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# An Evaluation of Debate . . .

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This evaluation of debate is a reflection of the attitude toward debate held today by former intercollegiate debaters of the University of Nebraska. Intercollegiate debate started at Nebraska in 1895, and a list of all people living today who participated from 1895 to 1945 was compiled. It was impossible to contact all former debaters because their present addresses were not available.

A questionnaire of eight questions with a five point attitude scale of "No", "Probably not", "Uncertain", "Probably yes", and "Yes" was developed. The eight questions were designed to evaluate debate on four bases. 1. Has debate an occupational value? 2. Has debate a value in training for leadership? 3. Has debate a cultural value? 4. Has debate had an adverse effect on scholarship? The recipient of the questionnaire was asked to check the term below each of the eight questions that best expressed his attitude to that question.

Two hundred and fifty-five questionnaires were sent to former University of Nebraska debaters and one hundred and sixty-three were returned. On the basis of these returns, I am making this evaluation.

## QUESTIONNAIRES SENT AND RETURNED ACCORDING TO PERIODS

The following chart indicates the number of questionnaires sent and returned in any one period. The following are irregular in length so that changes in coaches and attitude toward decision and non-decision debating could be more easily considered. It is noticeable that all periods are well represented and that a large number of these people have been out of school long enough to view the questionnaire quite objectively.

Period	Sent	Returned
Period of 1895 to 1901	23	12
Period of 1901 to 1906	26	21
Period of 1906 to 1911	31	18
Period of 1911 to 1915	29	23
Period of 1915 to 1919	19	9
Period of 1919 to 1926	31	17
Period of 1926 to 1931	21	18
Period of 1931 to 1936	23	15
Period of 1936 to 1941	39	21
Period of 1941 to 1945	13	9

## OCCUPATIONS REPRESENTED IN THIS EVALUATION

From the questionnaire it was noted that these debaters had gone into thirty-one different occupations.

I. Law	99
II. Business	30
Sales and advertising	6
Banking	3
Manufacturing	3

Accounting	2
Medicine	2
Newspaper publishing	2
Life insurance	2
Telephone management	2
General Business	2
Concert Theatrical Manag.	1
Laundry owner	1
Office manager	1
Real estate	1
Retail clothing	1
Retail lumberman	1
III. Education	20
College professors	13
High school administrators	3
College administrators	2
High school teachers	2
IV. Miscellaneous	14
Army officer	1
Chemist	1
Exec. secretary—Am.	
Red Cross	1
Housing administrator	1
Minister	1
Municipal employee	1
Postal clerk	1
Student Christian	
Assoc. Sec.	1
Students	4
Trust officer	4
Writer and Farmer	1

## TABULATIONS AND EVALUATIONS

This is the total tabulation of the attitudes expressed on each question in the questionnaire.

### Occupational Evaluation of Debate

The tabulation of attitudes on questions 1, 2, 3, and 4 facilitates an occupational evaluation of debate.

1. Did your work in debate have a bearing on your entering your present occupation?	
No	80
Probably not	13
Uncertain	4
Probably yes	27
Yes	36
No answer	3

Debate training has influenced sixty-three, or 38.6 percent of those returning questionnaires, in their choice of occupation or profession.

Forty of the sixty-three were lawyers. Other occupations indicated were in the fields of salesmanship, advertising, business administration, newspaper work, and education.

2. Did you take debate because you were planning on entering your present occupation?	
No	72
Probably not	5
Uncertain	2
Probably yes	17

Yes .....	66
No answer .....	1

50.9 percent of those who returned questionnaires said they took debate because they were planning on entering their present occupation.

Seventy-four of these people were lawyers. In fact sixty of the sixty-six that definitely said "yes" were of this profession. Other occupations indicated were in the fields of education, military training, newspaper work, business administration, ministry, salesmanship, and advertising.

3. Did debate help you in your present occupation?	
No .....	4
Probably not .....	2
Uncertain .....	1
Probably yes .....	11
Yes .....	144
No answer .....	0

In 95.7 percent of returned questionnaires or in 155 out of 163 cases, people believed that debate had given them some help in their present occupation. The overwhelming affirmative vote in this respect is very significant.

4. Would you now advise people entering your occupation to take debate?	
No .....	1
Probably not .....	3
Uncertain .....	5
Probably yes .....	7
Yes .....	145
No answer .....	2

93.2 percent said "probably" and "yes" they would advise people entering their occupation to take debate.

In six instances, that of the laundry owner, an accountant, one high school teacher who is in speech correction, one college professor, one municipal employee, and one lawyer, returned questionnaires revealed that they believed that debate training had not helped them in their present occupation; yet the lawyer, the teacher, and the college professor would advise people entering their profession to take debate. The accountant, municipal employee, and the laundry owner in answering question eight would still advise any interested, capable person to take debate.

One doctor and a postal clerk maintained that debate had helped them, but they would not recommend people entering their profession to take debate. Both of these people in answering question eight would still recommend people who were interested and capable to take debate.

While one accountant felt that he had received no help, another was positive that it was for him the most valuable course he had taken at the University.

One hundred percent of the lawyers answering this question said that they would advise people entering their profession to take debate.

### Leadership Evaluation of Debate

The leadership training of debate could be evaluated by examining the tabulation for question five and seven.

5. Did debate help you to take a more prominent place in campus life when you were in school?	
No .....	17
Probably not .....	8
Uncertain .....	9
Probably yes .....	38
Yes .....	90
No answer .....	1
7. Has your debate training enabled you to take a more prominent place in civic life?	
No .....	9
Probably not .....	8
Uncertain .....	14
Probably yes .....	38
Yes .....	91
No answer .....	3

The results of these questions were almost identical. In both cases, over 78 percent of the people who returned questionnaires thought that debate enabled them to take a greater position of leadership on the campus and in civic life.

### Cultural Evaluation of Debate

The results of question eight indicate whether debate has a cultural value.

8. Would you today advise any interested capable person regardless of occupation to take debate?	
No .....	2
Probably not .....	0
Uncertain .....	2
Probably yes .....	20
Yes .....	137
No answer .....	2

96.3 percent said "probably" and "yes" they would advise any interested capable person regardless of occupation to take debate. Only one lawyer and one teacher answered "no" to this question.

The overwhelming "yes" response might be explained by the following statements attached to the questionnaires:

Mr. George A. Lee, a lawyer who debated in 1904 says,

"The man who can think, reason, penetrate, analyze, express thoughts and ideas clearly, concisely, cogently, convincingly, who can articulate distinctly, who can speak on his feet with reasonable assurance and self confidence and poise, can command himself and others and business associates and auditors and no matter in what occupation, profession or field of endeavor."

Let me summarize on this question with a quotation from Frederick Maurice Hunter, Chancellor of the University of Oregon, who debated in 1902, "I consider debating excellent all-round training with broad cultural as well as practical outcomes."

### Evaluation of Adverse Effect on Scholarship

Debate has been criticized by people who say it has had an adverse effect on other school work. The debater becomes so wrapped up in debate that he forgets to do his regular class work. Question six attempts to find out the truth of this criticism.

6. Did your participation in debate affect your scholarship adversely?
- |                    |     |
|--------------------|-----|
| No .....           | 141 |
| Probably not ..... | 13  |
| Uncertain .....    | 1   |
| Probably yes ..... | 5   |
| Yes .....          | 1   |
| No answer .....    | 2   |

94.4 percent said "probably not" and "no" debate had not affected their class work adversely. Of the six people who said "yes" and "probably yes", one was a member of Innocents, the men's honorary society which requires a certain grade average for membership, and another was a member of Phi Beta Kappa.

Scholastic honors won by University of Nebraska debaters indicate also that debate need not adversely affect one's scholarship. Four Nebraska debaters have been Rhodes Scholars, forty-seven have been members of Phi Beta Kappa, and thirty-one have won the Order of Coif, the honor given to graduating lawyers who have ranked in the upper ten percent of their class.

Debating could have an adverse effect on a person's scholarship, but it would all depend on the person. The results of the questionnaire and the honors won indicate that generally debate does not affect one's scholarship adversely.

### Other Results

1. In spite of the fact that four different forms of management have existed in four different periods, the questionnaire indicated the same attitude in all four periods.

2. The general attitude trend was the same for people who engaged in decision debating as for those who engaged in non-decision debating. This is significant when we realize that the University of Nebraska engaged in no decision debates for over 20 years.

### COMMENTS ON VALUES

A number of the people who returned questionnaires wrote comments as to what they thought was the value of their debate training.

1. Perhaps the most common values listed was that debate taught one to think clearly and logically, to analyze carefully, and to arrange ideas in an orderly fashion. Approximately twenty-five people commented on these factors. Some of their statements follow:

"The training in analysis which I received in argumentation and debate and also in logic has been of tremendous

value to me throughout my life."—Byrne Marcellus—1911.

"The greatest benefit, it seems to me, that we received, in addition to practice in standing before an audience and in quick rebuttal, was in making a clear analysis of a question and arranging facts and arguments in a logical order."—Warren B. Catlin—1902.

"The orderly arrangement of ideas which debate teaches us is invaluable training"—Lloyd Welch Pogue—1924.

2. Another type of comment was that debate taught one to select and use evidence.

"I learned from my work in debate to respect facts and to know that they cannot be ignored or by-passed, however unpleasant they may be."—C. A. Sorenson—1914.

"The training which I received in weighing, analyzing, and arranging of evidence and argument, has been of great value to me."—Hugh Agor—1913.

"To be sure of one's facts, to sift evidence, using the relevant and discarding the irrelevant, to distinguish between mere assertion and legitimate argument, to support conclusions with well established premises—all these, and other fundamentals of debate I have found to be indispensable to any forceful argument in court."—C. A. Kutcher—1902.

3. Five people stated that debate taught them how to do research.

"I received my first careful training in the use of the library and in research in preparation for debates."—E. T. Grether—1920.

"We were taught the essentials of research and bibliography, logic, and the weighing of material."—Raymond A. Smith—1913.

"In my view debating stimulates a desire for research and develops aptitudes for discrimination as between essential facts and irrelevant matters."—H. E. Sackett—1898.

4. A very popular value expressed was that debate taught one to think on one's feet and to speak effectively.

"I found debate in particular taught me to think on my feet, to organize my material before saying anything, and to develop a delivery style that does not antagonize an audience."—John C. Landis—1935.

"Ability to think on one's feet, and express those thoughts clearly and effectively is a most valuable training."—A. W. Storm—1927.

"I believe that ability to speak effectively opens more doors of opportunity to the average man than any other accomplishment. I would strongly urge every student to study speech and debating."—Harry J. Burtis—1913.

5. One person contended that debate has a social value for the nation.

"Intercollegiate debating does a great

deal, I am sure, to accelerate social advance, and to prepare the way for public consideration of vital social and economic questions."—Charles A. Sunderlin—1905.

6. A number of former debaters contended that all lawyers should be required to take debate.

"My personal opinion is that some similar course should be required of every law student."—Harold A. Prince.

"It is my opinion that debating might well be a prerequisite to the study of law."—Henry V. Broady—1935.

7. Some debaters claimed that debate taught them that there were two sides to every question.

"Debate impresses people with the fact that there is more than one side to a controversy."—Frank B. Morrison—1928.

8. Not too profound but a comment that many would subscribe to is that debate is fun.

"Fogg's Think Shop" created the basis for my most pleasant memories of life at the University of Nebraska."—O. A. Drake—1921.

"I'd love to gather up the old gang of 1942-44 and go on another debate trip to Denver or the Missouri Valley Tournament. Gee, we had good times."—Anne Wellensiek—1945.

"Many of my fondest memories of school are inseparably linked with debate."—Bernard Gradwohl—1924.

#### SUMMARY

The 163 people who returned questionnaires expressed the following attitudes toward debate:

1. 38.6 percent said "probably" and "yes" that their work in debate had a bearing on their entering their

present occupation.

2. 50.9 percent said "probably" and "yes" that they took debate because they were planning on entering their present occupation.

3. 95.7 percent said "probably" and "yes" they would advise people entering their profession to take debate.

4. 93.2 percent said "probably" and "yes" they would advise people entering their profession to take debate

5. 100 percent of the lawyers who answered four said that they would advise people entering the legal profession to take debate.

6. Questions one to four indicate that debate had a high occupational evaluation for those who returned questionnaires.

7. Over 78 percent said that their training in debate had helped them to take a more prominent place in campus and civic life. This would indicate that debate was valued by these people for its training in leadership.

8. 96.3 percent said "probably" and "yes" they would advise any interested capable person to take debate.

9. 94.4 percent said "probably not" and "no" debate had not affected their scholarship adversely.

This study reveals that we should not curtail debate activities in our schools, but we should develop programs that will enable people to take advantage of this training. This evaluation should make all educators aware that at least for those polled, debate had a high educational value.

## University of Missouri Forensics Conference . . .

Under the auspices of Forensic Activities of the Department of Speech and the Missouri High School Debating League, the annual Forensics Conference was held on December 5 and 6. High School debaters from the entire state were University guests for this occasion.

The program consisted of addresses on various phases of the Compulsory Arbitration question (the national high school debate question) and on topics related to speech education, as well as demonstration debates presented by college debaters and practice debates participated in by the high school students.

Among the addresses on the debate question were the following: "Analysis of the Question of Compulsory Arbitration", Bower Aly, Professor of Speech and Director of Forensics, University of Missouri; "Affirmative Case", Burdette Thurman, Missouri debate squad; "Negative Case", Gordon Parks, Missouri debate squad; "Compulsory Arbitration and Labor Relations", Russell S. Bauder, Professor of Economics, University of Mis-

souri; "Industry's View on Compulsory Arbitration", Fred M. Karches, Director of Operations, Rice-Stix Company, St. Louis.

The addresses on topics related to Speech education included: "How to Receive Debating Congratulations Gracefully", Loren D. Reid, Chairman, Department of Speech, University of Missouri; "The Debater's Voice", Charlotte G. Wells, Director of Speech and Hearing Clinic, University of Missouri; "Radio Speaking", Elbert R. Bowen, Instructor in Speech, University of Missouri; "Today's Debate, Tomorrow's Decision", Donald C. Bryant, Professor of English, Washington University, St. Louis.

The demonstration debate on the proposition "That the federal government should require arbitration of labor disputes in all basic American industries" was presented by an affirmative team from the University of Missouri and a negative team from Washington University.