

## DELIBERATING DEBATE'S DIGITAL FUTURES

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While most Amish communities forbid personal ownership of cars, radios, and telephones, they will occasionally charter diesel buses and use battery-powered calculators. As political scientist Richard Sclove (1995) explains, "to a casual observer, the resulting pattern of exclusions and adoptions seems capricious" (p. 6). But closer inspection reveals a sophisticated tapestry of social practices that is often overlooked in stereotypical accounts of Amish culture:

*In essence, each local Amish community – acting collectively rather than as a set of discrete individuals – asks itself how the adoption of a technology would affect the community as a whole. Innovations that would tend, on balance, to preserve the community, its religion, and their harmonious relations with nature are permitted. Those that appear to threaten the community and its values are rejected. In either case, the decision is reached through a process of public discussion and democratic ratification. (Sclove, 1995, p. 6)*

The Amish way of dealing with technology charts a middle course between polar extremes of uncritical acceptance (technophilia) and totalizing rejectionism (neo-Luddism). Within this basic framework, each Amish community's unique value commitments form a normative background horizon that shapes collective decisions. Might this decision-making heuristic inform the intercollegiate policy debate community's pending choices regarding possible embrace of new information technologies?

Further consideration of this question provides an opportunity to foreground the *telos* driving our essay.

The Amish example shows how human communities can use collective deliberation to make considered decisions regarding their relationship to technology. Such reflection is particularly warranted, because as sociologist Langdon Winner (1986) observes, "technological artifacts have politics" (p. 19). In other words, choices about technology carry political implications, because patterns of sociality are embedded within technical tools (McMillan and Hyde, 2000). Fortunately, Winner notes, "by far the greatest latitude of choice exists the very first time a particular instrument, system, or technique is introduced" (Winner 1986, p. 29). Winner's insight punctuates the salience and timeliness of this forum exchange, which comes at a moment when the intercollegiate policy debate community is faced with the daunting challenge of understanding precisely how rapid technological change might transform its norms, practices, and even identity as an intellectual endeavor (Edwards, 2006).

This essay is oriented to stimulate such reflection in an open-ended fashion that does not presume or anticipate closure on key inflection points around which community discussion will likely pivot. In theorizing what we term the Digital Debate Archive (DDA) – an online database that archives, tracks, organizes and publishes argumentation presented in tournament contest rounds – it is necessary to consider both possibilities and pitfalls. The general concept of an argument archive is nothing new, as the linear "caselist" record of arguments advanced in contest rounds is now an institution in National Debate Tournament (NDT) and Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) circles. However, the possible turn to more ambitious information architecture presents new challenges and new choices. How might near-term choices regarding information architecture and community norms shape future trajectory of the archive? Does the NDT/CEDA community have a real mechanism for facilitating collective discussion and reflective decision-making on this issue? Who will be the gatekeepers determining what content is included and the form it is presented in a DDA? What incentives will debaters have

to share their ideas beyond the contest round space? In this essay, we explore these and other questions by considering one specific technology's implications for architectural choices, argument pedagogy, external audiences, and competition. Our hope is that discussion and debate over these issues will contribute to more reflective, long-run decision-making, not only regarding DDA technology, but also about the debate community's orientation to other technological artifacts.

Our method of inquiry draws upon argumentation as a process of knowledge production. In face-to-face meetings, we used critical discussion and debate to generate a model outlining possible alternative futures related to different evolutionary paths a DDA might take. Contributors then collaborated on written position papers, each focusing on a particular aspect of the issue. These papers were subsequently circulated to the entire group for vetting and critique, with argumentative feedback smoothing the transition of the discrete position papers into a complete essay.<sup>4</sup> Part one explores issues of feasibility and usability, while part two considers possible implications of a DDA for argumentation pedagogy. Part three analyzes how a DDA might interface with external audiences beyond the intercollegiate debate community, and part four analyzes how various manifestations of a DDA could alter intercollegiate debate's competitive landscape.

### **Architectural Choices**

Given both the diversity of argument and motivations to participate in competitive intercollegiate debate, it would be hasty to presume a specific architecture to the archive. Instead, several

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4 This essay grew out of collaborative research by the Schenley Park Debate Authors Working Group (DAWG), a consortium of public argument scholars at University of Pittsburgh. Founded in 2005, the Schenley Park DAWG strives to generate rigorous scholarship addressing the role of argumentation and debate in society. Lead author Carly Woods led work on this DAWG essay, senior author Gordon Mitchell provided mentorship, and all of the co-authors contributed substantially in areas of conceptual design, research, and writing.

different design possibilities present themselves, each with their own opportunities for the community and implementation challenges. This section unfolds around two general problematics in DDA design: organizational structure and conflict with entrepreneurial enterprises at work presently in debate.

An issue central to the architecture of the archive is the ability of individuals in the community to contribute to the forms of organization and the argumentative structure of a DDA.<sup>5</sup> Open source software, in its ideal form, allows all users with sufficient knowledge of web-design to participate in DDA production and collective problem solving. This mode of production values a form of “electronic commons” for debate ingenuity (Levine, 2002), and translates that value into a social structure in which contributors see themselves as “co-producers” of a social space (Truscello, 2003). However, the immense diversity of debate styles and argument structures over the last ten years just within NDT/CEDA debate may make a consistent format impossible to maintain; imagining an open community may produce a chaotic archive.

On the other end of the spectrum, a centralized design, like one used for DebateScoop (Smith & O'Donnell, n.d.), makes it easy to provide a central organizing logic for a DDA, but also contains its own hidden costs. It is unlikely that one person could successfully run a DDA, but it could create opportunities for archivists or graduate students to play a part in knowledge production, gaining valuable experience while providing a service to the debate community. However, it would be necessary to

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<sup>5</sup> To some extent, the degree to which openness of software engineering occurs reflects on the nature of the debate community. In essence, the conditions enabling community interaction and structuring connections have influence upon the ways the debate community can imagine itself (see Anderson, 1991; Asen, 2002; Culler, 1999; Preston, 2006). Each of these perspectives lends insight to our observation that the choice of who develops a DDA and how it will develop will have consequences for how the debate community sees its mission. After all, the products of our community labor become the basis for understanding toward what ends we ought to work.

guard against designers who would archive arguments in ways that distort the original argument structure so that evidence fits a pre-determined pattern of organization, leading others in the community to feel alienated by a lack of input and top down reflections on the community (Mee et al., 2007). Also, this type of control of a few over community information ought to raise concerns about the “social engineering” of debate (Duff, 2006).

Between these two extremes in DDA development, several other possibilities exist. One option includes creating alliances with outside business, education, and non-profit groups. This could be to the mutual benefit of both the debate community and assisting outside organizations (Alexander, 2001), though knowledge does not always translate across specialties and may result in more internal tensions (Haythornthwaite, 2006). Another option mediates the two extremes, with a core design group that organizes the larger DDA structure while soliciting community members to work on specific modular components that have had success in similar large-scale design projects (Crowston & Howison, 2006). Negotiating the tensions between decentralized design and consistent structure requires thinking about a DDA as a woven tapestry of community elements. The extent to which various elements of the debate community feel both empowered and motivated to offer their services will depend on the vision of the community that emerges from debate about possible DDAs (Sack et al, 2006).

In addition to concerns about access to knowledge production, several options are available for the design of an “information ecosystem” (Savirimuthu, 2005, p. 354) suitable to the multiple uses of a DDA. An argument logic tree, already used at Debatepedia (Lindsay, n.d.) and spacedebate.org (Schnippel, n.d.), organizes individual claims and support into a logical outline centering on a central question of fact, value, or (most likely) policy. This type of structure offers good opportunities for debate outreach because it condenses complex arguments into a simple argument division around central social controversies, and only archives unique argumentative claims (Kenix, 2007). On the other hand, the drive to find newer and better evidence for the same

claim makes archiving multiple pieces of redundant evidence desirable, and multiple cuttings of the same source can make huge differences in both claims and argument quality. Using a basic logic tree would quickly make a DDA structure too simple to find evidence effectively.

Topical argument organization deals with some of these issues, but also raises new questions about design. For example, Gyre.org (Schnippel, n.d.) archives new articles under a particular technology topic, while also providing a large bibliography for background information. A DDA would blend the archiving of new evidence along with contextual references that help fill out an argument package for outside audiences, making outreach still an important goal for the debate community. The format also supports argument redundancy better than the logic tree. On the other hand, topical organization could become unmanageable very quickly given the amount of evidence generated across the debate community and the broad organizational structure of topical models.

A third model indigenous to debating practices is debate “file” organization, found in examples such as Evazon (Kerpen, n.d.) and Planet Debate (Harvard Debate, n.d.). These services offer complete argument files to debaters for a monetary fee, organized according the exigencies of contest round argument. This type of organization would require the lowest start-up labor for a DDA, and would supplant current scouting procedures found on the Opencaselist Wiki (Lacy, n.d.). In addition, this mode of organization would respect forms of in-round debate innovation and slight argument mutations. Even so, the sheer redundancy of this organizational pattern would make archival space a constant concern. This type of organization also is the least likely to attract interest from outside parties in developing a DDA, as debate offers a specialized form of argument not immediately accessible to outside observers (Richardson, 1976).

Using a combination of these basic organizational schemas might allow a DDA to reap the benefits of each method, while compensating for their respective deficiencies. For example, designers could develop a principle of evidentiary redundancy for

similar evidence cuttings. Here, contributors would add links to existing material, while archiving unique argument assemblies proffered by each team.<sup>6</sup> The logic tree might provide a way into argument subsets for outside audiences, while maintaining another organizational scheme more applicable to debate uses. Though this option seems appealing, it requires the most intellectual labor to develop and maintain, making it the most costly option to intercollegiate competitive debate practice. Ultimately, decisions about DDA architecture will require a lengthy discussion about community values and resource commitment to the project.

Finally, the debate community must consider the economic impact of creating a DDA. We understand that many of the motivations for participating in a DDA, much like other sectors of internet knowledge production (Ensmenger, 2005), cannot be reduced to economic concerns. Nevertheless, the effect of the archive on evidence selling could provide strong incentives for resistance by some sectors of the debate community. Planet Debate (Harvard Debate, n.d.) and Evazon (Kerpen, n.d.) provide only the most obvious examples of the entrepreneurial enterprises in debate revolving around evidence services. Handbooks and summer debate workshops base their appeal to high school students and coaches on evidence production. Establishing a DDA open to individuals outside of the intercollegiate debate community will affect the income of those participating in commercial evidence production.

Of course, not all aspects of these practices will be affected in the same way. Files to handle specific cases, weekly updates to argument generics, and topic-centered files will still have commercial appeal. We find it difficult to speculate on the exact impacts of a DDA on evidence sales in these different venues, but it should receive some attention, especially given that some of

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<sup>6</sup> Of course, the use of selective highlighting and underlining in debate complicates this picture, as different underlinings of the same evidence cutting can yield radically different arguments. Though this issue is important and should occupy those wanting to design a DDA, we choose not to pursue such a detailed line of thought in this essay.

those receiving income (undergraduate debaters, paid assistants, etc.) are often the most in need of it (though certainly not always).

A free evidence archive available to all raises another concern about the alienation of labor. Like other business practices in the netscape, free labor in the form of volunteers may seem like a mutually beneficial contractual arrangement, but can quickly devolve into a relationship of exploitation (Terranova, 2000). This risk seems acute due to the tendency of academic enterprises, especially debate, to rely on the labor of graduate students who rarely get sufficient compensation for the immense amount of specialized work they perform. Any feasible DDA project will have to confront this issue, deciding what sources of labor compensation are feasible, and what ought to be considered ethical compensation for specialized labor.

The combination of these economic and design concerns mark significant considerations in altering the modes of evidence production in intercollegiate competitive debate. Though a DDA could usher in a new era of debate cooperation, lower the barriers of participation, and democratize access to debate knowledge production, the practical barriers to its production suggest that the debate community should not hastily assume that such an outcome is an inevitable result of any design project.<sup>7</sup> Designing a DDA that achieves these goals will require careful planning, community wide cooperation, and a shared vision of success.

### **Argument Pedagogy**

Contest round debating and argumentation pedagogy have evolved iteratively, with principles from policy debate informing many argumentation textbooks (e.g. Rieke & Sillars, 1997; Hollihan & Baaske, 2004; Winkler, Newman & Birdsell, 1993), and concepts from argumentation theory shaping the flow of

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<sup>7</sup> Other open source projects provide reasons for caution in these matters; having an ideal of producing a new social space is much easier than putting it into action. Frequently, the compromises necessary to make technology work transforms the project from a revolutionary practice to a supplement of existing technological inequities (Bradley, 2005).

tournament competition. The advent of a DDA is likely to recalibrate this relationship, with the ensuing alterations carrying potential to yield new forms of knowledge production. Most basically, a DDA organized in a fashion to facilitate the tracking of arguments through time could prove to be a significant research resource for scholars seeking to study argumentation. As a historical archive, a DDA could document argument strategies and research approaches to particular debate topics, providing a valuable storehouse of data for future scholars interested in studying the intellectual history of argumentation and debate.<sup>8</sup> This function could also support new avenues of scholarship that would investigate argumentation processes by utilizing academic debate as a social "laboratory." Here, the work of academic debaters could itself become an object of study, with the digital archive providing a unique portal for researchers to access phenomena that take place in tournament contest rounds. For example, one might study how new argument formations struggle to gain recognition as legitimate contributions to policy dialogue, or conversely, how they are excluded.

Similarly, the content of argumentation advanced on a particular topic could serve as the basis of scholarship, with inquiry focused on how topical arguments unfold in the contest round setting, and the resulting generalizations compared with argumentation trends unfolding in wider spheres of public deliberation. A related function of a DDA might involve serving as a pedagogical resource for educating novices and non-debaters

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<sup>8</sup> Debating societies and teams are critical for rhetorical scholars interested in the ways in which argument types, styles and techniques evolve over time. Angela Ray's work on how antebellum men's debating clubs reveal the permeability of public culture demonstrates the importance of debate as an object of study for communication theory (Ray, 2004). Similarly, the study of today's intercollegiate policy debate community might someday provide critical insight into the public culture of the time. A DDA, as an archival research resource and a literal database, could certainly aid in this process.

about refutation or evaluation in basic argumentation courses. The information on a DDA could provide an exemplar of in-depth argumentation, including model research briefs and argument structures. Instructors could use the resource in the classroom as evidence of what argument-in-action can look like.

The preceding scholarly and pedagogical uses of a DDA could be facilitated or frustrated depending on the format of the archive. A DDA format that privileges pedagogy and scholarly research, perhaps by emphasizing sorting and classification functions, might yield an archive that was teaching and research friendly, with a possible tradeoff in competitive utility for tournament contest round participants. Pondering these tradeoffs, it is also possible to visualize ways that a research and teaching-friendly DDA might potentially transform the competitive contest round process itself. For example, if a DDA architecture could be organized to provide a mechanism for public recognition of original and innovative research (i.e. possibly through *del.icio.us*-style bookmarking), it could both alter the competitive reward economy and create new opportunities for debaters to amplify their work products to wider audiences. Consider that currently, Evazon (Kerpen, n.d.) operates a clearinghouse for commodity exchange of finished debate speaking briefs. One section of the website lists the "most popular authors" of such finished briefs, ranking them by statistical measures of the number of briefs sold on the website. A DDA with sorting and tracking features could support similar competitive indices, perhaps with statistics recognizing debaters whose original arguments were subsequently picked up and run by other teams in contest rounds, or debaters who fashioned the greatest number of original arguments on a given topic.

If a DDA created knowledge towards extra-competitive ends, such as scholarship and debate community outreach, the social capital of participating in collective knowledge production might exceed the competitive incentive for withholding information goods (van den Hooff et al, 2005). CEDA provides some insight into how such incentives could work, though their scope ought to expand significantly. Awards for coach scholars and public debate

programs offer opportunities to acquire “social capital” within the organization for non-competition outcomes. This outwardly-oriented knowledge production could have a positive impact on the relationship between debaters and other individuals, such as department chairs and deans, who provide funding for programs but may not know the intricacies of the activity. By providing these figures with access to the copious argument briefs produced for intercollegiate debate competitions, a DDA could create deeper connections with the academy and stimulate development of a rewards system for inventive research.

However, there are dangers in opening up the intercollegiate debate community to external scrutiny. In the past decade in particular, the NDT/CEDA community has witnessed a number of non-traditional arguments, strategies, and styles. The value of a number of these new ways of envisioning debate may not be easily explained to administrators who are critical to the funding of debate programs.<sup>9</sup> In a world in which an archive chronicles these strategies in ways that are meant to gain publicity with external audiences, a team’s funding might be jeopardized. While some “unconventional” strategies are in search of a broader interface with the general public, the risks to ongoing funding are not negligible. Furthermore, it can be argued that exposing debate arguments to wider audiences short-circuits the ability of debate rounds to function as “protopublic spaces” in which students practice behaviors that prepare them to engage wider publics (Eberly, 2002). It may be preferable to see the debate round as an insular space to test out ideas. Practices specific to the intercollegiate policy debate, such as switch-sides debate and debate jargon may alienate audiences unfamiliar with the community. A DDA has the potential to enhance argument pedagogy amongst external audiences in a number of ways. However, it is prudent to assess the new challenges that a DDA

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<sup>9</sup> While the most recent College Sports Television (CSTV) documentary made inroads into how college debaters use different types of arguments, ground-breaking experiments (and potentially, most controversial) of recent times have been largely unreported.

will present in this regard. The next section will explore these issues as they relate to other debate communities.

### **External Audiences**

A decision to create a Digital Debate Archive is a decision to open an often insular community to a wide range of external audiences. Although it is difficult to imagine the many different audiences that might view a DDA were it fully implemented, it is helpful to begin by thinking about how other debate circuits might be affected. This section theorizes the possible implications of a DDA on other US debate communities and on the international debate community.

The National Forensics Association Lincoln-Douglas (NFA-LD) and the National Educational Debate Association (NEDA) are two US-based debate circuits created with the intention of fashioning debate praxis markedly different from the NDT/CEDA policy community. Both NFA-LD and NEDA represent not only external audiences for, but also contributors to, a DDA. In this sense, a DDA may offer a powerful opening for productive interaction between debate circuits. If developed with inter-community interaction in mind, a DDA itself could offer a springboard, if not a space, for constructive dialogue between debate communities. For those that attempt to evoke social change through their debate practice, a wider audience of interested parties might be seen as a particularly valuable possibility offered by a DDA. Regardless of their specific orientations toward debate, all schools involved in any form competitive debate face similar important questions of sustainability and pedagogy. In the process of developing content by those who supply information to the archive, a DDA has potential to spark communication and interaction between communities.

However, we must also be attentive to the ways in which technological advances may erode and challenge the carefully erected borders between the policy debate community and the smaller, more insular NFA-LD and NEDA circuits. For example, NEDA, in its mission statement, gives primacy to a relationship between debaters and their evidence which departs greatly from

the trends developed in NDT/CEDA debate. Specifically, debaters are encouraged to only read evidence in debate rounds that they researched and processed themselves. In fact, there is an explicit warning in the “argument content” section of the NEDA Objectives and Procedures document against some of the entrepreneurial models of evidence acquisition discussed above. Because “research skills are an important educational outcome of debate...NEDA discourages the use of purchased evidence and expects debaters to take full responsibility for the accuracy of the evidence they cite” (National Educational Debate Association, 2005). NFA-LD, as a community, tends to engage in less open exchange of files and citations than does NDT/CEDA. Further, there is significant tension and disagreement in the NFA-LD over the general primacy of evidence over careful analysis in competitive debate. A shared archive of backfiles, if engaged by non-NDT/CEDA programs, may well encourage a shift in the evidence production practices of debaters in other circuits toward those of normative policy programs. Should we have concerns about how a DDA might affect other competitive debate circuits?

A DDA also has the ability to contribute to the international community of educational debate (competitive debate and debate courses). Given the intensive research and quality of arguments generated in the NDT/CEDA community, a Digital Debate Archive might provide debaters in other countries with ideas for constructing arguments on similar topics.<sup>10</sup> If, for example, the

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<sup>10</sup> We take the Japanese debate community as our primary focus for hypothetical issues concerning international debate in this section for two reasons: first, it is the country whose debate practices most closely mirror US policy debate, and second, because it is the debate community that the authors are most familiar with. However, it is fair to assume that if the archive were successful, debaters from a plethora of different countries might be interested in a DDA as *topoi* for arguments. A current example of this is the International Debate Education Association’s debatabase, which provides ideas for topics, pro and con arguments, and additional sources for debate (International Debate Education Association, n.d).

Japan Debate Association (JDA) had a resolution on economic assistance, the archived materials could help debaters in Japan to come up with the key stasis points and research strategies when the NDT/CEDA community debated related issues. As the agent of action would probably be different, debaters in Japan cannot simply recycle the arguments by the cutting and pasting the evidence from an archive. They could use a DDA as a research guide to jumpstart their own, agent-specific research. Issues such as dependency on economic assistance, exploitation of the developing countries, or corruption of the recipient might cut across the possible agents. A DDA could facilitate a cross-cultural exchange of ideas as well as alerting debaters about the differences that each debate community might face given the nuances in the way that resolutions are focused. Even if the topics debated in the US policy debate community do not overlap significantly with international debaters, they might nonetheless gain some background knowledge, which aids in brainstorming ideas and developing an effective research plan. In short, a DDA can function as special *topoi* for arguments and help debaters in other countries in the initial stage of research, and improve the quality of arguments in other debate communities.

In fact, this type of learning has not been unprecedented. When the Japanese debate community started to emphasize in-depth analysis based on evidence in the late 70s and the early 80s, import of knowledge from the US debate community was of great help. According to an e-mail inquiry conducted by one of the authors on the mailing list of the JDA, transcripts and recordings of the NDT Final Rounds, evidence books issued by various universities in the US, arguments that participants of the US-Japan exchange debate tour brought to Japan, and literature published in *JAFSA*, *Speaker & Gavel*, *Rostrum*, and *Alta Conference Proceedings* were circulated and shared in the community in that period.<sup>11</sup> Although several answers to the inquiry indicate that they

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<sup>11</sup> The email inquiry posed the following questions: what debate materials were imported from the US to Japan? What year were these materials imported? How did individuals in Japan use the materials? Thirteen

could not use the arguments in their original form, they did provide a starting point for research. Abstract impacts, such as unemployment or human rights, were gradually accepted through the import and influence of arguments and debate theories. We do not mean to imply that similar effects would necessarily occur again with the introduction of a DDA.<sup>12</sup> However, this example illustrates that arguments used in a debate community can function as the *topoi* of arguments in other communities.

Supposing, for a moment, that international debate communities will access and utilize a DDA: what issues or problems does the community have to consider? First, there is a possibility that DDA could undermine creativity required of international debaters in the initial phase of the research (this is also a concern for US debaters). Storing arguments and making them easily accessible to debaters, and they may skip the process of coming up with ideas for arguments. This process requires some sort of creativity, so reliance on a DDA may be counterproductive in developing this skill. However, this point may not be unique, given that other services and resources are already in place. Second, a DDA may promote domination of debate communities in other countries by the NDT/CEDA community. If debate

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instances of import were reported, ranging from 1978 through to 2003. Four replies suggested that they reused arguments. Only one reply indicated that they had used the arguments in the same form that they had been used in the US (these were arguments concerning the safety of nuclear power plants and alternative energy sources). The remaining three replies indicated that they used the imported arguments as a starting point. They made use of the idea of the arguments, did more research on the issue, and developed arguments to be relevant to the Japanese society.

<sup>12</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this article, the effect at that time could have been unique to that the situation of the debate community in Japan. When the import of arguments happened in Japan, the practice of debate shifted from the public-speaking-like debate, stock-issue-based debate, to debate based on the systems analysis. The aggressive import of the arguments might well have been possible because of these backgrounds.

communities in other countries do not set up a similar archive, the flow of arguments is one-sided: from the NDT/CEDA to other communities. As a result, the ways in which debaters approach a proposition may get standardized as embodied by the arguments used in the NDT/CEDA and stored at a DDA. Once again, however, this possibility may not be unique to the creation of a DDA, given the availability of other US debate materials available abroad. The problem of one-sided knowledge production could be magnified significantly if a DDA was a free system, as opposed to payable services that deliver debate evidence currently.

One potential result of an open access archive is that external audiences such as other US debate circuits and the international debate community could use a DDA as a resource for their own activities. A DDA provides an opportunity to change the relationship between these communities—but is that change a desirable one? Issues of research, argument innovation, and competition for other debate circuits must be considered as a DDA is developed. In this final section, we turn to the range of possible competitive implications for US policy debaters.

### **Competition**

The idea of a college debate archive, in addition to raising questions of usability, pedagogy, and external audiences, also generates a series of possibilities and concerns as to how it will affect competition. For people actively engaged in the policy debate community, questions of how the archive could affect competitive success are apt to be paramount. A DDA raises questions in a variety of competitive vectors, including research and style, voluntary vs. mandatory participation, and how the archive is framed and promoted.

The amount of research done on a regular basis in college debate is viewed as essential to a model of informed decision-making at the heart of debate pedagogy (Ehninger & Brockriede, 1972). In fact, a major trend in academic debate has been the foregrounding of research and the simultaneous devaluing of style as anything more than an extension of the information processing required by the research process. For many coaches and judges,

this is the hallmark of excellent debate and is seen as essential to the training of future policy-makers, lawyers, politicians, and activists (Panetta, 1990; Mitchell, 1998).

One of the primary potential benefits of a DDA may be an interesting reversal of the centrality of research implied by this model of debate. While the pedagogical benefits of research are important, the competitive nature of academic debate seems to be the primary driving force for its valuation. In order to win debates, squads are increasingly pressured to pursue ever larger research agendas whose scope is almost unimaginable to the uninitiated observer. This research is critical to competitive success as teams have increasingly been granted access to more and more efficient means of compiling new and cutting-edge arguments. Scanners, laptops, wireless internet access on university campuses and in hotels, and the ever-increasing amount of information available through online databases have accelerated research at an almost exponential rate over the past decade (Edwards, 2006).

If a DDA grants access to the research utilized in debates throughout the country, then the drive to do ever-increasing amounts of research could be reduced in favor of a scheme in which evidence sharing fills gaps and reduces research burdens, particularly for smaller schools. It is in this situation, style and the presentation of evidence could become increasingly important as all teams have access to the same evidence set. A DDA might invigorate an interest in the persuasive force of presentations that are not rooted in speed or efficiency alone but also in the unique interpretations and organization of shared evidence and arguments.

The above scenario merits discussion but we must stop short of its total acceptance here. The opposite trend seems possible as well. Instead of enforcing a nationwide interest in presentational skill, a DDA may simply accelerate the search for more and more evidence. In order to make up for the competitive losses implied in evidence sharing ushered in by a DDA, many teams might simply try to create new sets of arguments before every tournament. In this sense, a DDA might very well bring about an even more pervasive occupation with evidence production.

Alternatively, a DDA could potentially usher in the debate community's own "tragedy of the commons" in which individuals flood the market with sub-par evidence and hold back all of their best research until the end of the year at the National Debate Tournament or the Cross Examination Debate Association national tournament. A slightly different outcome might involve the loss of motivation for top researchers. If someone who typically spends multiple hours producing large, highly user-friendly files knows that such files will be made instantly available as soon as they are read in a debate round for the first time, it seems unlikely that the researcher would want to continue to do such demanding work.

The least palatable outcome might be a wholesale reduction in research skills. Given that a DDA model could publish complete, competition ready files, many people might simply stop doing research altogether and lose the pedagogical benefits that research is supposed to entail. This same criticism was made long ago against the increasingly prevalent role of coaches in research and pre-round preparation (Lane, 1915). A command of large amounts of information does not represent meaningful learning or knowledge production. Debaters who have not actually read the literature on a given topic are unlikely to increase their competitive success by simply reading pre-made files in rounds. The ability to read through large amounts of information and make decisions as to what constitutes credible and useful information for use in debate rounds is a skill that might be entirely lost on whole generations of debaters given that a certain version of a DDA would hand them everything they need after the first several tournaments. Alternatively, a DDA might very well augment the level of evidence scrutiny throughout the country as almost every piece of evidence being utilized is tracked to its source. In this scenario, debaters would see a DDA as a means to test the quality of evidence being read in debates and select particular articles to read on their own once they have decided which of the available arguments they want to make their own.

While the trends discussed above are in many cases mutually exclusive, the point of this discussion concerning research is to highlight the multiple directions the debate community might take

when reacting to a DDA. We view these as potential outcomes that are primarily linked to the version of a DDA that is made available. This recognition is critical to understanding the ways that the above issues interrelate and should become part of an informed decision-making process. Many of the arguments raised in favor of the archive are based on an analogy with the open source movement in programming circles. One of the central tenets of open source philosophy is that the information will be available to any interested audience. However, in the context of college debate, it remains to be seen whether or not this could be modeled. In particular, a potential concern arises when particular debaters or teams choose not to participate actively in the archive. This issue certainly is not new to discussions about this new argumentative archive. For at least the past twenty years, intercollegiate debate has struggled with the issue of argumentative disclosure and its resultant impact on competition. Coaches still discuss the finer points of the conditions under which argument disclosure should either occur or not occur in order to balance the competitive value of argument innovation and original research with the desire to improve the quality of clash (see Harris, 2007; Hoe, 2007; Massey, 2007; Morris, 2007).

If open source thinking reigns supreme in this context, there should not be barriers to access of information. However, there is likely to be pressure to exclude those who do not participate from accessing the information, in an attempt to prevent "free riders." Social pressures may be effective in encouraging argument reporting, and ongoing discussions in the community, much like other internet advocacy groups pushing for a democratization of knowledge production, might help to assuage the impact of reporting disparities (Salter, 2004). If such pressure were to gain momentum, it seems possible that the information could be restricted, such as by password. In such a world, open source principles become overridden by competitive ones, and the potential to impact external audiences loses. It is entirely possible that peer pressure will be enough to convince non-participants to contribute.

However, a cursory examination of the OpenCaselist Wiki sponsored by Wake Forest University (Lacy, n.d.), an open source database designed to facilitate community-wide argument disclosure, shows a wide disparity in the quality of both pre-tournament and in-round argument reports provided to the list. In a pattern that mirrors distortions in the free exchange of knowledge in other areas of the “network economy” (Fekete, 2006), resource privileged debate squads could opt-out of voluntary reporting, accumulate evidence through more traditional means (i.e. private scouting), and maintain a monopoly on their unique information resources. If top-down regulatory pressure is needed to enforce the success of this archive, it becomes important to ask as a community if the benefits are worth this kind of sacrifice. Community-wide reflection on this issue seems apposite given its ability to radically alter practices, norms, and rules for the foreseeable future. One potential resolution for this pitfall might include the creation of a set of NDT/CEDA norms enshrined in the constitutions of these organizations which outline the rules governing these technologies so that confusion and patchwork policies can be avoided through the democratic process of rule-formation.

Finally, before we embark on something as important as an archive of this scope, we should be careful in the ways in which a DDA is conceptualized and pitched. Throughout this article, we have discussed the potential benefits of a DDA. However, there is a concern that the archive might be advocated as a type of “magic bullet” solution to the structural problem of “small” schools (whether in terms of budget, number of coaches, number of card-cutters, etc...). Indeed, it is not implausible that the archive could provide benefits for smaller programs. Rather than having to stretch limited card-cutting capabilities thin in order to cover the basic research requirements of a given topic, coaches and debaters would have more time to practice, develop skills, and work on argumentative style. However, posing the archive as an expansive solution is dangerous. In recent years, the college debate community has been actively attempting to understand why programs leave the NDT/CEDA community. Correspondingly, a

number of solutions have been offered, each of which were thought to be the best hope for reviving small schools. From small topics to extensive caselists to restrictions on NDT scouting, the intercollegiate debate community has been quick to provide what we thought would be definitive solutions to the "small school" problem. However, the actual amount of benefit that these reforms have provided to small programs has been much more dubious. If the archive can open dialogue with other communities (and we are willing to face the risks of such heightened dialogue), that might be an important reason to proceed. The policy debate community should avoid selling this as *the* breakthrough that will close the competitive gap between top programs and programs struggling to build budgets and personnel—while simultaneously working to make sure that any proposal adopted by the community has an eye towards these goals.

### **Toward Reasoned Dissensus**

Like the Amish, the intercollegiate policy debate community should dwell in the middle ground between uncritical acceptance and uncritical rejection of new technologies that confront the community. Our intent in this essay was not to sway readers in one direction or another regarding the creation of a DDA, but instead, to raise pertinent issues that deserve attention in community decision-making.<sup>13</sup> A Digital Debate Archive would inevitably affect debate coaches, graduate students, undergraduates, and external audiences in varied ways.

Choices regarding a DDA's architecture will shape the incentive structure that influences participation rates, demarcate

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, we have not raised all issues relevant to the creation and execution of a DDA. For example, an expert knowledge of copyright infringement laws is necessary when considering how to negotiate the reproduction of massive amounts of debate evidence for a public archive. It would be wise to draw advice from the large knowledge pool of former debaters and coaches who have gone onto legal professions in order to deal with the intricacies of this issue.

lines of editorial authority, and affect the commodity status of debate knowledge production. On another level, the basic philosophy underlying a DDA will determine whether the technology preserves intercollegiate debate as a primarily insular space or transforms it into a more public enterprise. Furthermore, depending on which design features are selected, a DDA could either reinforce prevailing norms of competition, or introduce new elements into the picture that change the nature of intercollegiate debate entirely.

It is important, as a community composed of diverse people and programs, to make sure that multiple perspectives are heard and debated out before action is taken. Therefore, we challenge readers to use their argumentative skills and engage in critical deliberations regarding a DDA's effect on usability, argument pedagogy, external audiences, and competition. These important deliberations, already begun on the eDebate listserv and continued here in the pages of *Contemporary Argumentation and Debate*, have great potential to inform collective decisions regarding the NDT/CEDA debate community's orientation toward technology. In this endeavor, premature consensus may be the most formidable stumbling block to long-term success, because, as Richard Sclove observes cogently, "The democratic virtue of reasoned dissensus is that it helps others understand the bases of evaluative disagreements, rather than sanctioning behind-closed-door compromises that obscure those bases" (Sclove, 1995, p. 217).

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