

Connecticut Debate Association

Extemporaneous Cross-Examination Debate

<http://ctdebate.org>

The Connecticut Debate Association (CDA) is the premier high school debate league in Connecticut. We have sponsored a regular program of competition for over 20 years. Our debate format is cross-examination policy debate, but we change the resolution for each tournament and limit research like parliamentary debate.

Why Debate?

Debate helps students to develop speaking, listening and analytic skills. It places a premium on quick thought and precise expression, similar to skills needed for the CAPT and SAT reading and writing sections. Many noted public figures are former high school or college debaters: Al Gore, Senator and Presidential candidate; Lawrence Summers, former Chairman of the National Economic Council and former President of Harvard; Lawrence Tribe noted constitutional lawyer; Oprah Winfrey, noted television personality; and James Dean, the actor.

CDA provides a complete debate program close to home at low cost. CDA can also be an adjunct to competing in other leagues and using other styles of debate. Some CDA members participate in national high school tournaments sponsored by Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Columbia and elsewhere. Teams from the CDA have won the Yale Osterweis parliamentary debate tournament for the past six years. Many CDA members also participate in model congress, model UN and mock trial competitions.

CDA Membership

Organized under the auspices of the Connecticut Association of Schools, the CDA is open to any high school in the state, public or private. We have averaged 25 member schools over the past five years, with 39 members in 2010-11. Membership requires payment of dues—\$200 for the 2011-12 school year. Dues paying members may attend all regular tournaments with as many debaters as they care to bring at no additional cost, subject only to space limitations. Dues paying members may also vote at the Spring and Fall coaches meetings to elect CDA officers and set CDA policy.

CDA Tournaments

The CDA holds tournaments one Saturday each month from October through March, followed by State Finals championship tournament. All debaters are welcome at the six regular tournaments; only those who qualify during the regular season may enter State Finals. As many as 350 debaters participate each month. We normally run tournaments at two schools each date in order to have space for all. Each tournament has a varsity and novice division to accommodate different levels of skill and experience.

Schools register for tournaments by email. The tournament day opens with check-in from 8-9AM. At 9AM the debaters receive the resolution to be debated—the resolution changes for each tournament—and a packet of research material. They have an hour to prepare before the first round. Each two person team will debate both the affirmative and negative side of the issue over the course of three rounds. During the preparation hour, we hold a workshop for new judges. There are two rounds of debate before lunch, at 10AM and 11:30AM. Lunch is at 1PM and the third round begins by 2PM. The top two varsity teams compete in a public final round at 3:30PM.

The awards ceremony follows the final round at 5PM, and we break at 5:30PM. We have been successful at keeping very close to this schedule and ending on time.

Extemporaneous Debate

The CDA extemporaneous debate format is a modified form of cross-examination policy debate practiced at the high school and college level. Each team consists of two debaters, a first and second speaker. Each debater has a six minute constructive speech after which they are cross-examined for three minutes by their opponents. The speeches alternate between the Affirmative and Negative. Each debater also has a four minute rebuttal speech. A single judge decides the result of each preliminary round, and a panel of five judges decides the final round.

The resolution to be debated changes for each tournament and is not announced until the morning of the tournament. The debaters receive a packet of six to twelve pages of material with the resolution to help them understand the topic and develop cases and arguments. Debaters may also bring a dictionary, an almanac and a copy of the US Constitution. During the one hour preparation period, debaters may work as two-person teams or in larger groups.

Limits on research materials and preparation time favor students who are well-read in current events and public policy. The resolution topic is usually an issue current in the news. For example, at State Finals in 2011 we debated collective bargaining by public sector labor unions, prompted by legislation in Wisconsin and other states. The CDA website has 15 years of past resolutions and 5 years of evidence packets.

Starting a Debate Program

A debate program requires a moderator or coach to help organize the team. The coach will need to recruit and to train debaters, and to enlist adult volunteers to serve as judges. Depending on the school's policy, there may be transportation expenses to and from the tournaments in addition to CDA dues.

CDA coaches vary in experience from none to some to lots. A few are former debaters. Most are social studies or English teachers. Some teach an elective class in public speaking or a related subject that helps them build their team. Some also coach related activities such as model congress, model UN or mock trial. Experience in any of these areas tends to benefit both coaches and students.

Lack of debate experience is not a barrier to coaching. Debaters do much of their learning from each other in competition, so your most important job is getting them to the tournaments. Stronger teams tend benefit the entire league. The CDA also has a variety of material prepared over the years to help train new debaters. New coaches in need of help will find many current CDA coaches willing to provide advice or mentoring.

CDA Volunteers

The CDA depends on volunteers among the member schools for its success. The Board consists of an Executive Director, an Assistant Director and at least five at large members. These and other coaches help run the tournaments. We rely on member schools to host our tournaments. This provides an opportunity to show off your facility and repay the generosity of others.

Contact CDA

For more information, visit the CDA web site at <http://ctdebate.org>. For inquires, send an email to everett.rutan@moodys.com or ejrutan3@acm.org.