



3. External Resources and Opportunities

The coach can both make her job easier and maximize debate's benefit to her students by helping them to take advantage of educational resources in their school, league, and community. In particular, the coach can use these resources to compensate for gaps in her own knowledge. For example, if she is not an expert in policy debate she can help her students seek out opportunities to learn from those who are.

Local Seminars

Many urban debate leagues, conscious of the fact that the majority of their coaches are not policy debate gurus, recruit prominent members of the debate community to offer lectures and seminars for the students in the league. Although these cannot substitute for the individualized attention of a trained and accredited educator (the coach), they are an excellent way for students to get exposure to in-depth policy debate theory and argument strategies that their coach cannot offer.

If possible, the coach should attend these seminars as well. This is likely to increase turnout among students both because she will be able to make sure that they go and because her willingness to spend her own valuable time at them communicates the importance of the seminar to the students.

Coaches could also consider offering extra credit to students who attend these optional seminars. After all, they generally entail several hours of learning about reading, speaking, critical thinking, and note taking skills.

Sometimes, leagues also offer seminars or conferences specifically designed for coaches who want to learn more about policy debate and how to teach it. Coaches may even be able to count the time they spend at these seminars towards in-service professional development required by their school, district, or union.



Web Resources

The internet is a valuable tool useful for more than just research. There are a growing number of websites offering educational material about debate and the current debate topic. Coaches can supplement their teaching with these resources:



National Association of Urban Debate Leagues

(<http://www.urbandebate.org/>)

This is the only policy debate site on the internet dedicated exclusively to the needs of students, coaches, and administrators in urban debate leagues. The electronic resource center contains several fully researched files, dozens of research links, tools to help coaches with every aspect of managing a debate team, and information about college, summer institutes, and other opportunities for students.

NDCA Free Workshop Evidence Database (<http://ndca.debateteams.net/>)

The National Debate Coaches Association “NDCA” provides all debate coaches, regardless of type of debate, region or pedagogical style with avenues for professional development, including sample lesson plans. There is a small annual membership fee (\$25). Beginning in 2007 they also have a new comprehensive collection of files from 22 workshops from the past summer that can be downloaded *for free* by any member. This is a way for debate teams to access thousands of pages of evidence, organized by topic. This site also has a starter pack for new coaches, and a PR kit to help sell your program.

University of Vermont’s Debate Central (<http://debate.uvm.edu/default.html>)

Alfred “Tuna” Snider, perhaps the world’s most famous debate coach, has gathered a lifetime of debate wisdom here. His website includes educational resources for students and coaches, information about debate-related opportunities such as scholarships and summer institutes, details about many different kinds of debate, and recorded debates and lectures. Of special interest is his online book, *The Code of the Debater*, which is chock full of valuable advice for learning and improving debate skills.

Michigan States Online Debate Free Encyclopedia (<http://sdiencyclopedia.wikispaces.com/>)

One of the most difficult aspects of learning debate is confronting all the stylized jargon that has developed over many years. In 2007 the Michigan State debate program began the assembly of a comprehensive encyclopedia of debate jargon and concepts. It is free to access and organized alphabetically.



National Forensics League (<http://www.nflonline.org/Main/HomePage>)

Coaches can use this site to find out about upcoming tournaments, submit their team's NFL points online, and find helpful teaching resources. Also, back issues of the NFL's publication, *The Rostrum*, are archived here.

Planet Debate Free Debate Textbook (<http://www.planetdebate.com/>)

Planet Debate is a comprehensive debate website that includes materials about how to debate and a giant database of evidence. It offers a valuable free online textbook ("Policy Debate 101" - <http://planetdebate.com/book/book.asp>) that is available to anyone. The best content on this website, such as regularly updated evidence and recorded lectures from famous debate coaches, is available by subscription only. Available for free, however, are lists of arguments being used around the country, schedules of upcoming tournaments, research links, and more.

National Center for Policy Analysis' Debate Central (<http://www.debate-central.org>)

This is a great place to start a research project. It contains hundreds of links, grouped by topic and by Affirmative/Negative, to articles related to the current resolution. Forums and even a few pre-written briefs are available as well.

Cross-X.Com (<http://www.cross-x.com/>)

Although this is primarily a site that sells evidence, it also contains debate news, chat forums, and some research links. This site does provide information on various workshops from around the country including an opportunity to write questions for the camp directors to answer.

International Debate Education Association (<http://www.idebate.org/main/home.asp>)

IDEA's website contains information about and resources for different kinds of debate. Coaches will find their suggestions for debate exercises and their 'deatabase' of possible debate topics, complete with summaries of the arguments for each side, especially useful. IDEA also sponsors some debate-related educational opportunities such as contests and international seminars.



Summer Workshops for Students

For students interested in taking their involvement with debate to the next level, there is no better way than to attend a summer debate institute. Summer debate institutes, sometimes referred to as ‘debate boot camps,’ provide students with several weeks of intensive policy debate instruction.

Many urban debate leagues offer in-house institutes for their students at little or no cost. Coaches should urge all of their debaters to take advantage of these opportunities, as they are hands-down the most cost-effective way for students to improve their debating and get to know other students, coaches, judges, and administrators in the league.

Colleges and universities around the country offer more extensive (and expensive) residential programs where students spend two to seven weeks completely immersed in policy debate and the upcoming season’s debate topic. Students there work with some of that nation’s best college debaters and debate coaches to master debate skills and produce loads of evidence for use during the upcoming season. Attending a residential institute is almost a must for any debaters who want to start competing nationally.

The benefits of a residential debate institute are many: students work with top-notch instructors, receive many rounds of experience on the upcoming topic, and make valuable connections with debaters at other schools and with members of the debate community who may end up judging them. For some students, even the opportunity to leave the city where they live, and experience a college town, is a rare and exciting one.

The major drawback, of course, is the cost of these programs, which are generally in the thousands of dollars. Fortunately, the directors of residential summer debate institutes are often willing to offer financial aid, scholarships, or group rates for urban debaters. The league may have arrangements set up with nearby institutes, or the coach may need to contact the director of the institute herself to ask about scholarships and financial aid.

The NAUDL Online Guide to Summer Workshops

Beginning with Summer 2008 institutes, the NAUDL provides an Online Guide to summer debate workshops that catalogues up-to-date information from participating summer workshops. The Online Guide is accessible at the NAUDL website. It includes general information for each workshop – such as dates, student-faculty ratio, size, etc. It also identifies and highlights those workshops that offer special opportunities (scholarships, faculty, curriculum) for UDL debaters.

Nuts and Bolts: Choosing a Summer Debate Institute

Attending a summer debate institute is a substantial investment of time and money, but the payoff can be huge, too. The potential advantages are not only for the individual students who are able to attend, but also for their coaches and teammates who benefit from the instructional materials and strategies they bring home with them. Coaches, students, and parents should consider the following factors when thinking about summer institutes:

Is it Affordable? For the families of many urban debate league students, cost is the bottom line. Even with substantial scholarships and financial aid, an institute can cost hundreds of dollars. Plus, scholarships rarely cover travel expenses, which can be considerable. In addition to scholarship awards or discounts from the institute the student's league or school may have money available for educational summer programs.

Are there Additional Costs? A few institutes charge students lab fees, make them pay if they want to take evidence home with them, or expect them to pay out-of-pocket for research-related expenses. In many cases these costs are being reduced by the availability of electronic research and evidence processing. In any event costs won't be covered by scholarships or financial aid, so they'll have to be factored in to the consideration of affordability.

Are they UDL-friendly? Some institutes go out of their way to make UDL students feel welcome and appreciated. They understand that UDL students make valuable contributions to their program and they eagerly seek out UDL students for their programs. They often do this



through their hiring practices, their curriculum, their scholarship assistance, and their track record of attracting UDL students. Find out if the workshops you are investigating have hired teachers with UDL experience. Learn how many UDL students have attended the workshop in the past.

Who else is Going? Getting to know the competition and the judging pool is a big benefit of summer institutes. For students who compete only in their UDL, the in-house institute is best for this purpose. Those who compete regionally should find out where the top teams at other nearby schools are going. Those UDL students that compete nationally will be best served by national institutes.



Nuts and Bolts: Choosing a Summer Debate Institute (cont.)

Where is it Located? Institutes in major cities can offer cultural excursions and chances to interact with real-world policymakers but often have to keep a tighter rein on students because of safety concerns. Those in more remote locations offer leisure activities akin to those at a traditional summer camp: swimming, sports, etc., but may be more expensive to get to.

When Will it Take Place? Students with a lot of time on their hands in the summer may want to attend a residential institute that won't conflict with the in-house one that their league offers.

Is it the Right Track? The largest summer institutes offer several tracks based on students' experience, ability level, and prior accomplishments. At some workshops the big name faculty may end up spending most of their time with the top track, so it is important to learn about the details of each track before making a decision.

What is the Focus? Different institutes focus on different skills. Some are known for the quality of research that they produce, others for having top-notch tournaments or renowned lab leaders. By reading between the lines in promotional literature such as brochures or information on the institute's website, savvy consumers can often determine how students will spend most of their time.



Other Leagues and Competitions

Some urban debate leagues are more insular than others. It may be possible for students to spend several years on a debate team and never compete against a team that is not from their league. This has its advantages: urban debate leagues provide a level playing field for schools without big debate budgets and larger coaching staffs to compete against each other.

On the other hand, debaters who participate only in their UDLs are exposed to a narrow variety of debate styles and arguments; they miss out on exciting opportunities to travel and meet new people; and they are unable to engage in great competition such as that found at various state and national championship tournaments. Moreover, debaters may learn more by losing to better teams than by winning against their peers. Finally, there is the danger that such insularity may be perceived as a statement of urban debaters' inability to compete with more affluent schools.

Those teams who have traveled beyond their UDL have often been pleasantly surprised. At other regional tournaments, the competition often is similar in caliber to what they are used to in their leagues. Plus, their school and their program gain prestige in the broader debate community, and their coach gets the chance to meet and swap ideas with more of her colleagues.

Stepping Outside Your League

Coaches interested in taking their teams to competitions outside of their league should consider these national opportunities:

National Forensics League (NFL). Membership in the NFL entails a small fee on the part of the school, but is free for all students at that school. The NFL awards points to students for competing in a variety of forensics activities and grants higher and higher distinctions to students as they accumulate NFL points. Best of all, the NFL sponsors regional tournaments through which debaters can qualify for a weeklong national championship tournament.

National Catholic Forensics League (NCFL). Although the NCFL is organized the diocese of the Catholic Church, it is open to all schools public and private. Membership in the NCFL is usually required to participate in the tournaments they sponsor, but is relatively inexpensive and makes students eligible to participate in regional and national championship tournaments.

Tournament of Champions National Circuit (TOC). The annual TOC held in Lexington, Kentucky is sponsored by the University of Kentucky. The TOC is the only debate circuit that is not organized regionally. Instead, debaters compete at the largest tournaments around the country and earn 'bids' to the TOC by placing highly at these tournaments. Of these leagues, the TOC national circuit is most similar in style to college policy debate, with an orientation towards rapid-fire delivery and complex argumentation. These tournaments attract difficult competition and may be intimidating to teams leaving their league for the first time.



Local Universities

Universities are often looking for ways in which they can have a positive effect on their host communities. While they can and do give back to these communities financially, they generally prefer projects that allow members of their faculty and students to play an active role. Working with a team in a local urban debate league is a great way for them to accomplish all of these goals. If your city has a college or university with a debate program you may want to look to them for helping after school or at tournaments.

UDL debaters can benefit from the involvement of a local university in a number of ways. Members of the college debate team (if there is one) or college students with high school policy debate experience may volunteer as assistant coaches for the school, providing students with another source of policy debate knowledge and the opportunity to learn more about college life. Professors from the university who are experts in the topic area might agree to speak with the team and help them gain a stronger understanding of the arguments they are debating. The school's community relations or public service department might sponsor the team or some of its events.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the university will probably want to recruit members of the high school debate team, especially if it has a team of its own. A debate team typically attracts some of the smartest, most dedicated, and hardest working students at a high school, making it a valuable resource for college recruiters.



High School Debate as a Path to College Admission

There is no doubt that actively participating on a debate team helps students get into college indirectly by improving crucial skills such as reading, critical thinking, oral and written communication, and organization. These skills generally produce higher GPA's and standardized test scores, which are the primary statistic evaluated by college admissions officers.

There are also some very direct ways in which involvement with the debate team can increase a student's chances of getting accepted to and paying for college.

First, debate experience looks good on a transcript. Many college admissions officers say that it is the number one extracurricular activity they look for. Extensive participation on a debate team says many positive things about the student. They chose an academic-oriented extra-curricular activity. They have learned how to research and formulate logical ideas. In short, they have the qualities that admissions departments see as important for likely success in college.

Second, debate experience often gives students the opportunity to interact with university students and faculty. In some cases, this can make college seem like a real possibility for a student who had always believed it wasn't for her. The connections that students make by attending a summer institute, working with a university debate team, or meeting college admissions officers can also be very valuable when is applying. A letter of recommendation from a faculty member or alumnus of a university can make a world of difference in the highly competitive admissions process.

Finally, there are some very well funded college debate teams that go to great lengths to recruit talented high school debaters. Some even make special efforts to recruit urban debate league students. The coaches of these programs can frequently offer scholarships to students who are admitted and may even be able to influence the admissions process.



Talking to Students about College Debate

Many universities with college debate teams offer scholarships that are designated for debaters. Some universities offer awards based on merit and need beyond that – ones that are not tied to the debate team. Participating on the high school debate team helps in being awarded either of these kinds.

Scholarships from university debate teams generally require the recipient to be an active member of the team. College debate can be very enjoyable, educational, and rewarding, but it is not for everyone. It can be very different from debating in an urban debate league, and no student wants to be in the position of being financially dependent on participation in an activity that she does not enjoy.

College debate is more difficult than high school debate in the same sense that college economics classes are more difficult than high school debate classes. College programs often offer full time directors and coaches, which can be a very supportive environment. In the same way that high school debaters tend to stand out in their classes, so do college debaters in their courses.

The most important consideration is that there is dramatic diversity in college debate programs. Students who are interested in a certain type of college program should investigate the characteristics carefully. Coaches should talk to students considering debating in college about the following things:

Time Commitment

Most urban debaters attend one or two practices every week, give up five or six weekends a year for tournaments, and spend two or three weeks at a summer institute. This schedule, though demanding, pales in comparison to that of a nationally competitive college debate team. Team meetings may be longer or more frequent than they were in high school and research assignments are generally more extensive. Tournaments often run Friday-Monday, requiring debaters to miss several days of class. This schedule can make it very difficult for students to participate in other extracurricular activities.

On the other hand, many college programs are sensitive to these demands and offer regional competition with lesser time commitments. The average college debater attends 8-9 tournaments per year, but many attend fewer than that. Most college teams have one weekly meeting in the evening that lasts for an hour or two. Research assignments are generally based on the experience level of the debater and tailored to the time available to the student. Keep in mind that a college student only spends about 15 hours per week actually in class, so there is more time available if the debater is self-disciplined.

Stylistic Differences

College debate is very similar to national circuit high school debate, but quite different from what goes on in many urban debate leagues. Again, there is wide variation in styles that different teams adopt. College debate does tend to be fast, and you will find teams that emphasize policy, teams that emphasize critical arguments, and programs that mix both.

Community Differences

Because all of the teams in an urban debate league tend to go to the same tournaments, summer institutes, and seminars, they often get to know each other very well. Moreover, students regularly encounter coaches and judges whose primary concern is their education. Students from UDLs will find similarities in these areas. The college debate circuit is small enough that you will become friends with debaters from other schools. You will have the same judges several times so you can benefit from that familiarity. College judges also tend to be more experienced so your interaction with them is very educational and supportive.

Members of racial or ethnic minority groups are often in the majority in their UDL. In this regard the college debate community is very much the opposite. Minority groups and women are underrepresented.

