

[So the LDEP sent out tournament policies, and I got the feeling that they'd come to some agreement and send these out and cross their fingers. That doesn't sound like much to me. So I addressed the policies, but also added the message below. If these people don't by now think I'm totally whack, I'll eat their hats.]

I was hoping not to jump in alone on this, but what the hell. Time has passed, and in for a penny, and all that...

I'm attaching (no doubt predictable) commentary to the policies. Take that for what it's worth.

After that, and assuming that somehow we reach some great agreement that, yes, this is what we believe in strongly enough to do something about it, the question remains of what to do. And there's the rub.

We have some choices. First, we can go around our regions and enlist support from our colleagues so that we are presenting a unified stance. Most of us are already forces in our areas; getting agreement from our neighbors not in LDEP shouldn't be terribly hard. (Although I point out that there is a belief that this old fogie org is, essentially, anti the latest argumentation, rather than simply concerned about educational benefits as a whole. It is important to assure one and all that we are not about banning pomo & such, but simply sticking to the goals of LD as we generally perceive them.)

And then we can take that stance in the strongest way possible. Or we can send out emails and hope for the best.

And here's the deal. In my region, parent judges are progressively more addled by speed and weird arguments, and therefore harder to enlist. I'm progressively more addled by weird arguments, for that matter, especially when I believe those arguments are steering my students away from where I want them to go as students. We have a number of important local coaches who, probably just as addled, have publicly claimed that they've had about enough of LD and are moving into PF instead, and taking their teams with them. Last year at TOCs, which was the one time I got to check in with a lot of folks from around the LD universe, there was universal griping that we're going to hell in a handbasket, and that this is our last chance to do anything about it.

My point is, if all the above is true, then we must act accordingly. We can't just let people do what they want to do, we have to use all the authority we can muster to MAKE them do what we want them to do. Whatever that means, in real terms. Either we're saving LD or we're not. Either we're a bunch of old fogies who will have awards named after us Real Soon Now, or we're mainline coaches actively protecting the activity from disintegrating before our eyes. Either we take a stand and succeed or at least go down fighting, or else we wish we had. There is no way we can really change the activity without the strongest

possible unified voice, without all of us adhering to whatever standards we agree to, without all of us lobbying TOC and CFL and NFL to follow these guidelines.

If you folks are really out there, let's do it. Real Soon Now...

[What follows is the Tournament Policies, with my comments]

1. Think carefully about the educational goals of your tournament and implement policies that will achieve those goals.

Educationally excellent tournaments do not happen by accident. Even if you reject many of the suggestions below, you can preserve and enhance the educational value of your tournament by bringing your best professional judgment to bear on this subject. Revisit the educational rationale of your tournament's policies regularly.

Doesn't say anything to me. I do believe that our guidelines would need to be specific and objective.

2. Publicize your policies and their educational rationale in your invitation, booklet and opening assembly.

Explanation helps coaches, judges and students know what they should expect, and makes it more likely that all parties will work together on a common educational project. Advance notice also helps coaches make informed decisions about which tournaments suit their own objectives. Authoritatively announcing judging policies (e.g., take the ballot instructions seriously) at the opening assembly indicates that you are serious about your policies, which will promote greater consistency and ultimately more fairness and educational value.

I would simply say "Publicize your policies in your invitation, booklet and opening assembly." This is objective and clear and makes sense; I need to know what I'm agreeing to when I sign up for a tournament (or don't sign up).

3. Announce the resolution to be debated and make clear to coaches, judges and students that students are expected to debate that resolution.

Students have a right to know what topic they will be asked to debate and to know what is required to win—i.e., what burdens they have. Because there is no presumption in LD, each side must defend a truth-claim about the resolution; specifically, the negative must do more than criticize the affirmative case. The affirmative is responsible to show that the resolution is more likely true than false, and the negative, to show that it is more likely false than true. LDEP supports this burden scheme because it forces students to

explore the arguments on both sides of a question. Of course, if you wish for your tournament to observe a different burden scheme, you should make that clear, too.

I don't think there should be multiple ways of doing LD, or at least that there are multiple acceptable ways of doing LD. I think we need firm language here that such and such is what it is. This is the toughest part of the agenda; what I wrote is a little more specific, but not necessarily better. It needs to be melded, welded and nailed to the door.

4. Plan a realistic schedule with adequate time for meals and rest.

Debate is more fun and more academically enriching for everyone involved when it does not require the sacrifice of health. Build in a buffer in case things don't run smoothly as smoothly as you would hope.

This is nice advice for new (or loopy) TDs, but should be in a separate document on how to run a nice tournament (to which I'd be happy to contribute).

5. Do not admit unaffiliated entries, and require that each student be accompanied by an adult chaperone.

Liability concerns aside, unsupervised students are literally unaccountable to coaches, administrations, or other adult authority figures. When concerns arise about a student's practices or her influence on other competitors, it is essential that judges and coaches be able to discuss the situation with a responsible, educationally committed adult.

OK.

6. Make the purpose, range and interpretation of points clear to all students and judges.

The LDEP ballot (which comes either with or without point guidelines) offers one reasonable interpretation of points, but each tournament should ensure that whatever interpretation it endorses is clearly communicated and consistently implemented. Whatever scale you adopt, strongly discourage point inflation, which compromises the informational (and hence educational) value of this important tool.

Agree. And some samples should be given. There's the 20-30 LDEP approach, there's something I use at our beginners' league which I call the A/B/C/F approach (relating points to class grades). Again, very specific and clear is best.

7. Encourage educated adults, especially coaches, to fulfill judging obligations, and assign adult critics whenever possible, especially in elimination rounds.

Because they control competitive incentives, judges are the most powerful teachers in debate, and tournament directors ultimately decide who will wield this power. Students need to be held accountable to ordinary norms of clear thinking and speaking, and adult

critics are more likely, on average, to reinforce these norms than are recent high school graduates. Educated community members can strengthen a judging pool if properly oriented. Most tournaments will find it necessary and desirable to include former debaters in their pools, but LDEP believes younger critics need mentoring and should not dominate a pool or panel.

OK. Plus I think stronger stuff can be added directly to coaches to get out there and judge or get another job.

8. Distribute judging guidelines (the LDEP's or your own).

Make your expectations about educationally constructive judging practices explicit. This need not involve micromanaging judges or restricting the content of resolutional arguments; see LDEP's "Judging Recommendations" for a model.

OK.

9. Do not allow judge strikes, ranks, or preferences.

These practices foster narrow and exclusive styles and shield students from meaningful criticism; they may also contribute to conflicts of interest. Instead, encourage judges to discuss their preferences with students and coaches so that debaters can practice adaptation to a range of audiences. A very limited strike policy may not be damaging.

I strongly disagree about strikes, from my own experience as a judge, where if I were certain kids, I would have struck me in a second given half a chance, having nothing to do with education or orthodoxy but simply bad chemistry. Ban ranks and prefs, leave "a very limited number of strikes if desired."

10. Implement procedures to block conflicts of interest.

Many relationships to students besides those of coach, relative, or teammate may compromise a judge's impartiality. To ensure the fairest competition for all students without even the appearance of impropriety, all judges should be required to recuse themselves from judging any students to whom they have potentially biasing relationships. LDEP lists such relationships in our "Conflicts of Interest" document, which could form the basis of your policy in this area.

Yeah. I would trim that document a little, but after some thought, I can see the value in enumerating various situations. But a simple wording like this one is what you need in the guidelines.

11. Prohibit judges from reading cases before rendering decisions.

To maintain LD's distinct identity as a spoken contest, it is essential that students be forced to present their oral arguments with sufficient clarity to persuade their judges.

Allowing written arguments to count in decisions essentially turns debate into an essay contest. Selective review of disputed evidence (not entire cases) may be necessary, and is permissible.

OK.

12. Implement procedures to promote research integrity.

Make sure that all students, judges, and coaches know the requirements for ethical evidence use and how they should handle cases of suspected dishonesty. Proven intentional fabrication or misrepresentation of evidence warrants the harshest penalties, up to expulsion from the tournament. LDEP has published guidelines on research ethics which may help define standards in this area.

Is this necessary in the guidelines? My personal experience has included no ethical questions about research integrity. But maybe that's just me.

This leaves unaddressed the following from my messages:

4. Judges may set a strict speaking speed limit; failure to adhere to this limit will result in a mandated limit on speaker points assigned in the round.

If most of the complaints I hear are about speed, then it needs to be addressed or accepted. We can't ignore it.

6. Competitors are not allowed to request a printed copy of an opponent's case during a round.

This is in keeping with judges not reading, and I would add it in.

9. Coaches and teams are responsible for the training and development of their coaches. Signing up a judge for a tournament implicitly indicates that the team registering that judge has explained the rules of LD, discussed potential arguments, and generally prepared the judge for the experience.

One of my biggest pet peeves. Teams have to accept responsibility for their judges, especially their adults. Parents who have no idea what they are doing impressed into service at the last minute and adjudicating rounds with no idea of what LD is all about is no better for the activity than hotshot college kids with bizarre critical agendas.

12. Coaches will insist that their teammates adhere to these standards.

I can live without this one, myself.

15. Judges should clearly communicate a paradigm, or lack thereof, prior to the tournament.

This has advocates on both sides. We should address it; personally, I think it's a good idea if only to get those untrained judges up to snuff in my #9 above.

16. Coaches will train their students to be effective and fair judges of underclassmen.

This may be a whole other issue, if we're looking at the TD universe as our audience, but that's another question altogether.