

# Judging, Evaluation, and the Quality of CEDA Debate

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## "The Serenity Prayer"

God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed,  
Courage to change the things which should be changed,  
And the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.

Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971)

The Cross Examination Debate Association was founded in 1974 in an attempt to improve the quality of academic debate.<sup>1</sup> In the fourteen years since its inception, this Association has, in fact, had a profound and favorable influence. On the other hand, a good deal of dissatisfaction has been expressed, much of it by CEDA coaches who feel that, more change is necessary and that a certain amount of backsliding has taken place.<sup>2</sup> This essay argues that feedback is the single most important factor in determining the quality of debates and that more can be done to actualize the goals of CEDA through judging and evaluation than by any other means.

## Feedback and Debate

Intercollegiate debate can be thought of as a complex system involving students, coaches, rules, procedures, and physical resources. These factors are interdependent and the quality of debate heard from tournament to tournament is as much a part of the system as a product of the system. As in any complex system, it is feedback which defines and maintains the outputs. Debaters compete to win, and those communicative sources which provide information about how to win become the focus of attention.

One important feedback cycle in academic debate has been the evolutionary transition of debaters into judges and coaches. Each four-year generation of debaters has been influenced by its experiences and has gone on to apply the standards it learned to the

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<sup>1</sup>"The Philosophy and Development of CEDA," James E. Tomlinson, *1983 CEDA Yearbook*, pp. 1-5.

<sup>2</sup>"Report of the Executive Secretary of CEDA—1982," Jack H. Howe.

generations who have followed. The evolution of NDT debate, from the communicative activity it once was, to the information-processing activity it has all too frequently become, is an example of this generational feedback process. Each generation of judges has placed greater emphasis on the logical elements of argumentation and less emphasis on the communicative elements.

The establishment of CEDA by a group of dissatisfied coaches was an attempt to break away from this mainstream feedback cycle in favor of an alternative emphasis on debate as a communicative activity.<sup>3</sup> A number of rule and procedure changes were instituted in an attempt to achieve this end and to underscore the distinction between the old system and the new: cross examination was added to the debate format; value topics were selected in preference to policy topics; topics were announced at the beginning of the school year; the association later went to two topics a year; etc.<sup>4</sup> Another factor which should have worked in favor of establishing an alternate feedback cycle is that CEDA was created by a group of like-thinking coaches and a relatively fresh group of students,

The fact that these changes have not been enough to bring about the desired change suggests that whatever forces led to the creation of NDT debate in its most unacceptable form are at play in CEDA debate as well. If this were not the case, we would expect to see a progressive improvement in the quality of CEDA debates from season to season. That we have not seen such improvement suggests that there may be a feedback mechanism within the larger feedback cycle which has been fundamentally unchanged by the transition from NDT to CEDA, a mechanism which seems to reinforce styles of debate which are considered undesirable by CEDA standards.

#### Sources of Feedback

Since debate is a competitive activity and debaters compete to win, we should therefore focus our attention on those sources of feedback which provide debaters with information on how to win. In general, there are five major sources of such feedback: textbooks, coaches, peers, judges, and decisions.

Many, if not all, debaters are exposed to one debate text or another when first learning about the activity. Often, these texts are a compromise between the attempt to train intercollegiate debaters and the attempt to be marketable to the more general "argumentation and debate class" audience. Examples of this type of text include, *Argument: A Guide to Formal and Informal Debate*

<sup>3</sup>"Statement of Principles," Jack H. Howe, unpublished letter, 9/13/1971.

<sup>4</sup>Tomlinson, pp. 1-5.

(2nd Ed.) by Eisenberg & Ilardo, *Argumentation: Reasoning in Communication* by Jensen, *Introduction to Debate* by Keefe, Harte & Norton, and *Argumentation: Inquiry and Advocacy* by Ziegelmüller & Dause.<sup>5</sup> These texts have too great an emphasis on general theory and general applications to be of practical use to a competitive intercollegiate debater. Other texts, such as *Strategic Debate* by Wood & Goodnight, *Argumentation and Debate: Reasoned Decision Making* (5th Ed.) by Freeley, *Contemporary Debate* by Patterson & Zarefsky, and *Basic Debate* by Fryar & Thomas are much more oriented to the competitive debater.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, even the best texts make promises about the nature of the activity which debaters see exploded in practice:

Debaters should deliver their speeches as if they are talking to each individual. They should convey the impression that they are persons, not computers. (Wood & Goodnight, p. 203)

Rather than using three pieces of evidence, and delivering them at too rapid a rate, for easy comprehension it would be better to use one well-chosen piece of evidence, integrating it carefully into the case and helping to drive it home by use of an effective rate. (Freeley, p. 255)

You are also encouraged to avoid using debate jargon such as conditional counterresolution, inherency, minor repairs and the like. Such terms usually confuse the issue at hand. (Patterson & Zarefsky, p. 288)

Blatant bad manners are no more in order in the cross examination period of a debate than they are in any other formal setting. (Fryar & Thomas, p. 134)

Debaters receive this kind of feedback and then are exposed, round after round, to some of the most rapid, impersonal, complex, technical, and disrespectful speaking styles they may ever hear. And what is worse, they see this style consistently win; they read their texts and talk to their coaches, *but they see what wins*.

Coaches generally pay lip service to the textbook notions of high quality presentation but emphasize the role of evidence and logic-while coaching. Even coaches who aver "ethos" recognize that "logos" is what usually wins rounds. The result is that debaters, while minimally influenced by debate texts and their coaches, are more influenced by other factors. And many CEDA coaches are disturbed when they find out that their own debaters are adopting

<sup>5</sup>Eisenberg & Ilardo (Prentice-Hall: New Jersey, 1980). Jensen (D. Van Nostrand; New York, 1981). Keefe, Hart & Norton (McMillan: New York, 1982). Ziegelmüller & Dause (Prentice-Hall: New Jersey, 1975).

<sup>6</sup>Wood & Goodnight (National Textbook Company: Illinois, 1983). Freeley (Wadsworth: California, 1981). Patterson & Zarefsky (Houghton Mifflin Company: Boston, 1983). Fryar & Thomas (National Textbook Company: Illinois, 1979).

NDT styles in debate rounds.

When debaters interact with peers they attempt to "psych out" the system. Much of the between-round discussions among debaters involve feedback about what arguments and styles of presentation will work (win) against specific cases and before specific judges. If textbooks and coaches can be thought of as primary sources of input into the debate system, peer interaction can be thought of as a fermenting process in which much of this primary information is checked against experience and modified.

All of this suggests that the two most important sources of feedback, the sources which have the greatest real impact on debaters' behavior, are judges and decisions (that is, first (he observation of who wins each round; second, the oral critiques offered by judges after debates; third, the comments made by judges to debaters between rounds; and finally, the comments and reasons for decisions written on debate ballots). I believe that this is the point at which CEDA debate is falling into the same feedback pattern as NDT debate. Fortunately, this is also the point in the feedback cycle over which we as coaches can exert the greatest direct influence.

#### Judging and Evaluation

Recently, a novice team ran up against an experienced team at a major eastern CEDA tournament. The novice team was full of "the theory of debate" and "the importance of ethos" when they hit the experienced team in their first actual round of competition. They were subsequently "destroyed" by the experienced team. However, in addition to crushing the novices with an overwhelming superiority of evidence and argumentation, the experienced team was highly obnoxious and belittled the novices as well. The round was judged by a well known and highly respected CEDA coach who awarded the decision to the novices. The ballot mentioned the one team's rude and blatant bad manners, *but the ostensible "reason for decision" given on that ballot was that the experienced team had neglected to take the novice team's one valid argument seriously enough.* Now one might imagine that this kind of ballot would encourage the experienced debaters to develop better ethos, but the real message seems to be a reinforcement of the NDT philosophy that *every* issue is potentially important, that *every* issue should be taken seriously, that *every* issue should be responded to and shot down with everything you've got. In other words, while the feedback on the ballot indicated that poor ethos disturbed this judge, it was a slight error in logos which cost the experienced team the decision.

But was it really? If so, then the judge in question is more of an NDT judge than a CEDA judge. On the other hand, if not (and I am inclined to take this view), then the logos issue was merely the rationalization which the judge used to justify taking the decision away from the obnoxious team and awarding it to the novices. I believe that it is exactly this type of protective rationalization which reinforces NDT style debate and undermines the goals of CEDA. If we want to see a serious transition toward higher quality presentation and high ethos debaters (in both CEDA *and* NDT), we are going to have to be willing to award decisions and put in writing our reasons as being based on presentational and ethical considerations.

Imagine reading a ballot which came right out and said, "The experienced team was better prepared and far superior on logical grounds. In fact, they would normally win this debate based on superior reasoning skills. *However*, during the course of the debate the experienced team was so rude and obnoxious they destroyed their credibility, and I am therefore voting for the novice team on ethos." Can you imagine the typical debater's reaction to such a ballot? It could serve as a strong confirmation and reaffirmation of the textbook and coaching principles which are generally lost in the practice of debate. Most debaters, however, would dismiss this type of ballot as being a "squirrel" decision from a "turkey" judge. And most coaches, even CEDA coaches, would undercut the object lesson of such a ballot by echoing and reinforcing that opinion.

There is a small cadre of judges who are willing to write such ballots when the occasion demands (which it all too frequently does). And I have found that debaters quickly learn to adjust their style to the expectations of such judges. Coaches, however, are often less pliant (I once heard a graduate student judge pulled aside and harangued for almost twenty minutes by a prominent West Coast coach for having dropped that coach's team on ethos).

In short, if we want to hear a better quality of debate, we must come out of our closets and declare ourselves willing to vote for such quality—we should not limit the expression of our discontent to hallway conversations among ourselves, convention panels, and printed articles, but we should assert them on ballots, in oral critiques, and in conversations with debaters.<sup>7</sup>

In NDT, ethos has frequently come to mean speed and pathos, dead bodies on the flow sheet. Logos, it seems, has become the *raison d'etre* of the activity. If we wish to avoid hearing NDT-style

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<sup>7</sup>Coaches should also make it a practice to support the decision of judges who vote on ethos and pathos issues.

debate, especially in CEDA rounds, we must be willing to vote openly on ethos and pathos. Debaters pay close attention to what wins; when they see speed and discourtesy lose, *because it is too fast and too discourteous*, they will adjust. We will then see the kind of high ethos presentations we are striving to promote.

#### Ballots

The ballot is another feedback factor which emphasizes the importance of logos to the detriment of ethos and pathos. The American Forensic Association Debate Ballot, long a standard of the debate community, lists six categories of items to be assessed by judges in determining speaker points (and it is worth noting that speaker points are the basis for determining who wins individual speaker trophies and which teams break to out-rounds in cases of tied win/loss records). See Table 1. When these six items are listed under the headings ethos, pathos, and logos we find an obvious and

TABLE 1

American Forensic Association Ballot		
ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
Delivery		Analysis Reasoning Evidence Organization Refutation

overwhelming emphasis on logos to the exclusion of anything else. Is it any wonder our debaters consider logical issues to be the only things of importance in debate rounds when they receive feedback such as this? Even Bud Zeuschner's CSUN ballot, which has been widely adopted by the CEDA community, has a heavy emphasis on logos. Some of the items on the CSUN ballot sound as if they could

TABLE 2

CSUN Debate Ballot		
ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
Delivery Courtesy	Audience Adaptation	Analysis/Definition Evidence/Reasoning Refutation/Rebuttal Organization Cross Examination

be listed in other categories, but an item by item analysis of the "note to judges" which accompanies this ballot suggests that the

<sup>8</sup>Copies of the American Forensic Association Debate Ballot can be obtained from James A. Johnson, AFA Treasurer, The Colorado College, Colorado Springs, CO 80903.

categorization in Table 2 is accurate.<sup>9</sup> The only ballot that I know of which offers a balance among ethos, pathos, and logos is the Spider Debate Ballot, but this ballot has not been widely used by the debate

TABLE 3

Spider Debate Ballot		
ETHOS	PATHOS	LOGOS
Courtesy	Impact	Logic
Delivery	Wit	Support

community."<sup>10</sup> See Table 3. The Spider Debate Ballot has been criticized because it fails to provide enough sub-categories of logos (analysis, reasoning, refutation, organization, etc.). The fact that such criticisms are voiced underscores the hold that logos has in the minds of most judges. Ethos too could be sub-divided into numerous categories (rate, inflection, image, dynamism, etc.) as could pathos (interest, vividness, humor, appropriateness, etc.). But one almost never hears the AFA or CSUN ballots criticized for excluding such items.

In short, I would suggest that in addition to voting for ethos and pathos as well as logos, we develop and use ballots which reflect this pedagogical bias.

#### Rule and Procedure Changes

A number of experiments involving rule and procedure changes have been conducted in an attempt to promote a higher quality of debate. The results of these experiments reinforce the arguments made above concerning the role of feedback in the creation and maintenance of debaters' styles.

In California, for example, the high schools have been operating under a "no flow" rule for a number of years; debaters are still allowed to flow, but judges are not. David Jack, a district NFL chairman and president of the Yosemite Forensic League, indicated that the rule is about six years old and was originally adopted because "too many volunteer judges were turned off by rapid-fire delivery."<sup>11</sup> One of the effects of this rule has been a change in

<sup>9</sup>Copies of the CSUN Debate Ballot can be obtained from Don Brownlee, Executive Secretary of CEDA, California State University, Northridge, CA 91330.

<sup>10</sup>Copies of the Spider Debate Ballot can be obtained from Nina-Jo Moore, Director of Forensics, University of Richmond, Richmond, VA 23173.

<sup>11</sup>From a telephone conversation with David Jack, debate coach at Turlock High School, 9/11/1984.

judges' expectations about debate team burdens. When faced with a rapid-five attack, "first affirmative rebuttal speakers are not expected to cover the case, just the new arguments raised about the plan."<sup>12</sup> Mr. Jack also indicated that one of the important benefits of this rule is that "debaters have learned to analyze their judges and do a better job of adapting to whatever style that judge expects."<sup>13</sup>

Don Vettel, president of the Southern Valley Forensic League and member of the California State Speech Council which was the organization that adopted the "no flow" rule, indicated that this rule has been "very effective at achieving its goal, but (that) perhaps the time has come to go back to flowing."<sup>14</sup> He characterized this rule as "an experiment which has served its purpose."<sup>15</sup>

At the university level, Bob Halle, Forensic Coordinator at El Paso Community College, adopted a no flow rule for his Sun Carnival Tournament in 1983 and planned to do so again in 1984. He indicated that "debaters were initially uptight about the rule and then began to like it as the quality of their presentations improved."<sup>16</sup> Mr. Halle reported that most of the feedback he had received about the experiment "has been positive."<sup>17</sup> Also on the university level, the Spider Invitational Tournament in Richmond, Virginia had to rely on novice judges for three years. As in the case of the Sun Carnival Tournament, debaters were initially uneasy but quickly learned to adjust to their inexperienced judges by adopting a more audience-oriented style of debate.<sup>18</sup>

It should be noted that rule and procedure changes such as those described above are designed to force judges to render decisions based more on ethos and pathos and less on logos. This forces

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<sup>12</sup>David Jack.

<sup>13</sup>David Jack.

<sup>14</sup>From a telephone conversation with Don Vettel, debate coach at West Bakersfield High School, 9/12/1984.

<sup>15</sup>Don Vittel.

<sup>16</sup>From a telephone conversation with Bob Halle, Forensics Coordinator at El Paso Community College, 9/17/1984.

<sup>17</sup>Bob Halle.

<sup>18</sup>An interesting footnote to this novice judge experiment involves the octafinal round of the 1982 Spider Invitational Tournament. There were exactly 2/3 too few experienced judges to cover the octafinal round in the senior division of CEDA, so instead of having one judge per panel, each panel was made up of one experienced and two novice judges. There was only one upset decision and that was 3-0. In every other panel, the team who was the higher seed advanced. One might have expected a great many 2-1 decisions in which the novice judges voted against the experienced judge, but this was not the case.

debaters to present a style of debate which is more consistent with the goals and philosophy of CEDA. In other words, these rules and procedures are designed to evoke the kind of feedback from judges and the style of debate from students which I believe they should be willing to provide without constraints. And it is worth emphasizing that *these rule and procedure changes worked* although they did have the effect of impairing the logical quality of the debates.

#### Conclusions

Any changes which promote a superior quality of debate, whether imposed from without or evoked from within, are going to have the effect of reducing logos to some degree. If debaters cannot speak at 350 words per minute, they must, perforce, include less material. I believe, however, that internal changes in judging philosophy (a willingness to vote openly on ethos and pathos) is a far better strategy than external changes in rules and procedures (no flow rules or novice judges) for improving the quality of debate. Internal changes leave judges in a position to take accurate notes and provide high quality feedback on all aspects of the debate round. External changes constrain judges in some respects and provide more emphasis in some directions but, perhaps, at too great a cost in others. What is necessary is not a new system, but courage and self-discipline. It would also be helpful to support this CEDA emphasis in judging by developing and adopting new ballots which reflect the characteristics we wish to see in our debaters.

On a highly positive note, I feel far more optimistic about the future of CEDA debate having researched and prepared this report than I did when I began. There is nothing wrong with debaters who can speak like a machine gun, think like a computer, and cite evidence like a Supreme Court Justice, as long as they can also turn into Daniel Webster when the occasion demands. I would apply Don Vettel's analysis to CEDA: the experiment has worked to a large degree. Many debaters are quite capable of making the transition from an NDT judge to a CEDA judge—and this ability to adapt to such widely different audiences must be considered a big plus by almost any rhetorical standards.

Unfortunately, too many CEDA debaters are unable to make this transition and they tend to abandon the CEDA emphasis in favor of a more NDT style. I attribute this to an overabundance of NDT judges, CEDA judges who subscribe to an NDT judging philosophy, and CEDA judges who avoid voting openly on CEDA criteria. If we want a more CEDA style of debate we must increase the percentage of CEDA-style judging and evaluation which our debaters are exposed to.

Individual judges can change the system—at least in this one respect. A single judge who provides strong and consistent feedback in support of a CEDA style of debate will influence a great many debaters during the course of a school year. Enough such judges become a potent force to which debaters must, can, and will adjust. There is no need to wipe out the NDT influence in CEDA. We must merely accentuate the CEDA influence in CEDA. Through our judging and evaluation we can do this.

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"The Coaches' Prayer"

God, give our debaters the speed and logos to  
impress an NDT judge.

The ethos and pathos to impress a CEDA judge.

And the audience analysis to distinguish the one  
from the other.

(with apologies to  
Reinhold Niebuhr)