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The Intersection of Competitions and Classrooms in Forensics Pedagogy

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Many forensics coaches also serve as professors or instructors in their home departments. As a result, they often carry competitive debate practices with them into the classes that they teach. Although this overlap is widely beneficial, it is not without risks. Not all competitive procedures are well suited for classroom environments. Instructors may sometimes incorporate competitive techniques by habit without carefully considering the pedagogical consequences. In this article, we review instructional materials and syllabi from collegiate argumentation and debate classes and identify several methods that are commonly carried over from competitive settings. We then assess the pedagogical and educational implications of implementing these practices in undergraduate classes. We find that several tools and procedures that are appropriate for competition are problematic or even detrimental when adopted in introductory courses. In particular, instructors should think carefully before choosing to emulate competitive formats, incorporate competitive theories, or train students to use competitive techniques.

Keywords: Academic Debate; Argumentation; Interdisciplinary Instruction; Pedagogy; Public Speaking

The educational benefits of forensics are widely acknowledged. Participation in speech and debate, either in a competitive or classroom setting, can equip students with critical thinking, communicative, and experiential skills that facilitate long-term success both within and beyond academia (Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, & Louden, 1999).

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However, despite the promise of forensics to improve students' lives and to enrich educational environments, debate pedagogy exists at an impasse. As the activity evolves, it is continually pulled in diverging directions by the competitive impulses of its participants and the pedagogical desires of its practitioners.

In most intercollegiate activities, program managers and coaches are functionally distinct from professors or instructors. Athletic coaches and sporting directors rarely teach classes, attend academic conferences, or publish in refereed journals. However, a similar distinction between occupational roles does not exist among forensics faculty. Almost all stewards of competitive speech and debate—the directors, coaches, judges, and officiators of the various governing bodies—are also professors, instructors, or aspiring graduate students. As such, they are simultaneously tasked with two responsibilities: to improve the competitive performances of their teams and to cultivate forensics education in their classrooms.

This overlap in responsibilities can greatly enhance pedagogy in a variety of ways. For example, because forensics coaches also teach classes, they become adept educators who can effectively communicate with students across diverse contexts. Even during tournaments, debate judges play the dual roles of adjudicator and educator. Indeed, the activity is unusual among competitive events in that community norms strongly encourage coaches to offer constructive feedback and advice to opposing teams as well as to their own students.

Second, instructors who primarily teach debate in classrooms can often benefit from occasional exposure to emerging competitive practices. Competitive pressures spur creative thinking; as a result, new varieties of argumentation and novel approaches to conventional issues often emerge during debate tournaments. For example, colleagues have suggested that the competitive use of conditional argumentation temporarily exceeded academic analysis of the issue and necessitated additional consideration. Thus, familiarity with the tools and techniques in use during competitions can aid instructors who hope to discuss cutting-edge practices in their classrooms. Finally, the intersection of instruction and competition also leads to a rich cross-pollination of ideas between academic research and competitive practice. Judges and competitors quickly apply concepts that initially appear in journals, and theories that originally emerged at tournaments are ultimately published or presented in academic venues. In short, the dual nature of the instructor–coach is overwhelmingly beneficial for the activity.

However, despite such benefits, a potential for harm also exists. In this article, we argue that conventional competitive procedures are too often incorporated into classroom environments without a measured consideration of their pedagogical implications. As such, we argue that a more robust distinction should be drawn between classroom debate and competitive debate and that, although the two activities are complementary, they should not be considered perfectly congruent. The remainder of this article proceeds as follows. First, we review traditional practices regarding argumentation and debate instruction in classroom environments and identify five common habits. Second, we assess how those methods may be beneficial in competitive contexts but pedagogically detrimental when incorporated into introductory classes. Finally, we offer pedagogical recommendations for forensics practitioners and instructors.

Previous Research

This section explores the relevant literature on the pedagogical practices used in argumentation and debate courses on college campuses. We break down the literature into three parts: (a) studies that demonstrate the influence argumentation and debate courses have across the curriculum; (b) studies that specifically advocate using techniques from competitive debate in the classroom; and (c) studies that offer broader suggestions on how these courses ought to be taught.

First, McGee, McGee, and Kennedy (2009) examined course offerings and college catalogs to determine the availability of argumentation courses in the curriculum. They discovered that nearly 90% of institutions that offered a BA in communication studies offered at least an introductory course in argumentation. Although the authors note that the most common topics included, "various aspects of intercollegiate debate theory; participation in classroom debates; the influence of theorist Stephen Toulmin; and fact, value, and policy propositions," they declined to comment on the desirability of translating competitive techniques into the classroom setting (McGee et al., 2009, p. 65). The study highlighted two important points: (a) argumentation and debate courses are widely offered by universities, but a careful analysis of how such courses are designed and taught has not yet been conducted; and (b) course offerings often draw significantly from competitive intercollegiate debate, a trend that we find problematic and discuss in detail throughout this work.

Indeed, classroom debate is rapidly expanding into interdisciplinary courses and other fields of study. Lantis (2004), for example, introduced structured classroom debates to discuss the ethical dimensions of international relations. Similarly, Omelicheva (2007) advocated for the use of in-class debates in undergraduate political science classes. Given that scholars from other fields are attempting to incorporate debates into their courses, it is important for communication scholars to carefully identify best practices and to prepare useful models that instructors from other fields may emulate. For example, Snyder and Schnurer (2002) offered a set of competitive debate materials and guidelines that have been modified for use in undergraduate classes. Unfortunately, Davis (2011) pointed out that, although debate coaches continually innovate with lesson plans and pedagogical practices, they rarely share their ideas with other faculty or coaches. As such, a meta-analysis of common approaches to forensics instruction is long overdue.

Second, even a cursory analysis suggests that the bulk of available instructional materials regarding classroom debating are written and developed with a goal of narrowing the divide between competitive and classroom debate. Researchers commonly praise the merits of competitive debate but take by assumption the fact that the same techniques will be equally effective when applied directly to the classroom. For example, a 2011 special issue of *Contemporary Argumentation & Debate* included a forum on forensics pedagogy, but three of the four suggestions offered by the authors were recommendations to make classroom debate more similar to tournament-style debate[1]: Atchison (2011) argued that classrooms should emulate intercollegiate competitive debate by adopting "switch-side" techniques. Mosley-Jensen (2011) took

the infusion of competitive debate even further by advocating that instructors host mini tournaments within their classes. He concluded that the goal is to, ''focus debate students' attention and preparation in the same way that they prepare arguments for a tournament'' (p. 76). Finally, Kuswa (2011) proposed a classroom format that borrows heavily from competitive rules. For example, he argued that the resolution should fairly divide the ground between teams, that time limits for speeches should mirror those used in competitive debate, and that debaters should learn to take notes or ''flow'' the debate as they would in competition. We address all of these suggestions later in this article.

There are, however, also a variety of articles that question the overlap between classroom and competitive debate. In general, this discussion has focused on the necessity of the switch-side, adversarial model of debate. For example, debate is a requirement for secondary-school students in England, and Jerome and Algarra (2005) criticized the use of a competitive or adversarial model in the classroom. They believed that the system of assigning students to a particular side limits their understanding of issues and concluded that a more deliberative model of debate would increase citizen competency and participation in civic life. Approaching the issue from a more critical lens, Mitchell (1998) argued that the description of debate spaces as laboratories for civic skills is overstated; in fact, the skills that students acquire do not translate outside of competitive debate. Mitchell (2000) continued his argument, calling on debate instructors to develop curriculum that combines an adversarial and deliberative model. In this article, we move beyond a comparison of the deliberative versus adversarial models and argue that additional aspects of competitive debate can prove problematic when applied in the classroom.

Finally, Bsumek (2009) argued that the competitive nature of intercollegiate debate conjures up negative views from outsiders. Rather than winning and losing, Bsumek argues that we should focus on the acquisition of knowledge and an increase in education. Similarly, Sellnow (2006) argued that instructors of classroom debates should design curriculum that allows their students to acquire skills that will be useful both within and beyond the classroom. We agree in principal with both of these suggestions but argue that they require greater specificity in order to serve as a useful guide for instructors and forensics practitioners. The issue of how argumentation and debate courses should be structured and designed is an important question for forensics coaches, communication instructors, and administrators who are attempting to expand the debate curriculum across additional fields of study. In the following section, we assess contemporary trends in forensics instruction.

Research Methods: Identifying Classroom Procedures

A careful analysis of practical applications is necessary to determine how instructors currently teach argumentation and debate courses. This section offers an overview of our methodological approach for assessing classroom instruction habits and for

identifying the competitive debate practices that are frequently used in undergraduate instruction. The remainder of this section is divided into two parts. First, our methodology proper is discussed. Second, we describe the materials that we used as data.

Methodology

Two complementary modes of inquiry shed insight on the prevalence of competitive habits in the classroom. First, we conducted content analysis in order to quantify how often various traits and methods appeared in argumentation courses. Second, we conducted intertextual analyses on instructional textbooks. Our goal was to provide a comparative analysis of key themes within the texts that are considered pertinent to the teaching of argumentation skills in the classroom.

Content analysis is defined as a, ''research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication'' (Berelson, 1952, p. 489). In seeking to achieve this ideal, researchers have implemented content analysis in a myriad of forms, ranging from analytical induction to computational text mining. As with any methodological tool, each method possesses its own set of advantages and shortcomings. Choosing which form of content analysis to proceed with is contingent upon stated research goals, as each type gives support for a particular line of inferential logic. Because we sought to assess the prevalence of characteristics, we used counting as our chosen mode of content analysis.

Counting is most appropriate when the resulting frequencies are both meaningful and representative of the text-at-large (Krippendorff, 2013). These criteria were met through our operationalization of earlier theoretical claims into quantifiable data. We focused on the stated course goals on syllabi for numerous argumentation courses across several universities, as well as relevant course descriptions. In particular, we counted the frequency of word choices and categorized them as they related to the varying habits we have discussed. By reducing the volume of text present in entire syllabi to a typology based on articulated course goals and descriptions, our study provides a basis for understanding how often traits associated with competitive habits appeared throughout argumentation courses.

Broadly understood, discourse analysis provides observers with an opportunity to better understand how people make sense of the world. Put more explicitly, textual analysis is the process of making an ''educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations'' that might be made on a text (McKee, 2003, p. 1). These interpretations represent how social meanings are practiced vis-à-vis actions and identities. This study draws from these approaches to identify concepts that are most relevant to understanding the integration of competitive forensics habits in argumentation course curricula. Specifically, we examined a number of instructional textbooks that are the most prevalent in courses related to argumentation. We compared our interpretations of texts in order to generate more robust justifications for our overall claims. This method, known as intertextuality, is functionally a comparison of interpretations across similar texts (Fairclough, 2003). This approach allowed us to

draw an important distinction about relations of a text. Most importantly, ''internal'' relations are the findings drawn from looking at a particular text. This lends insight to questions such as the specialized role that a textbook plays or the practiced meanings of a given theme found therein. Intertextuality provided the foundation for assessing ''external'' relations. Here, the meanings of texts that are compatible under a shared context were analyzed across each other. The aim was not to create universal generalizations but rather to craft a more durable understanding of the complex relationships between social meanings and important texts that have shared purpose (Ivanic, 1998).

Data

The data we used can be categorized under either of the two aforementioned methodological approaches. First, for the content analysis section, we examined the stated goals and course descriptions within argumentation class syllabi from numerous leading programs in communication studies. The idea here was not to achieve an ''as if random'' state of sampling, but rather to have a contextually grounded representation of what the field of communication studies sees as the cutting edge of argumentation course curricula. Moreover, our sample of programs is not justified based on an arbitrary number of cases but rather through a comprehensive representation from different venues of forensics activities.

Table 1 presents an overview of the 57 programs included within the study, along with their forensics organization affiliation. The evidenced variation in pedagogical outlooks between these formats is apparent. Thus, any findings that are observable throughout these curricula should be even more suggestive of the claims we articulate in this article.

For intertextual analysis, we examined the textbooks that are most frequently assigned or referenced within syllabi at different universities. Discourse analysis was undertaken for these texts to eke out social meanings that signified relevance to understanding the nature of competitive habits in argumentation course instruction. For the sake of parsimony, however, they were not all discussed at length. Rather, our article goes a step beyond simple interpretative comparisons and seeks to construct intertextual themes that persisted across these books and that lie at the heart of the dynamics we are exploring.

Table 1 Number of Programs and Forensics Organization Affiliation

Number of programs	Forensics organization
20	National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA)
17	National Forensics Association (NFA)
10	Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA)
10	World Universities Debate Championship (WUDC)

Empirical Analysis

This section implements our empirical strategy. Here, we undertake two primary modes of inquiry. First, we conduct content analysis on argumentation course syllabi and identify general traits as well as those associated with particular competitive debate practices. Second, we examine key instructional texts using intertextual analysis. We then describe our findings and provide evidentiary ground for later discussion.

Counting Habits

A representative content analysis requires proper contextualization of the broader ideas presented earlier in the article. Here, it is prudent to articulate clear criteria that provide a framework for the counting process. There are five general themes related to competitive debate practices that function as categories for placing associative traits within. These categories are the following: competition, argumentation, critical thinking, research, and skill-building. For competition, we counted instances where rules, formats, or requirements are based on either a competitive format or participation in collegiate tournaments. Utilization of rules and resolutions from forensics competitions, as well as exclusive offerings only to forensics team members, are also important traits.

Counts in the argumentation category include mentions of design or creation, as well as analysis, evaluation, and refutation of arguments used throughout course instruction. Similarly, critical thinking denotes how often reasoning and critical thinking were part of argumentation course goals. Next, the research category illustrates the number of times research and the use of evidence were emphasized in course curricula. The final category, skill-building, encompasses the number of times that note taking, public speaking, oral advocacy, listening, and organization were expressed as course goals.

Table 2 depicts the frequency by which each category was found within course descriptions and syllabi. The most prevalent category was argumentation with an associated trait frequency of 57. Research was also heavily represented with a count of 36. Critical thinking and skill-building were the least common categories and appeared only 25 times each. Finally, although competition was not as ubiquitous

Table 2 Competitive Forensics Habits in Argumentation Course Instruction

Associated trait	Frequency
Argumentation	57
Research	36
Competition	32
Critical thinking	25
Skill-building	25

as argumentation or research, we nevertheless identified competitive traits 32 times. In other words, more than half of all course descriptions and syllabi drew specifically from competitive events or procedures. Substantively, this ordering suggests that the habit of integrating competitive forensics activity into classroom instruction is more common than placing emphasis on either critical thinking or skill-building.

Intertextualizing Textbooks

Our intertextual analysis of textbooks used in argumentation and debate courses confirms our suspicions that instructors are drawing heavily on competitive formats when they design their curriculum. For example, half of all syllabi we examined adopted a textbook that is based on one of the major North American debate formats. One textbook used, *Elements of Parliamentary Debate* (Knapp & Galizio, 1998), focuses on debate preparation, resolution analysis, case construction, and even adds a section on how students should judge debates. *Mastering Competitive Debate* (Hensley & Carlin, 2004), another textbook used in an argumentation and debate course, covers policy debate, Lincoln–Douglas debate, student Congress, mock trial, parliamentary debate, and public forum debate. *Burden of Proof* (Crossman, 2005) teaches students about National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) debate and covers stock issues, different types of resolutions, the roles of each individual speaker in the debate, and advice for participation in competitive public speaking activities like extemporaneous and impromptu speaking. *Art, Argument and Advocacy: Mastering Parliamentary Debate* (Meany & Shuster, 2002) teaches students how to compete in competitive parliamentary debate tournaments. This book contains chapters on the roles of the speakers, how to develop an affirmative case, how to structure negative disadvantages, and even advanced debate arguments like counterplans and critiques. *Advocacy and Opposition* (Rybacki & Rybacki, 2011) contains three different chapters on debating resolutions of fact, value, and policy in competitive events. These results demonstrate that there is a heavy emphasis on modeling classroom debates after competitive debate formats, as well as promoting skills that are more useful for students in tournaments than on the job market.

In summary, syllabi, textbooks, and course descriptions for undergraduate argumentation and debate classes frequently incorporate themes, rules, and techniques that are drawn from competitive forensics events. Indeed, our results suggest that competition is an even more common classroom characteristic than critical thinking or skill-building. As interdisciplinary courses increasingly adopt in-class debate approaches that are either modeled after communications syllabi or utilize argumentation textbooks, these competitive practices are likely to become even further entrenched in university courses. In some sense, this is not cause for concern. Many aspects of competitive forensics can be usefully and beneficially translated into classroom environments. In general, students will benefit significantly from an expansion of classroom debating. However, competitive techniques should not be emulated wholesale or applied without careful consideration. Instead, communication researchers and instructors should evaluate whether the specific procedures and

methods that they employ during forensics competition are appropriate for use in classroom settings. In the next section, we offer an initial exploration of common areas of overlap and their respective pedagogical and educational implications.

Pedagogical Consequences

The vast majority of argumentation and debate classes are taught both skillfully and effectively by dedicated instructors who seek to facilitate student growth. However, we argue that the common inclusion of competitive practices—a habit that we identified in the previous section—is liable to yield suboptimal educational outcomes under certain circumstances. As such, pedagogy can be improved with a careful reevaluation of competitive methods and an analysis of their suitability for the classroom. In this section, we provide an initial assessment of the benefits and costs of incorporating several commonplace competitive practices in undergraduate courses. We focus on three general behaviors: emulation of competitive formats, incorporation of competitive theories, and training students in the use of competitive techniques.

Emulating Competitive Formats

In many of the syllabi and course descriptions that we reviewed, the in-class debate format was either closely modeled or identical to one of the predominant North American intercollegiate debate formats. In most circumstances, instructors modified the format slightly in order to better fit the context of a class. For example, in courses that were modeled after policy debate, the time limits for the event were shortened so that a 90-minute competitive format could be fit into a 50-minute class period. Similarly, some classes drew upon parliamentary debate formats in which the topic for discussion is revealed to competitors shortly before the initiation of the debate; however, instructors extended the length of preparation time—typically by a week or more—so as to provide students with an opportunity to prepare arguments in advance. However, despite these common methods of adapting competitive formats for use in classroom settings, a variety of rules of questionable pedagogical value frequently remain in place. In particular, we focused on four traditional components of competitive debating that merit reconsideration when designing a classroom event: the exclusion of the audience, the assumption that the outcome is zero-sum, the use of resolutions borrowed from competitive formats, and rules regarding the use of evidence.

First, although competitive events are often tailored for the classroom setting, instructors almost universally retain one aspect of competitive forensics: the exclusion of the audience from the debate. In a competitive setting, where a judge is asked to render a decision regarding the relative performance of two teams or individuals, minimizing audience interference is important. Coaches, teammates, and even members of the public could easily sway the result of the round if they lent support to either of the competitors by offering argumentative suggestions or asking

questions of the opponent. However, allowing the audience to ask questions in a classroom format can increase engagement between students and presenters. This may improve students' retention of information, consideration of the topics to which they were not personally assigned, and evaluation of the arguments being made. In-class debates should be designed to engage students in the audience as well as students who are presenting.

Second, instructors often retain an assumption that debate outcomes are zero-sum. At the end of classroom debates, the audience is often asked to vote for one side or the other. Similarly, students are asked to render binary decisions because instructors use example ballots from competitive formats that demand the judge choose a winner or loser. However, in the classroom setting the goal is not necessarily to evaluate the relative performance of each side but rather their absolute performance. Unlike a competitive setting in which teams are gradually eliminated until an overall tournament champion is declared; in the classroom, ties can be celebrated when they indicate that both teams prepared thoroughly, argued skillfully and presented successfully.

A third competitive habit retained in introductory argumentation and debate classes is the use of resolutions that were designed for competitive environments. Instructors commonly assign the annual policy resolution to their class or ask their students to debate the topics that were announced at recent NPDA tournaments. However, instructors should design classroom resolutions with a different purpose than the one that framers use when writing topics for tournaments. In a competitive environment, it is essential for topics to be fairly balanced. Because the outcome of a competitive debate is zero-sum and will affect the prospects of the two teams for the remainder of the tournament (or even competitive season), both teams must begin the debate with an equal chance of winning. By contrast, balance is not necessary for resolutions in classroom debates. Because grades are not determined based on the relative performance of the two teams but rather on their absolute performance, it is acceptable if one team is on the "wrong side of the issue." If they defend their position valiantly, that team's performance may even merit a higher grade than that of their more favorably sided opponent. In addition, competitive topics are often narrowly phrased because debaters are expected to already be familiar with a wide range of more general literature regarding an issue. For example, rather than debate the merits of alternative energy, a topic might require teams to debate public funding for a specific type of nuclear reactor. However, instructors should craft classroom debate topics to acquaint students with concepts that are central to the literature on important issues. Given the research constraints that are to be expected of noncompetitors, breadth, rather than depth, may deserve precedence in classes.

Finally, instructors often carry over competitive rules regarding the use of evidence into their classroom debates. Courses with formats modeled after policy debate often incorporate a strong expectation that students will utilize evidence when making their arguments and give little credence to arguments that lack quoted support. By contrast, classes that are modeled after the World Universities Debate Championship

(WUDC) and NPDA formats conventionally oppose the use of direct evidence in debates—a rule consistent with the competitive regulations. We recommend that instructors utilize a more balanced approach to quotation and evidentiary inclusion. Instructors should encourage students to provide empirical support for the arguments they develop, but such support could originate from a variety of sources. Likewise, instructors can strike a balance between the desire to help students acquire extemporaneous delivery skills and the need to allow the use of notes and prepared remarks in order to raise the quality of the debate.

Incorporation of Competitive Theories

The second primary area of overlap between competitive debate and classroom debate is the incorporation of theories that are traditionally applied in the context of competitive debate. Since the inception of intercollegiate debate—and escalating dramatically over the past several decades—a significant amount of scholarship and energy has been devoted toward understanding how debates themselves should proceed. Competitors and judges are well versed in a variety of theories regarding the expectations for competitors, the mechanisms that should be used to evaluate the debates, the types of arguments that should and should not be tolerated, the procedures through which topics should be interpreted, and a host of other factors. In general, such theories and principles are not applicable to the broader context of argumentation or communication but are limited in scope to the competitive debate framework. Nevertheless, they are commonly incorporated into the course curriculum of introductory argumentation and debate classes.

Within the courses we surveyed, a significant number included one or more lectures on highly specific theories that relate to the practice of competitive debating. The same phenomenon was apparent in the textbooks we reviewed. Several chapters were consistently dedicated to the theories and practices of competitive debate. In each of the books, suggestions were offered for affirmative and negative teams, advice was given on pretournament research preparation, and analyses were conducted of competitive debate cases and rounds. Although such information is useful for an aspiring competitor—or even a highly motivated student seeking to understand more deeply the nuances of competitive forensics—we argue that focusing on advanced debate theories can detract from an introductory class. It is far more important that students learn to develop arguments that are supported by reasoning and evidence, become adept at recognizing and correcting common logical fallacies and gain confidence as public speakers rather than they understand opposing perspectives on the nature of fiat or conflicting topicality standards. Likewise, students may be better served by analyzing contemporary political speeches or arguments that are made in the editorial pages of newspapers than reading transcripts from competitive debate rounds or watching demonstration debates between skilled competitors.

On a related note, lectures were often devoted to familiarizing students with the terminology that is commonly used within competitive settings. For example,

students may be taught to understand topicality, conditionality, critiques, uniqueness, internal link turns, and other concepts and jargon that are unlikely to apply directly in other circumstances. Even if familiarity with the terminology could be useful over the long run by allowing students to succinctly describe the logical relationships that they observe, the time tradeoff may not be favorable in the context of an introductory course. In the early stages of their training, students should learn to express their ideas and arguments to a broad audience rather than in esoteric terms. As such, we recommend that instructors teach courses using conversational terminology rather than competitive jargon.

We recognize that college-level courses should incorporate material that is specific to the class and discipline, and that engaging with novel information can help students expand their knowledge base and facilitate their development into clearer and more critical thinkers. However, class time is at a premium, particularly in courses that heavily emphasize experiential education such as debates and presentations. Given that there are inherent limits on the volume of material that instructors can include, we argue that educators should critically evaluate the degree to which they devote time toward content that may not have external utility and instead err in favor of developing students' broader capacity to research, to analyze, and to evaluate arguments.

Training in Competitive Techniques

The final manner in which instructors incorporate competitive debate habits into their classrooms is by training students to employ techniques that are primarily useful in competitive debate rather than helping students acquire general skills.

First, instructors often provide extra credit or even require students to spectate or compete at nearby tournaments. Instructors include this element to encourage students to participate in intercollegiate debating, to provide them with a model they should strive to emulate, and to excite students about the process of debating. However, the requirement can also backfire as a pedagogical tool. Spectators are often ill equipped to discern between the desirable and undesirable traits of the competitors they observe. Thus, students are equally likely to copy poor practices rather than to emulate good ones. This is particularly likely given that students are typically asked to participate in or witness novice-level debates, in which the competitors they observe are likely only marginally better trained or more experienced than the observers themselves. On the other hand, spectators who observe varsity-level competitors may believe that they have no capacity to reach a similar level of debate proficiency. If this assumption discourages them, it may prevent students from opting to pursue additional debate experience in the future.

Second, instructors often dedicate a class period to teaching students how to "flow" or take notes in a debate round. Although classroom debating is a useful mechanism for teaching students to become active listeners, hone their note-taking skills and quickly discern between essential and nonessential arguments, teaching

them to take notes in the same manner as intercollegiate competitors is unnecessary. When students take notes in the same manner as competitors, they may begin to subordinate broader communicative goals to the minutia of line-by-line analysis. Furthermore, the practice of flowing can lead students to overlook how diverse audiences will interpret their debates. Political candidates, for example, often lament situations in which they were "ahead on the issues" and yet nevertheless "lost" a televised debate in the eyes of the public. General audiences, unlikely competitive debate judges, do not often carefully and consistently weigh the relative merits of every point and counterpoint. Just as politicians must familiarize with broader persuasive tools and learn to help their audiences identify the primary issues of importance, so too must students learn to approach debates in a manner that will help them achieve communicative success in the future.

Finally, debate classes rarely incorporate requirements for written assignments and instead focus purely on presentations, exams, and debates themselves. Because debaters at competitions do not convert their speeches into essays, instructors often do not include a persuasive writing assignment in their classes. However, persuasive writing is one of the most likely applications in which students can apply the knowledge they gain about argumentative form, evidentiary analysis, and critical thinking. Thus, we argue that instructors should consider incorporating written assignments into their courses despite the fact that perfect parallels do not exist in competition.

Conclusion

We encourage instructors to use their own judgment in tailoring curriculum and to choose carefully when introducing habits and techniques from intercollegiate debate competitions into their classrooms. Although many competitive behaviors and procedures can be productively adapted for use during in-class debates, this article has identified a variety of potential drawbacks that merit further consideration. Even competitive practices that are widespread may require reevaluation or significant amendment before they are applied in undergraduate courses.

In general, argumentation and debate courses should focus on training students to develop, to understand, and to evaluate arguments. Such classes should also help students develop practical skills. Structuring an advantage, identifying stock issues, and learning to construct a valid topicality shell are not skills that will benefit students in the job market. By contrast, learning to identify useful research articles, to marshal information for persuasive purposes, to evaluate conflicting arguments, and to draw appropriate logical inferences are skills that students will likely draw upon for the remainder of their careers. Finally, the technical aspect of debate—the jargon, the steep learning curve, and the cutthroat nature of the competition—often dissuades newcomers from joining. Introductory classes—even those designed to eventually lead students toward competition—should focus on including people in the activity and creating an environment that facilitates student growth and achievement. Instructors should encourage students to read articles, to write response papers, to investigate new issues, and to engage in discussions within the classroom.

Finally, educators should strive to recognize that debate is a process as opposed to a codified curriculum and that critical thinking is a mindset rather than a method. To the extent that engaging in competitions and modeling competitive techniques can help students develop into creative thinkers, skilled presenters, and successful individuals, coaches should then continue to borrow from competitive practices. But to the extent that some competitive habits may detract from students' educational achievement, instructors should think twice before modeling their syllabi after competitive techniques. This article offered a variety of recommendations for further consideration and trial. Hopefully, future research will address whether these suggestions have proven successful in practice.

Note

[1] Davis and Bsumek (2011) offered the only suggestion that does not draw heavily from competitive debate. They designed an assignment in which students attend and evaluate a public debate on campus using the analytic tools they acquired in their argumentation course. Although this recommendation removes the threat that competitive practices will be inappropriately employed in the classroom, it also entirely removes classroom debating from the recommended curriculum. In general, we agree with Sellnow (2006) regarding the importance of experiential learning in speech and debate classes.

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