

# PRAGMATIC ORIENTATION IN LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATE: ON THE NEED FOR PERSUASION WITH A PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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When Lincoln-Douglas debate debuted as a national high school forensic event in 1979, it was created with the intention that it have a unique style, format, and purpose. While it has certainly succeeded as a non-policy<sup>1</sup> debate event, nearly twenty years later, the authors raise the issue of the appropriateness of pragmatic orientation in Lincoln-Douglas debate.

Because of variations in how Lincoln-Douglas debate is coached, practiced, and judged throughout the country, it remains one of the most challenging events in which to achieve success nationally. In addition, since it is difficult to identify the realm of a given region based on any concrete geographic-based data, preparation for a particular style of judging becomes difficult. Furthermore, the non-disclosure of judging philosophies, whether written or verbal, highlights the challenge in adapting to local customs and styles.

Several members of the debate community have commented on this phenomenon and while some (including one of the co-authors) have called for a more “unified” approach towards Lincoln-Douglas debate,<sup>2</sup> this essay will focus on a different approach—one which stresses a pragmatic orientation; one which the authors hope will be easier to adopt by the L/D debate community in the short term as more substantive improvements develop.

The essay begins with several observations regarding current efforts to prepare our students for the wide variety of judging styles, identifies two different judge types, introduces the concept of pragmatic case orientation, and argues that not only does this approach have universal appeal, but it is a more effective educational vehicle for teaching real-world persuasive skills.

## THE SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND

### Is There a “Common Denominator” For Our Students?

Many coaches who teach at summer L/D debate institutes attempt to identify geographic regions or districts where cer-

tain customs are followed. Such advice is often presented during lectures or seminars called “judging adaptation” or “how to win in front of different types of judges.” While such information is somewhat helpful for general preparation, there is a consensus among coaches and tournament directors that the national judging variance remains so wide even in the late 1990s that dependence on such data will not appreciably increase a debater’s chances of success at tournaments. An example illustrates this point best: Even if such advice was 70% accurate, it still would not guarantee a student will break at some of the more competitive seven preliminary round invitational tournaments held around the country.

The natural question which follows this observation is: then what *actually* classifies a “district” if geographic borders are such unreliable defining concepts? It is necessary to turn to the tenth edition of Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, which defines a “district” as “an area, region, or section with a distinguishing character.” It is through this definition that the true essence of a district on the Lincoln-Douglas debate circuit emerges. Note that physical location plays no part at all in Webster’s interpretation of this word, but rather the emphasis is places of the *common characteristics* of that area which make it unique and separate from all others.

The authors argue that rather than focusing on geographical regions, the Lincoln-Douglas debate community should look at common denominators; that is, identification of characteristics marked by a unique style and philosophy of Lincoln-Douglas debate. Despite many differences, there are a number of aspects of Lincoln-Douglas debate which have nearly universal acceptance. Everyone debates alone, follows the same pattern of speech times, and is expected to have a prepared case for both sides of the resolution, to name just a few of the most obvious ones. Additionally, one of the most generally accepted traits of Lincoln-Douglas debate is the comparatively slower rate of delivery, not sur-

prising since Lincoln-Douglas debate was originally created in response to the perceived “excesses” of policy debate.

### *Are There Common Meanings?*

Despite these common characteristics, even basic argumentative structures can be used in different manners from region to region. For example, though everyone is expected to write a case, the basic terminology which is used in that case may differ. While teaching at summer institutes the authors noted that debate vocabulary varied significantly from person to person, depending on the region in which the student debated. For example, students from the West Coast labeled each new argument in their case as an “observation,” while the East Coast or Midwestern debaters were more likely to use the terms “contention” or “line of analysis” for the same purpose. Even more specifically, there are debaters from several successful programs competing successfully on the national circuit who do not specify a value premise or criterion in their case, but rather proceed straight into their specific areas or argumentation, thus clashing with those schools who focus their entire cases around the concept of a core value.

This all ties back into the definition of a district as an “area or section with a distinguishing character,” as it is these inconsistencies in debate style which help to define a “district” in debate. Things as basic as the introductory word to a new argument can, thus categorize debaters as belonging to certain regions of the country. As the authors observed from their institute experiences, the West Coast debaters who subscribed to the terminology that dominates their region were immediately singled out as “West Coast debaters.” Similarly, many New England debaters share a more rapid pace of speaking than other places on the East Coast and are labeled as such. In California, the concept of a narrative case<sup>3</sup> is a commonplace idea, while an East Coast debater may have never encountered this method of case construction be-

fore. It is through these identifying factors that the most applicable identification of a district is created, and it is the district itself which defines and redefines these characteristics.

### **STRATIFICATION EFFECT: THE EMERGENCE OF NATIONAL AND LOCAL COMPETITIVE CIRCUITS**

If Lincoln-Douglas debate is a national event with one set of guidelines, it is only natural to wonder how these differences occurred in the first place. The authors see two primary reasons for this phenomena.

*First*, when L/D debate was introduced in 1979, there were twelve general guidelines. Several of them, however, provided limited guidance, if any, due to the brevity and/or generality of the statement. For example, “speak clearly” while obvious to some, meant to others what was acceptable to the judge; which in the late ‘70s and early ‘80s was most likely a policy debate judge accustomed to rapid delivery styles. In addition, many debate leagues adopted their own supplemental rules which became established customs as the years passed.

*Second*, Lincoln-Douglas debate has yet to benefit from cross-fertilization of ideas and exposure to different styles, as we have seen in policy debate. Part of this might be attributable to the lack of tradition due to the fact that this event is still in its adolescence. For the remainder, this is where the idea of debate circuits comes into play.

Put simply, competition occurs on two basic levels: local leagues and national invitationals. It is the idea of local competition which fosters a greater understanding of the creation of a district. Nearly all debate teams spend the majority of their time at local competitions, simply because of funding issues and time constraints; it would be nearly impossible for many teams to pay for plane tickets, registration fees, and hotel rooms at national tournaments, plus miss school days for travel and debate rounds, for more than a few days per year, if that. Many other teams are restricted from traveling outside their district or state; the reasons for which vary from liability concerns on the part of litigation-leery school boards to anti-competition regulations from state activities associations.

The bottom line is that although some 20,000 high school students nationwide participate in L/D debate each year, Lincoln-

Douglas debate is practiced very differently in different areas of the country and from competition to competition.

### **AN IMPORTANT CAVEAT**

However, the authors’ opinions in the essay necessarily comes with a warning label: *Do not pre-judge debaters based on the assumed characteristics of their district!!* Though it is generally accepted that different districts are defined by certain characteristics and, consequently, having knowledge of those characteristics can help you to understand the paradigms of your opponents or judges, it is dangerous to assume that all debaters from a given region can be lumped into a certain category. Stereotyping regions denies the fact that individual debaters possess their own talents and skills which combine with the style of their coach, their teammates, and the people in their district to make up their unique style of Lincoln-Douglas debate. Trends will always exist given the philosophy and area of emphasis in any given district, but that district is not the *only* determining factor which constitutes a debater’s technique. The existence of individual talent must not be forgotten in the midst of district analysis, though understanding a debater’s district may be important in understanding which methods a debater can use effectively.

### **JUDGING: THE KEY DETERMINANT**

It should come as no surprise to anyone when the authors point out that judging is the key determinant of any debate round; it is inevitably the feelings of the judge which decide the final outcome. The judge is the one who the debater must appeal to and impress with her or his knowledge. For this reason the judge’s name is one of the first things that any Lincoln-Douglas debater looks for when the posting for the next round is distributed. All debaters know that the judge’s perception of them is pivotal and, thus, desire to have judges who will appreciate their individual style and argumentation.

Unfortunately, all debaters can also *claim* to experience the total injustice of having at least one “clueless” judge in their career who had absolutely no idea how to evaluate the round because, if they did, “they wouldn’t have voted against me,” right?! Now, let’s be completely honest: how many times did that really happen and how many times were we just protecting our debate egos?! Seriously, however, this per-

ception of injustice stems primarily from the debater’s desire to win, but also from the differing perspectives that the debater and the judge possess. The judge, as a uniquely objective force in the round, *should* see things in an unbiased manner, while each debater is obviously more focused on the intricacies of his or her performance. However, in the end it is the judge’s discretion which decides the fate of both competitors. Thus, it is necessary to evaluate the differing levels of expertise which exist among judges.

### **Experienced vs. Non-Experienced Judges**

When debating on any given circuit, whether it be national or local, there are two primary types of judges which debaters inevitably encounter: the “circuit judge” and the “non-circuit judge.” These two types of judges often have vast differences in experience, expectations, and understanding of the Lincoln-Douglas debate event.

The “circuit judge,” defined as a person who has a considerable amount of knowledge of the structure and function of debate, has been traditionally the more “desirable” option. Generally, one labels former debaters, coaches, frequent judges who are *trained* in the intricacies of judging, or any combination thereof as a “circuit judge” because they are well-acquainted with Lincoln-Douglas debate and the inner workings of the debate community. They understand the terminology which is used by debaters, what style to expect, and are able to evaluate individual arguments based on their firsthand knowledge of what is expected of a good debater. Their training comes from extensive involvement in the activity, which consequently provides them with the ability to make a decision in a round based on the expectations of the Lincoln-Douglas community. In short, the “circuit judge” possesses the ability to view and understand a Lincoln-Douglas round on the same level as the debaters.

The second judge type can be identified generically as the “non-circuit judge” or the “lay judge.” The “lay judge” is someone who is unfamiliar to the specific structure, language, and intricacies of Lincoln-Douglas debate. Judges who fit under this category are generally those which a coach has brought along to a tournament in order to meet judge requirements once the pool of experienced judges that they normally depend on has been exhausted. Such judges have little background in debate and, therefore, are generally less concerned

whether or not debaters labeled their first area of analysis a contention or an observation; the term “value premise” has little meaning to them; and they generally do not appreciate a more rapid delivery speed, though these are all things which a “circuit judge” might find appealing.<sup>4</sup> What matters to the “non-circuit judge” is the strength of your actual arguments and the persuasiveness of your style.

### ***Should There Be a Preference? The Answer May Surprise You***

The question arises then as to which judge is more desirable. Any debater who is reading this right now would doubt the authors’ sanity for even suggesting that this is a difficult question. Can it be because all debaters naturally desire to debate in front of someone who knows what they are doing? Seems fairly logical, doesn’t it? Throwing a lay judge into a debate round can be somewhat like allowing someone who is completely unacquainted with basketball referee an NBA game; they have absolutely no concept of the accepted standards by which to judge the activity. Thus, as most debaters have told the authors over the years, the inherent advantage of having the “circuit judge” is that they understand the rules of the game and can make an educated decision about the outcome of the round. In addition, since there is a certain element of trust instilled in the “circuit judge,” it is easier to accept a loss from them because debaters *know* that these judges are not clueless about the activity. It is, for instance, difficult to argue with a decision if a former national champion is the judge.

Let us play devil’s advocate for a moment and examine the possible benefits of the lay judge. Often the benefits of having an inexperienced judge are overlooked because of their inherent lack of specific knowledge about Lincoln-Douglas debate. It can actually be argued, however, that it is this same inexperience in the workings of debate which can serve to make the lay judge the *best* judge of a debater’s persuasiveness. To illustrate this point, reconsider the example of an inexperienced referee who is thrown into the middle of the professional basketball game. There are a few inherent flaws in this example which must be pointed out here. The first is that without knowledge of the particulars of basketball, a referee is essentially useless because it is their job to know and enforce the *set* rules of the game. The key here is that the rules of basketball, as with any sporting event, are con-

sistent from state to state or region to region. No matter what part of the country the team is from, they learn the same rules and follow the exact same procedure. For example, the Chicago Bulls do not have to adapt to the rules of the “Boston basketball district” when they play the Celtics because they both play by the same rules.

Unfortunately in our activity, the variance between L/D debate regions does often mean different standards. However, the subject matter of debate is often something which appeals to any audience. It is possible for any person to formulate an opinion on a resolution such as, “Resolved: That an oppressive government is more desirable than no government.” Though this resolution is worded in “debate terminology,” the concepts are such that any rational person would be able to weigh its consequences through exercising their own knowledge and personal experience. This universal application of debate resolutions makes it a much more *immediately* accessible activity to most of the general public than any sporting event.

### ***BUT IT’S ABOUT THE REAL WORLD, ISN’T IT?***

It is this real world applicability which places the lay judge in a uniquely helpful role to those debaters who are willing to accept the opinions and decisions of a less-experienced judge. The authors argue that it is *because* of their inexperience that “non-circuit judges” can be of tremendous help to debaters in becoming more effective arguers. The “non-circuit judge” doesn’t care if the affirmative neglected to answer your fifth response to the second subpoint under contention three; quite honestly, they may not even know that there was a second subpoint to begin with. This type of judge may not know what a value premise is and, therefore, may choose not to place any weight on the fact that it is dropped in the round. What matters to them is *analysis and persuasion*. As a debater you always need to prove to that judge that you understand the topic at hand, not that you can use a bunch of esoteric words that have little significance to the argument itself. It is because lay judges will be looking primarily for convincing arguments that they are often good judges of your ability. Often times debaters get caught up in the smaller issues; did he support his criteria in his second contention? How does she define “liberty” in the context of this resolution? What is the tag for his third subpoint under the

first contention? Though these details are definitely important in the round, they are not the *most* important thing. What matters the most is the quality of your analysis. “Non-circuit judges,” whether they are trained or not, will be looking for that ways in which your arguments are appealing or unappealing in relation to those of your opponent. Therefore, they can provide the most accurate insight into the persuasiveness of your arguments because their minds are not too caught up in the minute technicalities of the round.

For example, The Manchester High School debate team in Massachusetts supports this idea through their annual “citizen judge tournament,” held once a year. Every judge in the policy division of the competition is either a parent, relative, friend, neighbor, or other such acquaintance of a Manchester debater who need to fulfill only one criteria: that they have little or no experience with debate. They are given a crash course in flowing and ballot-writing and sent off to judge their rounds. Why would anyone even consider attending a tournament like this? For many debaters, the concept of a tournament with absolutely no “circuit judges” is worse than their worst nightmare. However, the main purpose of this tournament is to prepare debaters for competition at NFL nationals, where many of the judges are citizens of the city where the tournament is held. In order to impress these judges, each debater must be as clear and persuasive as possible *without* relying on the safety net of debate terminology or technicalities of argumentation.

What debaters learn from this experience is the ability to see the raw argument when it is stripped of the overly formal structure we emphasize in debate.<sup>5</sup> Seeing an argument in its pure form without labeling it as a “contention” or a “value” can help the debater to see and understand the importance of the position itself. In nearly every occupation and social situation, the structure and style of formal argument is neither appropriate nor desirable. Being an effective persuasive communicator in front of the lay audience is crucial; no matter whether an attorney, educator, physician, salesperson, or domestic engineer. Training in front of lay judges provides excellent practice for such persuasive methods effective in the real-world.<sup>6</sup>

This is not *at all* meant to discredit the benefits of having an expert judge. With a “circuit judge” you know that they will understand you and make the best possible

choice, where the decision of non-circuit judges can seem somewhat arbitrary or biased at times because of their inexperience. This is why most tournament directors prefer to have elimination rounds judged by "circuit judges" to try to insure that such a crucial round is being decided consistently. Even if a lay judge must be inserted into an important round because of judge shortages, tournament directors still attempt to make sure that the "circuit judges" outnumber the "non-circuit judges."

It is, however, important to consider the value that inexperienced judges bring to the educational experience instead of dismissing them as completely unknowing or useless.<sup>7</sup>

### **IS THERE A SOLUTION WITH BROAD-BASED APPEAL?**

Though these problems seem insurmountable, the authors propose a pragmatic case orientation as a potential solution to some of the regional and local judging inconsistencies which presently exist. Every good debater, in the pursuit of success, goes through the process of writing and rewriting cases and blocked arguments in search of "the perfect position" which will be both strongly centered on the resolutorial conflict and acceptable to all people in all districts. Obviously, differences between districts, as well as judging discrepancies, tend to complicate the issues in a debate round. It is, therefore, difficult to come up with a strategy that appeals to all types of judges and is acceptable in all regions of the country simply because of the inherent individuality of judges and districts. Looking even more specifically, each judge possesses a unique paradigm and, thus, expects different things from any other judge. These factors make it seem as though the variety, openness, and diversity which is cherished in debate argumentation is useless in ensuring *success* in the activity, as it is virtually impossible to know what a given judge from a given area may be looking for. Though this panacea for the inconsistencies of Lincoln-Douglas debate only exists as an ideal, we propose the concept of the pragmatic case as one step towards the goal of universal applicability.

### **INTRODUCING THE PRAGMATIC CASE APPROACH**

What is a pragmatic case? The main component of a pragmatic case is that it *always* considers the real world effects of the resolutorial action. Therefore, it must be

made clear that pragmatism does not require just using examples, but rather involves analysis of such examples in order to come to holistic and logical conclusions.<sup>8</sup> The starting point for an exploration into the function and creation of a pragmatic case must begin with a definition of pragmatic. As defined from Webster's, once again, pragmatic is an adjective, describing something which is "relating to matters of fact or practical affairs often to the exclusion of intellectual or artistic matters: *practical as opposed to idealistic.*" This definition indicates that a pragmatic case is one in which the *practical* applications of an idea supersede its *idealistic* basis. In this sense, the Webster's definition perfectly describes the goal of a pragmatic case: to take the philosophical basis for Lincoln-Douglas argumentation and ground it in reality. It requires examining the resolution *first* from a philosophical standpoint, and *then* considering other real world applications of the resolution. These applications can be extensions of accepted philosophy, as well as other logical considerations which apply to the resolution. In either case, the goal is to have a case which encompasses many different practical, real world ideas. You will notice, however, that this process does not destroy the traditional philosophic basis of Lincoln-Douglas debate. Knowledge of philosophy is a definite asset to case-writing and is essential to the development of a successful Lincoln-Douglas debater. Too many debaters, however, wrongly believe that mentioning and describing the ideas of a given philosopher is enough to make a strong argument. Therefore, the entire purpose of pragmatic case-writing is to allow debaters to escape reliance on mere explanation and begin to *apply* the essential philosophies which are relevant to a values-oriented discussion. Pragmatism questions the strength of merely using philosophically-based premises and adds another dimension to the application of philosophical constructs.

Perhaps an example would make the use of pragmatism more clear. A few years ago, the Lincoln-Douglas debate community focused on the resolution "Resolved: that an oppressive government is better than no government." This resolution, on face, is a philosophical conflict between the existence of an unjust social order and the unpredictability of human nature. Therefore, many affirmatives upheld social contract theory, as well as Hobbes' belief in the selfishness of man. These arguments are

definitely strong and certainly apply, but why? In order to apply these philosophies to reality, it is the affirmative's job to examine their place in the functions of a government. Therefore, after a brief explanation of Hobbes, it is desirable that the affirmative give analysis and examples to illustrate the many reasons why people living in modern times require some form of government control. Talking about materialism and greed in modern society would strengthen this, as well as references to the Los Angeles riots or the Oklahoma City bombing. This places Hobbes' theories in the present and makes the argument itself more applicable to the resolution. The negative on this resolution faced a similar task in weighing the realistic harms of a destructive government with philosophies that support the benevolence of human nature. For example, many negatives decided to compare the concentrated, systematic power of an unjust government with the random acts of individuals, saying that it would be easier to deal with one-on-one unpredictable actions than those of a government towards its virtually helpless people. This argument required no philosophical background, just a close analytical look at the actions of a government. Therefore, a pragmatic look at the situation often reveals unique, logical arguments which are stronger and more believable than pure philosophy.

### **PRAGMATISM IS NOT POLICY ARGUMENTATION**

Pragmatic argumentation in Lincoln-Douglas debate, however, merely makes *observations* based on currently existing policies or social conditions upon which to base values-oriented arguments and to provide a realistic contextual framework for the judge. It is true that the use of practical, reality-based arguments sounds like a very policy-oriented idea at first glance. However, application of pragmatism in Lincoln-Douglas debate is inherently different from policy argumentation. In policy debate, the focus is placed on the validity of solving the resolutorial proposal through a *specific plan*. The necessity of that plan, therefore, becomes the crux of the round, making it is necessary to argue status quo issues.

To return to the oppressive government example, the reality-based arguments that we have highlighted do not require a plan; they are merely observations taken from resolutorial examples. The argument that oppressive governments are more dangerous because they possess more concentrated power that a single individual does

not require a plan in order to be entered into the round. It merely asks the judge to examine the danger of a ruling power, like the Nazi regime, which possesses a dangerous amount of control. Based on historic examples and common sense, it is a logical conclusion that the people of Germany stood no chance against Hitler's seemingly indestructible power. This argument is pragmatic because it deals with the practical application of ideas, yet it does not at all deal with a specific method for undermining the power of despots. **Thus, arguments that deal with status quo issues should not be restricted to policy debate because they have valuable applications to L/D philosophy. Rather, introducing arguments that are based on empirical situations provides a refreshing and real-world application of philosophical concepts, adding a new and entirely relevant realm to the debate round.** Therefore, pragmatic argumentation, though it appears to mimic a policy style, is extremely relevant to value debate.

Debaters must be warned not to write cases which rely solely on examples. Examples are meant to be used solely as illustrations to arguments which emphasize the point being made. Examples, therefore, should not be substituted for the actual argumentation. By basing an argument on one example, the debater is only proving the resolution in one particular instance. If an inductive claim is made from that example, the debater commits the fallacy of hasty generalization.<sup>9</sup> Because resolutions focus on universal concepts, proving one example does not mean that the whole resolution is true. In essence, an opponent could merely provide a counter-example which disproves the original example and case would fall. Examples may be used as additional evidence to prove a point, but do not constitute an argument in and of themselves.

### **ADVANTAGES TO THE PRAGMATIC APPROACH**

#### ***Enhanced application to the real world***

There are several advantages to the use of pragmatic case-writing skills. The first is that it strengthens debate argumentation. If you are able to see a resolution from many different perspectives and create believable, realistic scenarios that are induced by resolutorial actions, then your case possesses a broader base of analysis. One of the keys to writing a good case in Lincoln-Douglas debate is the use of a variety of arguments. Cases which are based on one main concept or have only one line

of analysis are extremely vulnerable. If your opponent defeats that main underlying point, your entire case falls. Therefore, a case which relies solely on Rawls' analysis or Rousseau's social contract theory risks immediate defeat. Even the brilliant ideas of "great thinkers" possess loopholes, and there are quite a few debaters who are well-versed in locating and exploiting such imperfections.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, mixing philosophy with reality eliminates some of that vulnerability. Rather, if you have one contention which explains the modern-day applications of Rawls' theory and then another which makes a separate, yet realistic and logical argument about the resolution itself, then your case is arguing on two unique, convincing planes. This forces your opponent to cover both arguments and leaves you with more options, should they make strong refutations against one of those points. Thus, your cases will possess more depth and analysis by using pragmatic arguments.

Consequently, pragmatic arguments add depth to the round itself. Many debaters are coached in "how to beat Locke" and "the problems with Kant." Institutes dedicate entire lectures to those topics and debaters are drilled in coaching sessions on the benefits and downfalls of using each philosopher, as well as the common misconceptions which exist about their particular philosophy. Debate rounds which merely regurgitate these lessons can be dry and boring to judge and to debate. However, with each new resolution, fresh possibilities emerge for reality-based argumentation. These arguments do not replace the necessary philosophical basis, but merely steer the debate into new, interesting territory and open up the possibilities for argumentation. This change of pace makes the round enjoyable and unique.

#### ***Enhanced comprehension of the arguments***

Furthermore, arguments that are grounded in real world issues are more universally understood because most debaters and judges are exposed to their effects. We have established the ambiguity of national districts and, more importantly, the unique debate styles that are attached to each. Despite the fact that some districts focus more on philosophy or rely on a narrative form of explanation, pragmatism is universally appealing because it *applies to all people*. For example, if the resolution at hand deals with euthanasia, one possible route would be to focus your case on philosophical explanations of indestructible na-

ture of life. Your case for euthanasia would, thus, rely on idealistic perceptions of inalienable human rights and freedom. These ideas are definitely useful and necessary to a affirmation of the necessity of mercy killing. However, another approach would be to look at the quality of life of patients who rely on machines to stay alive, or to examine the illegal and unsafe actions that desperate people might resort to if euthanasia were banned. This argument adds a whole new level to the argumentation and encourages debaters to think logically. These ideas can be grasped by anyone because of their applicability to real life. It is because of this universality that the pragmatic case transcends the boundaries of regional differences. As we previously noted, different regions of the country focus on different aspects of L/D debate. The differing uses and over-uses of philosophers can be alleviated by making such practical observations, simply because they are based on common sense. The buy-in required of the judge is more difficult when an unfamiliar philosopher is presented than with a real-world situation. Thus, some of the regional differences and clarity issues in debate rounds can be avoided by focusing on pragmatism.

### ***Broader Appeal of Pragmatic Argumentation***

Pragmatic argumentation also appeals to a wide-array of judges. We have established that judges can be grouped into "circuit judges" and "non-circuit judges." Both segments of the judging pool appreciate this type of argumentation, though perhaps for different reasons. First, the "circuit judge" most likely has a good grasp on the philosophers used in L/D debate. Their extensive experience in the activity has provided them with an in depth understanding of the common arguments that Lincoln-Douglas debaters tend to use. They, therefore, know when these concepts are being used properly and how they can be helpful. A debater who shows a deep understanding of such philosophical ideas by accurately applying them to the realistic situation at hand will impress a "circuit judge" immediately. Once the name of a philosopher is dropped by either debater, the "circuit judge" begins looking for clear, accurate explanations of their particular ideas, as well as their proper application to the round. Therefore, in focusing on the real

world applications of historic philosophies, the debater proves to the “circuit judge” that they are an expert on the resolution. Also, because they are so familiar with the common arguments used in Lincoln-Douglas debate, any experienced judge will appreciate a fresh look at the potential ground for the resolution. Pragmatic arguments, because they differ with each resolution, provide this refreshing alternative to the repetition of the same philosophical jargon that most debaters rely on. This makes the round a much more enjoyable experience for the judge and enhances the debater’s chance of picking up their ballot.

Secondly, the “non-circuit judge,” will appreciate the straightforwardness of practical argumentation. Because of their inherent lack of experience, may not understand the applicability of philosophy unless it is clearly explained to them. Many debaters, because they have been conditioned to use the ideas of certain philosophers, explain them in terms which are specific to debate. Esoteric, incomplete explanations will either confuse or anger a judge who has little experiences with particular terminology. When the judge is frustrated, the debater’s chances of winning diminish. Thus, relating philosophical concepts to modern issues makes your argument more accessible to them. Many tournaments use parents or local citizens who have never seen a debate round before to judge L/D rounds. Such judges may not be totally familiar with Locke or Hobbes. However, if you make these ideas seem more real to them, they will understand and believe what you are saying. Arguments that are based on what your judges read in the newspaper or books, or experience in their own daily affairs make your arguments easier to grasp and more appealing as voting issues. Therefore, both the “circuit” and “non-circuit” judge are easily persuaded by pragmatism.

### **Enhanced Educational Benefits**

Finally, because case content and clarity are enhanced with pragmatic case writing, so is the educational value of debate. First, the debater who writes the pragmatic case is forced to look beyond the mere explanation of philosophy and see the real world effects of the resolution. In this sense, case-writing becomes an educational process which both improves the debater’s knowledge of current and historical events, as well as refining his or her thinking process. These skills not only help in case-writing and refutation, but also help the de-

bater as a student to learn more about the working of society. Additionally, once he or she has a better grasp of the resolution from a pragmatic standpoint, his or her individual knowledge is passed on to their judge and opponent. Both will benefit from the unique position of the pragmatic case and the round becomes more pleasurable. It is definitely true that one of the main assets of debate is its educational value. Therefore, in presenting a unique, well-thought, logical set of arguments, the debater fulfills the learning aspect of Lincoln-Douglas debate for both himself, as well as his or her judge and opponent.

### **SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR SUCCESS**

After illustrating the concept and benefits of pragmatic case-writing, the authors provide the following brief suggestions for effectively developing and executing the pragmatic case approach:

(1) **Research** is essential to the development of any pragmatic case. Primarily, L/D requires a base knowledge of philosophy, which involves an extensive amount of study. However, in order to make the best use of pragmatic arguments, knowledge of both current and historical events is a necessity. In order to provide accurate analysis of modern society or empirical examples from previous eras in history, it is essential to understand as much about the different belief systems and mindsets which exist in today’s society. Research, as well as an on-going interest in current happenings, is an incredibly valuable resource which can provide a debater with many, many new ideas for case-writing. Research also ensures a more complete understanding of the examples which are applicable. It is a necessity to have your facts straight, both for fairness purposes and to ensure your understanding of your own arguments.

### (2) **The Magic Word is: WHY?**

Any case, whether or not it is based on pragmatism, should always be as solid as possible. Therefore, after every point that you make in your case, ask yourself, **“WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT? HOW DOES THIS RELATE?”** When writing pragmatic arguments, however, you want to make sure that you are exceptionally clear about their applicability to the round. Because status quo argumentation can come across as policy-based, it is the debater’s responsibility to ensure that their argument is clear and well-explained. Every argument should be **explained** well by the debater, **impacted** so that

it has significance in the round, and, finally, **weighed** against the opposing arguments. Following these three steps creates a solid case.

(3) **Revise and Refine.** It is essential that the concepts within the case are revised and refined to be as clear and persuasive as possible. Remember, what looks good on paper might very well sound awkward and overly formal when delivered verbally, so changes in sentence structure might be necessary. *There is no such thing as a final draft of a debate case!* With each tournament, new arguments should be added or old ones taken out, based on their success in rounds. Also, unclear phrases can always be reworded or eliminated. This ensures that your case is in optimal form. Your coach and fellow teammates can give you valuable feedback about the strength of your arguments. Additionally, having a non-debater read and critique your case can be enlightening. They may point out mistakes or unclear points that debaters would miss. Because they are extremely familiar with the arguments, judges, coaches, and debaters often miss key flaws or inconsistencies in wording or explanation, as they subconsciously apply their own knowledge to what you are saying. However, someone outside of the activity can give you the “non-circuit judge” perspective on inconsistencies which those within the debate community might miss.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Pragmatically-oriented analysis can be a refreshing, educational solution to the differing styles and ability levels within the Lincoln-Douglas debate community. It requires that the debater think beyond the common arguments that seem to apply to most resolutions, and discover new and unique ideas. Too often, debaters get swept up in using the arguments and analysis that are expected to come up on a given topic. The emphasis on just philosophy restricts our vision to esoteric and inapplicable ideas. As we prepare our students for the “real world,” let us focus on not only challenging our students with classical theory, but teach them how to apply those ideas and make them real to the other 99.9% of the population. Pragmatism breaks the mold of the “cookie-cutter” Lincoln-Douglas case and introduces challenging new ideas to consider and debate. That is why the authors believe in winning with a practical perspective.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>The term "non-policy" was often used in the debate literature during the late 1970s and early 1980s to mean "value" or "values-oriented" argumentation. Sentiment against policy debate during that period was so strong that nearly every Lincoln-Douglas and early CEDA guideline could be traced back to a particular "evil" regarding policy debate.

<sup>2</sup>See Luong, Minh A. 'Burden of Proof and Presumption in Lincoln-Douglas Debate: A Call for Reform' *Rostrum* 70:3 (November 1995): 15-24.

<sup>3</sup>Several noted debate scholars argued for acceptance of the narrative perspective in academic debate. Early works included Hollihan, Thomas A., Riley, Patricia, and Baaske, Kevin T., "The Art of Storytelling: An Argument for a Narrative Perspective in Academic Debate" Argument and Social Practice: Proceedings of the Fourth SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation, 807-828. This issue was recently discussed in the *Rostrum*. See McDonald, Kelly and Jarman, Jeffrey W., 'Getting the Story Right: The Role of Narrative in Academic Debate' *Rostrum* 72:5 (January 1998): 5-8, 20.

<sup>4</sup>Former National TOC Champion and NFL L/D Wording Committee Member Jason Baldwin lamented the rise of "technical debating" and ever increasing delivery speeds at the expense of quality of argument. See Baldwin, Jason. 'The State of Lincoln-Douglas Debate' *Rostrum* 68:8 (April 1994) 11-12.

<sup>5</sup>This statement should not be taken as a criticism of debate; rather as a means to contrast formal argument in a controlled environment from persuasive appeals which may be more common in everyday life.

<sup>6</sup>Mr. Luong recalls his days shortly after graduation from high school. Unemployment in Silicon Valley at the beginning of the 1980s was high and it was extremely difficult to find summer work. Based on real-world persuasive skills developed as a Lincoln-Douglas debater, he was able to convince the manager of a local Chevrolet dealer to hire him as a salesperson. He then used

his persuasive skills to earn an average of \$5,000.00 per month in commissions through the summer and by the time he left for college, Mr. Luong was driving a brand-new Camaro Z-28 and had a new appreciation for lay judges whose ballots now were their checkbook\$..

<sup>7</sup>Contrary to popular belief, lay judges are quite intelligent. While they might lack the technical expertise of circuit judges, lay judges bring a wide range of perspectives and experiences to the debate round. When he was a college debate coach, several of Mr. Luong's debaters were approached by a lay judge who owned a local business. Impressed by the ability of the debaters to persuade him using non-technical language, the businessperson offered the undergraduate students part-time sales jobs.

<sup>8</sup>The NFL Lincoln-Douglas Debate Guidelines are clear on this issue. Guideline #5 states: "[A decision should be based on] [d]ebating the resolution in its entirety. Neither the affirmative nor the negative is to debate his or her position exclusively from the standpoint of isolated examples." National Forensic League Official National Tournament Manual (1995) TA-4.

<sup>9</sup>The issue of whole resolution and hasty generalization has been debated in the policy debate community for decades. In that realm, there is a consensus that although parametric analysis might commit a hasty generalization fallacy, the case may be inductively sound if several standards are met. For a general overview of the debate, see: Coburn-Palo, Nicholas J. and Minh A. Luong. 'Resolutional Focus in Policy Argumentation: Theory and Application.' *Rostrum* (January 1996) 13-20.

<sup>10</sup>Also consider the fact that these authors have hundreds, if not thousands, of written pages of discourse to support their position while L/D debaters have a scant 13 minutes for their side of the resolution.

<sup>11</sup>The authors thank a number of individuals who assisted with the development of this essay. Timothy Averill (Manchester High School, MA), Cherian G. Koshy (U. of Minnesota), Rebecca S. Jacobsen, Paul Metcalf (The Spectrum Organization), and Melodi A. Morrison provided valuable insights. Any errors or omissions in this essay are the sole responsibility of the authors.