderstood or misused by debaters; those with a stake in the activity should prioritize teaching more accessible forms of reasoning when at all possible (Zompetti, 2005). If traditional assumptions about evidence and authority are uncritically applied to the modern digital landscape, a perverse form of post-modernism emerges. For contemporary debate practice, it is not that there is no truth, but that instead everyone is an expert. While non-peer reviewed, unqualified evidence has always been a part of debate, the demand for specifically worded, hyperbolic language and the emphasis on claim-making has accentuated the use of such evidence.

While each of these three dimensions manifest independently at times, they also help to produce and accelerate each other. The digital manipulation of evidence enables researchers to more directly render text into the specific language or claims needed for debates over "what the evidence literally says" in ways that speak to the needs of debate strategy as opposed to the facts of the issue. This incentivizes research that can pinpoint specialized wording or verbiage over researching the strength of competing claims or the merit of the source,

which is in turn exacerbated by the current agnosticism in source quality. If the strategic wording of a claim is more important than the supporting evidence for it or the source of the argument, the more specific language will be selected by the researcher and presented by the debater. These interlocking and mutually reinforcing practices are not accidental features or byproducts of competition. Such research and argumentative choices are the results of debate-teaching at summer institutes, in practice debates and drills, in the assignments that are designed, and in the oral critiques of judges. This nexus of practices and values constitutes a new approach: "debate as information production."

There are several implications for how this perspective encourages students to relate to evidence in their research and debates. It sees the role of the student or researcher as creating or finding pieces of information to fill out a preexisting strategic structure (e.g., a counterplan, disadvantage, etc.). In most instances, this structure is not a product of inductive discovery to reveal what issues or questions are at the heart of the topic, but rather are argumentative genres that are deductively mapped onto the topic area, squaring the circle of literature to meet our preconceived expectations of a strategic argument. In this world, debate strategy becomes overwhelmingly suggested by what produces competitive results, as opposed to the factual merit or quality of the evidence surrounding an issue.

Evidence ceases to function as argumentative support more broadly within the confines of this approach; its role is transformed into something largely symbolic or ritualistic. It works as a symbolic turnkey that allows a debater to fill out a preexisting strategic formula. This function of evidence pushes students and judges to relate to evidence psychologically, not argumentatively; the conclusions about what is a winning strategy have

already been predetermined in many instances and evidence is simply looked over to confirm what the judge or debater already believes (Gregg, 1967). This relationship severely limits the tools debaters draw upon in testing and challenging evidence and helps to explain why tests of evidence in debate are rarely about the facts or reasoning presented, but simply rituals of searching for specific language, demanding a line of text that "literally says" something or resorting to digital search features to make arguments.

In response to the challenge of this dominant practice, it hardly makes sense to demonize paperless debate. As Harrigan (2010, para. 1) argues, "we (the community) are not going back to paper. Within five years, the vast majority of teams will be paperless and there's not much that any of us can do about it." Although some may bristle at this type of "technological determinism" (Hester, 2010), it is important to note that Harrigan (2010) underestimated the rapid shift to paperless by a few years. Paperless debate is no longer "inevitable" or something that can be headed off; it simply *is* contemporary debate practice (at least at the college level). It would be foolish to attempt to turn our backs on the long list of benefits the platform provides, ranging from the economic (avoiding airline baggage fees, smaller rental cars, less fuel consumption) to the pedagogical (it is difficult to imagine the practice of an "open source" initiative without paperless debate). Moreover, trying to ban any particular practice short of cheating is pure folly and anathema to the broader values that structure the activity, as Doxtader (1989) notes in the context of abusive highlighting.

At the same time, it would be equally foolish to believe that the current dominance of paperless debate voids the need for a discussion over the best practices of evidence use, whether this belief is grounded on a naïve

faith that the best ideas will emerge through competition or through simple resignation to the dominance of paperless debate. Technological change determines neither life nor debate; it simply enables new ways of living and debating. To navigate the challenges of digital and paperless debate without resigning to the status quo, it is best to occupy the middle space "between uncritical acceptance and uncritical rejection of new technologies that confront the community" (Woods et al., 2006, p. 101). The task for debate educators is to decide whether current competitive practice conforms to our broader argumentative values about what debate ought to be and what practices can best reflect that. In the next section, I argue that current debate practice should actively seek out ways to encourage more debates about evidence.

Debate as Argumentative Judgment

There is no argument about whether the strategies produced by the dominant approach are successful, but the structural marginalization of reason-giving and evidence quality within those debates should be troubling. "Debate as information production" is dominant because it produces a lot more wins than it does losses. For example, the four teams from the Dartmouth Round Robin that were analyzed in the previous section represent debate's "best of the best." Collectively, they accrued 244 wins (78% win percentage) and appeared in five final rounds, eight semi-final rounds, six quarter-finals, and three octa-final rounds during the 2012-2013 regular season. Many of the features of "debate as information production" should be challenged, however, because they discourage more meaningful debates about evidence. This section begins by arguing that debates about evidence are more valuable educationally than the skills of information production. If the case can be made that we as debate educators must attend to more than wins and losses, and if the skills and

vocabulary needed to make judgments about the quality of evidence offered in an argument is best achieved through competitive debate, then a way to encourage more debating about evidence should be found. Thus, after arguing for the primacy of a curriculum of argumentative judgment, this section outlines some beginning parameters for what that approach might look like in practice.

Contemporary debate practice should prioritize a curriculum and skill-set that emphasizes making judgments about evidence over the production of evidence for three reasons. First, other social and intellectual institutions outside of debate have failed to provide opportunities for learning how to make judgments about evidence. Bruschke (2012) believes that argumentation theorists have largely deprioritized the evaluation of evidence based upon the starting terms of their approach. That, in turn, has diminished the ability for experts to weigh in on pressing social issues of global importance, sometimes even on challenges where the fate of the earth is in question. While the average college debate round will likely never determine who lives or dies (the exhortations of the average college debater notwithstanding), it is an important training ground for thousands of students and an important laboratory for testing ideas and evidence. As Muir (1993) argues, debate's distinguishing feature is its methodological approach to testing arguments:

> The emphasis on method—focusing on the technique of debate as an educational end—is characteristic of the defense of debating both sides of a resolution. Interscholastic debate, many scholars reason, is different from "real world" disputation… Debate is designed to train students to construct arguments, to locate weaknesses in reasoning, to organize ideas, and to present and defend ideas

> effectively, not to convert the judge to a particular belief. (p. 278)

Topics, literature bases, and research skills will change as students move on in their lives, but the skills of comparing the merits of an argument and the evidence underlying it that are offered help prepare students for their professional and adult lives more than the ability to produce another piece of evidence or quote.

Second, the ability to compare and judge evidence and arguments is a skill most unique to policy debate as an activity and should be preferred over the skills of "finding" evidence. Competitive debate has many plausible rationales and provides multiple benefits. To determine which rationale or set of benefits should be prioritized, educators and judges should select those that are most unique to the debate format (Rowland, 1987; Strait & Wallace, 2008).

If one starts from the premise that debate must aspire to a higher end than competition alone (Strait & Wallace, 2008), it becomes clear that making arguments about evidence is something that cannot be achieved through an analogous activity. The opportunity to competitively square off with an opponent's arguments over 100 times a year is limited to debate while there are ample academic opportunities to learn research skills. No classroom or professional experience comes close to affording the opportunity to focus on advocacy and refutation. The testing of evidence should be placed at the center of the activity because it "provides a rational basis on which to both construct *and evaluate* arguments critically" (Doxtader, 1989, p. 423, emphasis added). Distorting evidence to manufacture claims or suppressing the grounds or reasoning undermines the larger goal of learning how to critically judge different arguments, theories and subsequent policies (Doxtader, 1989).

The need to focus on debates about evidence has also been heightened by the recent explosion in the number of teams who have joined the open source initiative. Started by Wake Forest University three years ago, the movement to share the full text of evidence used online reached critical mass with the 2012-2013 season as dozens of teams around the nation adopted the practice (CEDA Forums, 2012). For better or worse, the odds that an individual debater produced even a majority of the evidence he or she uses in a single debate round have fallen greatly. Whether their evidence came from teammates, coaches, or open source files, more emphasis should be placed on how students argue about evidence because a skillset unique to every debater in an age of information saturation is how well they challenge and test evidence within the parameters of a contest round.

Third, research elements that prioritize finding specific language should take a backseat to making arguments about evidence for two reasons. To begin, research will always take place in other contexts and often in ways that are more rigorous and demanding than policy debate. In-depth research on a single topic is certainly something more unique to policy debate than other academic or professional contexts, but when that research is constrained by the fictions of debate strategy or artificial mechanisms in the topic's wording, students are insulated from important segments of a literature base or exposed to them in ways that are unrealistic. A semester-long upper division undergraduate seminar or graduate level education offer extensive and in-depth research opportunities that are better than what policy debate offers in many ways. Oftentimes, the activity creates "research" that is not usable in any other academic or professional context (Hester, 2010).

Next, the policy debate community is awash in evidence and information like never before. Open

backfile projects hosted at the high school and college level offer instantaneous access to amounts of information that once required being a member of the country's larger debate squads. Beyond open source initiatives, the broader cultural shift to digital information makes finding evidence to support any point easier than ever. High quality, peer-reviewed sources are now often published openly online or accessed by visiting a local university where open guest networks increasingly allow free access to online journals (even if a person is not a student there). The present moment is characterized by an overabundance of information and a skill-set that emphasizes the "finding" parts of debate is no longer helpful; a way of emphasizing the "debating" parts of debate is more important if debate is to provide a unique benefit for students.

I am not suggesting that students cease doing research or collecting information for their debates. I am proposing that we shift the calculus from a prioritization of producing evidence that has evidence-testing as a supplemental benefit, to a calculus that prioritizes evidence-testing with evidence-production as a supplemental benefit. A major component of information literacy is the ability to interact with research resources, both traditional and new, and be able to retrieve and locate information on any number of questions. Debates tend to be better when all participants have significant involvement with the production of the arguments involved. However, it is inevitable that students will have to rely on evidence produced by someone else simply because of the scope of the typical topic and the breadth of established arguments; using evidence from teammates, coaches, or open source is a necessity for most. In order to deal with this reality, debate educators should not posit the production of evidence as the central goal of the activity.

Even if agreement can be reached that debating about evidence is preferable to simply producing more of it, creating a new curriculum is a difficult endeavor. First, a delicate line must be toed that pushes debate in the direction of evidence evaluation while not entirely forsaking the skills of information production. There is always the danger of taking the perfectionist impulse too far in the other direction. A debate universe where coaches produce all of the evidence and information for their students in order to free up student time to focus on learning judgment skills would be as undesirable as the status quo's overreliance on information production. Thus, the alternative of "debate as argumentative judgment" must explicitly start from the initial value premise that debaters should be taught to test and compare evidentiary claims while also being incentivized to seek out and produce evidence that can withstand higher scrutiny. At the same time, this approach must also offer competitive rewards and pay off strategically given that competition is the primary driver of academic policy debate. To that end, I would like to highlight some potential practices that might offer debaters the argumentative tools to shift debates away from the dominant view of evidence production and closer to a world that prioritizes argumentative judgment.

First, debaters should challenge arguments that are structurally incomplete and fail to cross an established threshold of viability. An oft-heard challenge of evidence by debaters is that "it lacks a warrant," but this is often only offered up as a reason to prefer their own evidence over their opponents'. The problem with this passive strategy is that it is only advanced as a weak tie-breaker and the unwarranted evidence may sometimes be preferred because the wording of the claim is more specific or tied into preexisting beliefs about debate strategy. Without holding evidence to a minimum level

of structural completeness, all claims are rewarded some level of probability and it becomes difficult to deter bad argumentation (Rowland, 1987). A debater operating from a terminology of argumentative judgment could establish a framework for evidence evaluation in their first constructive that argues for dismissing evidence that fails to present the grounds and reasoning for a claim in the speech. If the debater advancing the framework convincingly wins the normative desirability for it, they would simply need to establish what evidence was read by the opposition that falls outside of being argumentatively complete and such arguments would be screened out by the judge. The debater could then make arguments about how that screen cuts out essential support for an opponent's argument, thus greatly altering the strategic calculus in any given round.

This framework closely resembles Rowland's "revitalized burden of proof standard" (1987, p. 195), but the key difference is that this challenge must be executed by the debater as an argument instead of utilized by the judge as an evaluative criterion. While having the judge simply toss out arguments has a more immediate effect on an individual debate, it does not achieve the goal of teaching students how to think about and assess arguments structurally (Hill & Leeman, 1997, p. 32). It is also difficult to have a significant impact throughout many debates and debate seasons if the judge is the implementer of this framework because it is structured as a punishment and not an incentive. If a debater wishes to avoid such punishing judges, they will adjust their preferences accordingly (a system that has changed greatly since the time of Rowland's writing). Teaching debaters to make arguments about the insufficiency of arguments creates a competitive incentive to challenge evidence rather than simply reading more of their own.

Three questions immediately come to mind. First,

what might the content of this framework look like? As a minimally acceptable standard, it could argue that an argument is only complete if it provides a claim and the reasons for believing that claim (as well as the evidence if it is a carded argument). There could be more specific variations of this framework as it evolved. There could be a standard for conveying the warrants in the tag of a piece of evidence. This would make debating and evaluating warrants more effective because tags are more easily recorded by a judge than the internals of evidence and the inclusion in the tag signals the active work done by the debater to demonstrate which parts of the evidence prove their claim true.

Second, what is the competitive incentive for such a framework if there are so many other tasks that must be accomplished in a debate? Such a framework argument transforms challenges of opponent's evidence from a passive form of evidence comparison to an offensive (in a strategic sense) argument capable of nullifying large portions of an opponent's arguments. Nor would it be necessary for a debater to win that every card an opponent relies upon is flawed. Just as debaters are encouraged to pick and choose their best link arguments within any affirmative or negative position, they could use this framework to hone in on places where there are crucial evidentiary gaps in an opponent's position and demonstrate why the loss of a particular piece of evidence unravels their entire stance. Knowing the poor state of most evidence files among the policy debate community, such a framework has the potential to pay off enormous competitive yields very early in its usage. As debaters adapt their research and arguments to reduce their competitive vulnerability, the end result might be more debaters who are more prepared to debate the reasons within their own evidence or challenge others. Such an adaptation would eventually nullify the utility of

this hypothetical framework, but it would result in a large gain for the community educationally.

Third, why should debaters be concerned with orally advancing the claim, evidence, and reasoning? It is clearly not required for competitive success; many of the activities most successful do not meet this standard. Additionally, most definitions of argument concede that pieces of arguments are often suppressed in everyday conversation. Why can't the same standard apply to debates? There are two responses. First, competitive success should not be the exclusive end that debate aspires to. Such a view is out of line with the broader educational purpose of the universities and colleges that fund the activity (often with public resources). This mindset serves to further alienate debate from its traditional place in the academy and has numerous reputational costs that make sustaining debate programs more difficult in the long-term (Frank, 2003). An exclusive focus on competition will reinforce a skill set that is conducive only to the narrow situation of winning a competitive policy debate, creating opportunity costs with the skills of argumentative judgment that are essential for students to be successful in life (Strait & Wallace, 2008). Second, explicitly communicating the full structure of an argument improves the overall quality of a debate. It would certainly remove much of the "fog of war" that inhabits many judges, leaving them to reconstruct the entire debate at the end of a round in order to decide a debate. It focuses the debate away from the quantity of claims being made by magnifying the quality of the reasons provided. Explicit reason giving is essential to good argument, as Balthrop argues:

> By emphasizing the giving of reasons as the essential quality of argument, evidence which provides those reasons in support of claims will inevitably receive greater credibility than a number

> of pieces of evidence, each presenting only the conclusion of someone's reasoning process… If the credibility of the evidence does indeed rest upon these premises, let them be presented explicitly as reasons why the evidence should be accepted in the absence of explanations more specific to the substantive issues… (1987, p. 178)

Thus, the framework offered here has the potential to move debate away from claim-making and closer towards comparing the quality of explanations. Arguments prepared in line with this framework would require the researcher to select the best reasons for a claim and think carefully about how to efficiently and adequately convey those reasons from the start of the debate. Debates about warrants would thus be a central feature of the debate early on, rather than a supplemental feature of the late rebuttals that only a few debaters ever engage in.

There are also opportunities for building in evaluative criteria for evidence comparisons that fall short of investing in an elaborate framework argument. To deal with evidence that has been excessively manipulated in a word processor, proximity and corroboration standards could be developed that give debaters the vocabulary to indict or challenge evidence that falls short of a context challenge but has more teeth than simply griping in cross-examination about evidence quality. Debaters could argue that evidence should be preferred in instances where there is a high degree of proximity between the key components of claims or reasons in the evidence as a way of challenging evidence that is often separated by enormous blocks of shrunken text or that bridges chapters or sections of the source. Debaters could likewise argue for grammatical standards of evidence preference as a way of challenging arguments that are "massaged" out of the text through creative or selective underlining/highlighting. Corroboration

could be evolved as an evidentiary standard in debates to buttress against pieces of evidence that have claims or wording that are sometimes "too good to be true;" challenging debaters to produce other sources that agree would encourage students to evaluate how expansive the support is for their arguments in this way. Attempts to call attention to evidence quality should be encouraged and, more importantly, rewarded even if there is not a full-fledged framework involved. Close calls on a question should go to the debaters making efforts to fully establish their own argument and challenge the reasoning of their opponents.

The erosion of traditional assumptions of authority also requires new standards of evidence evaluation. Instead of relying on the traditional challenges of recency or expertise, varying standards should be evolved that speak more directly to the nature of the source itself. It is difficult to create a taxonomy of possible standards because authority is something that is often entirely dependent on context. Despite that difficulty, posing a few questions makes it clear just how much there is to debate about when it comes to authority. Are the arguments made by a respected professor on a professional blog that has no review more authoritative than those of a Ph.D. candidate whose research has appeared in a peer-reviewed journal? What should be the status of review drafts or experimental versions of academic papers that are hosted on websites such as the Social Science Research Network? Do these represent more timely and creative arguments or are they half-baked and not ready for publication? What about professors or experts who are serving as visiting fellows at partisan think-tanks? Are their academic credentials or their paid self-interests to be preferred? Is the professional blog of a known and respected journalist worth more than an anonymous by-line on

an Associated Press article that has passed editorial review? This list of questions not only demonstrates how the face of information has changed greatly over the past 10 years, but also shows how many areas of exploration are out there for debates on source authority. The ritualistic statement to "prefer my evidence from a professor because their evidence is from a hack" is not well suited to help students navigate the current terrain of information that is available in a digital world.

To a large extent, the solution to the dilemma of source authority is beyond the boundaries of this essay because this is a problem that is largely external to the issue of debate's dominant relationship to evidence (though it certainly implicates it, as the previous section argued). Even if one entirely disagrees that "debate as information production" is a problem at all, the challenge of resolving the erosion of traditional standards of authority remains. Furthermore, even if the alternative of "debate as argumentative judgment" is incapable of resolving the present crisis of source authority, it fulfills its core objective if it creates a world where students are more actively involved in comparing reasons and warrants throughout the course of a debate.

This brief list of argumentative possibilities is an endeavor that will necessarily fall short for a few reasons. First, often, the most effective, efficient, and strategic ways of expressing an argument are only revealed through competition and the testing of debate rounds. Second, debate norms are rather slow to change. With a constant turnover in the student population every four to five years, it is easy for "lifer" debate coaches to forget that their students have experienced only a fraction of the debates the coach has and thus may not understand the need for developing argumentative judgment. Third, attempting to establish a new teleology for an activity is something that is inherently difficult to control or

predict. However, while it is difficult to give an extensive or exhaustive list of an argumentative curriculum at this point, isolating a few initial practices might help move the discussion over paperless debate beyond its current impasse and towards more meaningful debates about evidence.

Conclusion

I have hopefully made it clear that a good deal of the research and preparation done in contemporary policy debates is lacking from an argumentative perspective. Additionally, paperless debate and its effects are one of the most hotly contested issues currently being discussed by the broader debate community. In all likelihood (hopefully, even), my argument will provoke several objections or points of disagreement. I conclude this essay by considering some of these objections.

The most likely objection to this analysis is that many of these problems are not unique to paperless debate or even digital debate. I agree. That does not obviate the need for the discussion. While paperless debate is a significant change, it did not create many of the issues the community faces regarding the use of evidence. Digital-based research as the overwhelming norm in college debate precedes the shift to paperless by about five years. There are several examples of debate scholars seeking to place the use of evidence in debate on sounder educational footing (Benson, 1971; Newman & Newman, 1969; Rowland & Deatherage, 1988). Moreover, many contemporary problems associated with evidence use in debate have been discussed for some time now. The problems of "selective highlighting" (Doxtader, 1989), the battle for the most recent evidence and negative "unstrategies" (Wastyn & Stables, 1995), and the "cult of information processing" (Polk, 1996) were considered problematic decades ago and have never been entirely

resolved; they have simply assumed a form peculiar to contemporary debate practice. With that said, paperless debate and continued changes in web-based resources have accelerated and compounded several problematic trends in the use of evidence in debate. The fact that many of these practices are not entirely reducible to paperless is hardly surprising; the dominant practice of any community simultaneously reflects its present circumstances as well as the accretions of its history.

Challenging whether bad practice is unique to paperless is also not helpful in the long-term because this argument only disputes the narrative of change rather than defending the practice itself. By only challenging whether any particular debate practice (e.g., bad highlighting, a lack of warrants, generic evidence, etc.) is uniquely caused by a shift to paperless debate, one can forget that such practices are nevertheless descriptive of college debate's status quo. The conversation would be greatly aided if participants stopped asking whether the narrative of change is correct and instead focus on whether certain recurring practices are desirable or not.

A second likely objection is to list a variety of counter-examples in the form of individual teams or individual debate rounds that did not utilize these problematic practices. Others may object on the grounds that some debate squads are not paperless or digital at all. I have sought to focus my analysis on a set of competitive teams that are likely to be widely emulated throughout the college debate community and drawn from my extensive judging experience of the last several years. Some selectivity is inherent in any analysis of competitive debate because it is impossible to observe every speech. It would also be too hasty to conclude that the demand to provide reasoning or argumentative warrants in competitive debate no longer occurs or that these practices reflect a consensus by the judging

community to ignore reasoning or communication. The protracted discussion in the Galloway (2012), Heidt (2012), and Mosley-Jensen (2012) ballots (as well as numerous judging philosophies) indicates that many judges view this element as crucial. Despite these factors, the practices I have described are common in many debates, even if they are not universal. The fact that they are overwhelmingly prevalent among some of the largest and most prestigious debate schools in the country suggests they will become increasingly more common as they trickle-down through the community.

Third, it could be asked whether the changes in practice suggested here are too drastic. A logical alternative might be to simply evolve an additive curriculum that encourages students to do "all of the above" by combining emphasis on evidence production with an emphasis on evidence testing. This perspective is equally unhelpful because it is blind to the practical reality of competitive debate: every choice made by a debater is an opportunity cost with another. As Bruschke (2012) notes about argumentation scholars more broadly, the primary values of the researcher establish a teleology that directs inquiry towards specific features and often away from others. In order to enhance evaluations about evidence, practitioners must establish such ends as their core purpose:

> What is needed is new teleology. We, as a group of argumentation professionals, should begin to ask whether significant positions advanced in contemporary public disputes are warranted by available evidence…Structural, critical, and descriptive approaches all account for evidence. But these approaches do not see evidence evaluation as their core purpose. (Bruschke, 2012, p. 69)

Instead of weakly insisting that debaters utilize

and master all of the skills and tools available to them, debate educators would be better served to recognize this opportunity cost and to make a choice to build a debate curriculum and practice that speaks to the skill-set we wish debate to embody. Debate simply can never be everything that we want it to be. For better or worse, every debate round that occurs is the product of different path commitments that has caused debaters to pursue some arguments, strategies, and styles at the exclusion of others. The question that must be decided is whether we are comfortable with the current path debate finds itself on.

Finally, one could argue that the most successful debaters often employ many of the good practices this article advances. On the one hand, this is hardly surprising; good conduct is as much a product of observing the successful and talented as anything else. On the other hand, debate educators have a responsibility to consider how norms and practices at the most elite tier of the activity shape the tiers below. Debaters at the top may be very capable of exercising argumentative judgment in the form of comparing warrants and reasoning, or debating about the significance of source authority because they typically possess keen intellects and great talents. Their research practices inevitably shape the views and approaches of the less experienced or talented, especially in today's world of the open caselist and open source initiatives. As the first section of analysis made clear, the structural components of argument are not being built into the debate from the very start. If influential open source programs began adopting better practices in producing evidence, it may have a positive effect on a disproportionate share of debates around the country. As someone who has had the privilege of judging many of these same teams at times, I would also suggest their own debates would be

helped by focusing on argumentative quality, particularly in the rebuttal speeches of the round.

The practices I have suggested to move the debate community closer towards the ideal of "debate as argumentative judgment" are likely neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for a quality debate. In other words, the framework I have laid out will probably not make the excellent more excellent nor will it prevent the inexperienced from being inexperienced. However, such practices do have the potential to help the vast majority of debate programs, debate rounds, and individual debaters to become much better at debating about evidence and exercising argumentative judgment (a social skill needed now more than ever).

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