

AN INVITATION TO JOIN THE LD-L LISTSERV A VIRTUAL LINCOLN-DOUGLAS COMMUNITY

by
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Communities can grow almost anywhere. I have been privileged, in my role as founder of the Lincoln-Douglas listserv or 'ld-l', to midwife one of these communities. The small society is based in large part on the exchange or verbal writings. As the Talking Heads put it, one can "transmit the message, to the receiver, hope for an answer some day"- in this case, sooner rather than later.

The Lincoln-Douglas Listserv was founded in 1995 as a counterpart to policy debate's CX-l. While the occasional L-D message would find its way to CX-l, the sheer volume of material seemed to dictate a need for a Lincoln-Douglas oriented mailing list. As a coach heading up a brand spanking new program, such a service also seemed to be a way to help my students quickly become part of a larger debate community. Five years later, despite the occasional glitch, the list is still helping to serve this need.

Indeed, to use a hackneyed phrase, the ld-l is a "marketplace of ideas" in action - or at least as close as many of us are likely to see.

Your messages go directly from your keyboard to the computer screens of subscribers nationwide. Unlike traditional mediums, such as television or print media, there is no editor to filter messages based upon the credentials of the author, or the content of the message. Ideas can be evaluated based upon their own merit. The ensuing discussions can be engrossing. Or, at times, the discussions can be trite, or even worse. In a world where everyone can post, at times it can seem sometimes as if everyone does. Many people send messages of great insight, and many, well, do not. While some are excluded or hindered due to the costs of technology, the increasing prevalence of computers in schools and libraries somewhat mitigates difficulty.

The other problem is that on occasion messages reach list members in seemingly random order. Thus, one often receives several responses to a message, or 'post' before receiving the original post itself. This can be true even for the author. This is largely due to the limits on the technology of email transmission, and occurs less often than at one time. When it does happen, it can make for a rather surreal experience.

Overall, the educational opportunities are quite valuable. The ongoing dialogue serves as a topic brainstorming session far beyond the capacities of a single team. The interactions between people from different parts of the country exposes list members to new ideas and conceptions about debate.

While previously such conversation might take place at the occasional conference, or hurried between rounds at a tournament, now dialogues can occur on an ongoing basis. The fact that coaches, students, and "friends of the activity" can all engage in conversation without too much regard to traditional hierarchies is a boon to discussion and our understanding of the activity.

Among perennial yet productive topics are the role of criteria and core values in Lincoln-Douglas debate, the philosophy behind breaking (or not breaking) elimination round brackets, and the proper use of evidence.

To subscribe or join the ld-l, send an email message to majordomo@world.std.com with the single phrase "subscribe ld-l" in the message body. Please strip the message of any other words. It is not necessary to include a subject heading. Majordomo is the software that runs the daily functions of the list, not a "real" person, so it is rather like using a touchtone system, only with one button to press.

Unfortunately, due to a flurry of abu-

sive posts last fall, it was necessary to end the former "open" subscription policy. Due to my other obligations, it may take approximately a week for your request to be processed.

When you send your request to the majordomo, you will receive a message notifying you that your request has been sent to the list moderator, myself, for approval. In turn, I will send you a message asking you to confirm your identity before being admitted to the list. Typically, school, work, and "paid for" accounts have more latitude than free email accounts. If you have a free email account, such as hotmail.com, yahoo.com, or mail.com, you must be verified either by a list member of long standing, or by some quasi-official personage.

As a last resort, you may send a photocopy of an official ID to Paul Wexler, Debate Teacher, Needham High School, Social Studies Department, Needham, MA 02492. Only a few people have found it necessary to take this step, however.

After approval, you will receive many many messages daily. If you wish to receive one or two large compilations of postings, rather than many small individual ones, you may wish to consider subscribing to the digest version. To do so, follow the preceding directions, except the phrase send should be "*subscribe ld-l-digest*".

There is an archive service available for those interested in accessing old messages. The website is <http://www.westman.org> and is run by Mike West of the University of Texas.

Please consider joining our community.

(Paul Wexler is the owner/moderator of the Listserv. Paul currently coaches at Needham (MA) High School)