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(Re)Designing the Debate Tournament for Civic Life

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The presence of public audiences in competitive contest rounds, a central feature of early intercollegiate debate practice, was largely eliminated during the ascent of the tournament model over the last century. However, audience participation in tournament designs has recently become a topic of conversation among those committed to transforming the activity in line with the emerging civic and public attitudes of higher education. Given the preliminary nature of this conversation, we currently lack robust models for and scholarly reflection about the role audiences might play within the calcified and secluded structures of tournament debating. Building on recent work in American intercollegiate debate scholarship and practice, this essay recovers a little noted multimodal adjudication system or MAS (i.e., the use of multiple judging styles simultaneously) implemented at Stanford University on April 2, 1925 as an historical design resource for visualizing the role of audiences in debate competitions. Recovering this system provides a context to employ an historical antecedent as a small-scale case study to inform one approach to tournament redesign in the present. In addition, this essay reflects on numerous advantages of translating the Stanford system into contemporary tournament designs, especially: (1) the value of revisiting historical practices to rediscover pedagogical and competitive elements that have been forgotten over time; (2) the importance of acknowledging critical differences between the activity's past and present; and, (3) implementing experimental tournament designs that generate novel features of interest for debate, argumentation, and rhetorical scholars.

Key Words: civic education, civic and public debate, intercollegiate debate, multimodal judging, tournament design

Few words could adequately capture the experience of participating in an intercollegiate debate tournament. Though my focus here is on U.S. competitions, the same could be said for numerous international debate competitions as well. Tournament participants can readily supply endless anecdotes including the cultivation of powerful professional and personal relationships (Batt & Schulz, 2005; Zarefsky, 2017), unparalleled learning opportunities (Louden, 2010; Mitchell et al., 2010a, 2010b), stories of wins and losses both deserved and unfair, and numerous other experiences with lasting significance in their lives (“Alumni Testimonials,” 2010; Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014). Mitchell (2000) expressed the potency of tournament debating in the preface to his award-winning book on missile defense, a scholarly achievement he attributed in part to his participation in National Debate Tournament (NDT) events: “policy debate is an odd and magical place, where a keen spirit of competition drives

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debaters to amass voluminous research . . . and where the resulting density of ideas spurs speakers to cram arguments into strictly timed presentation periods” (p. xvi). Whether at the NDT or other formats currently practiced in the U.S., tournament debating shapes the intellectual and relational growth of its participants yielding many benefits including critical thinking, research, organization, writing, and civic engagement (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Batt & Schulz, 2005; O’Donnell et al., 2010; Panetta et al., 2010).


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However, tournament debating has invited numerous criticisms over the last century, especially in terms of its narrow pedagogical impact on a small cadre of participants in largely empty classrooms (Batt & Schulz, 2005; Llano, n.d.; Mitchell, 1998), competitive vicissitudes (Atchison & Panetta, 2009; Keith, 2007, 2010; Llano, n.d., 2017; Mitchell, 1998; Panetta et al., 2010), and controversial practices (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Greene & Hicks, 2005; Keith, 2007). One of the most durable critiques has been the seclusion of tournaments from the public square. Mitchell (1998) famously invoked Felski’s phrase “hermetically sealed forums” (as quoted in Mitchell, 1998, p. 46) to describe the reclusive characteristics of modern tournament life, a feature he attempted to overcome by advocating for public and community outreach. Llano (n.d.) introduced the metaphor of “the singularity” (p. 1) to characterize “the tournament . . . as a rhetorical black hole, a force that all rhetoric uttered about debating must gravitate toward, eliminating space for other conceptions of debate” (p. 2), thus noting how the tournament model has limited the landscape of pedagogical innovation in intercollegiate debate. These downsides of tournament participation have been and will continue to be of major concern for debate practitioners, especially given growing calls to transform higher education into a space for civic engagement (Albiniak, 2010; Keith, 2010; New, 2016; Rief & Wilson, in press).

Indeed, tournament debating does not easily fit into the increasingly civic attitude not only of higher education but also of intercollegiate debate scholarship (Albiniak, 2010; Hogan, Kurr, Bergmaier, & Johnson, 2017; Keith, 2010). Recent projects to recover historical models of debating clearly more integrated into civic and public life (Hogan & Kurr, 2017a, 2017b; Keith, 2007, 2010; Llano, n.d., 2017; McKown, 2017) raise major questions about the value of debating in the secluded space of tournaments. For example, Hogan and Kurr (2017b) recently articulated the formidable work of “Progressive Era” practitioners “to promote more public deliberation” in an effort to find “solutions to their problems in the collective wisdom of the people” (p. 6). Recovering this era’s vision of public deliberation might, they suggested, reveal methods to ameliorate the “Civic Malaise” that has brought widespread “political apathy and civic decay” to our democratic culture (Hogan & Kurr, 2017b, p. 3). Crucially, as Bartanen and Littlefield (2014) observed, the principles of the Progressive Era, which they dated from 1880-1914, framed the development of what they called the “Public Oratory Era” (pp. 27-53) of debating, a period that extended past the early days of Progressivism until WWII (see also Keith, 2007, 2010). Notably, throughout a significant portion of this time, intercollegiate debate was not locked in isolated classrooms but practiced with and for audiences, thus making it a powerful educational crucible for student participants *and* the public at large (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Keith, 2007, 2010; Llano, n.d., 2017; McKown, 2017).

Critiques of the tournament and a renewed interest in historical intercollegiate debate practices have opened up new ground for engaging in what I call the *civic restoration of the activity*, a phrase I use to highlight historically inspired modes of practice tethering debate to civic dialogue, community discussion, and public deliberation. However, the move to restore the civic, community, and public status of intercollegiate debate tournaments faces at least one major barrier: the assumption that tournaments are not the right modality for engaging publics given their designed inaccessibility (Keith, 2010). Working from this assumption, many contemporary debate practitioners have advanced “public debate” and other community-oriented programs as more appropriate antidotes to the insularity of tournaments (Albiniak, 2010; Llano, n.d.; Rief & Wilson, in press). However, if we exclude tournament debating from the ongoing project to achieve closer ties with our surrounding communities, we will fail to embrace the opportunity to (re)envision one of the most powerful pedagogical forms, and one of the most popular (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Mabrey & Richards, 2017), developed by intercollegiate debate as a tool for the activity’s renewal in the 21st century. Moreover, such a failure would ignore significant efforts to redesign tournament debating that have recently begun to value and, in some rare instances, achieve the inclusion of public audiences.

In light of these nascent efforts, this paper investigates potential synergies between competition and education, insularity and public impact, and expert and civic decision making simultaneously. In the sections that follow, I first detail emergent experimental efforts throughout the activity that challenge the divide between tournament and public debating. Second, following Batt and Schulz (2005), I argue such experimentation should include attention to the process of design and the resources necessary to manifest pedagogically valuable events. Third, I recover an event held at Stanford University in 1925 and employ it as an historical design resource for re-envisioning tournament competition as a simultaneously public and competitive activity. In particular, I focus on the use of a *multimodal adjudication system* or MAS (i.e., the use of expert judges *and* public audience members to adjudicate a debate) at this event. Notably, multimodal adjudication has not received significant attention in recent histories of the activity (see e.g., Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Keith, 2007). Thus, its recovery promises to change our understanding of both the history of the activity and current efforts to achieve the inclusion of audiences in contest rounds. This essay concludes with an extended consideration of the potential benefits of multimodal adjudication in terms of the shifting grounds of higher education and public deliberation in the 21st century.



“I recover an event held at Stanford University in 1925 and employ it as an historical design resource for re-envisioning tournament competition as a simultaneously public and competitive activity.”

Challenging a “Paradigm Difference”: Embracing the *Reality* of Audiences at Tournaments

In their practitioner guide to hosting public debates, Broda-Bahm, Kempf, and Driscoll (2004) noted “a ‘paradigm difference’” between public and tournament debating: “rather than being centered upon competition or upon a judge, public debates ought to be centered on the audience” (p. 73). As noted earlier, the assertion of this difference is justified by the traditional exclusion of audiences from tournament designs (Llano, n.d.). And yet, debate practitioners have begun to recognize tournament structures are in fact flexible and open to renegotiation. Significant efforts to reform tournaments to align with at least the *ideal* of public relevance emerged from the 1970s to 1990s (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Cirlin, 2002; McGee, 2002; Preston, 2006) and continue to the present day. For example, British Parliamentary debate has recently gained serious traction in the U.S., bringing a renewed commitment to “public reasoning” (Eckstein & Bartanen, 2015, pp. 465-466) as a tool for the civic education of student-participants. While such reforms and emergent formats have been criticized for their embrace of “a presumed audience” who “gains no benefits from the debate” while “the real public remains untouched” (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 21), they do indicate an “experimental” (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014, p. 297; Keith, 2007) spirit and attentiveness to civic life in the competitive domain of tournaments.

What’s more, this spirit of experimentation was at least in part a catalyst for the emergence of public debating. Tournament practitioners seeking to break down the wall between the classroom and the public square were central players in the promotion of public debate (DeLancey & Ryan, 1990; Mitchell, 1998; Newman, 1970). As early as the 1970s, Newman (1970) and Wenzel (1971) articulated the need for building community-oriented and public events to expand the debating experience beyond the tournament site. Notably, Newman (1970) attached tournament debating to public debating, arguing that the former can and should inform skills development relevant, even necessary, for the latter. As pointed out by Rief and Wilson (in press), 21st efforts to promote a public interface for intercollegiate debate have yielded significant reflection on the state of the activity at major conferences and in recent debate scholarship (Hogan & Kurr, 2017a; 2017b; Loudon, 2010). Furthermore, public and tournament debating have increasingly become complementary modes of practice in what Zarefsky (2017) recently called “the comprehensive speech and debate program,” a framework offering “both curricular and cocurricular components, featuring both competitive and noncompetitive activities, involving both speech and debate, on the local and national circuits, oriented both to the campus as a protopublic space and to public life generally” (p. xvi). However, despite mounting calls for “comprehensive” programmatic design, significant concerns remain about fusing public and tournament debating rather than practicing them as complementary but clearly separate activities. For example, Llano (n.d.) warned against the deleterious consequences of adopting tournament practices (e.g., styles of delivery, argumentative strategies, and formats) for public events, especially in terms of adequately addressing non-debate, public audiences. In response to this risk, Llano (n.d.) suggested “offering tournaments as one portion of a larger

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debate menu” (p. 25), thus envisioning the activities of comprehensive programs as a series of discrete options rather than synergistic endeavors. Llano’s concerns are certainly justified; however, if taken to the end of the line, they occlude possibilities for rethinking tournament designs with public audiences in mind.

Taking a different perspective on the more “comprehensive” vision of intercollegiate debate, some practitioners and scholars have argued for tournament reform aimed at enhancing public and civic engagement opportunities for participants. For example, Atchison and Panetta (2009) recommended “tournament experimentation” (p. 325) including utilizing “lay audiences” (p. 331) in contest rounds. Leeper et al. (2010) argued for “changes in judging” and “alter[ing] the structure of tournaments to require that one or more rounds be judged by a member of the community” (p. 150; see also Keith, 2010). Innovations resembling those summarized above have been implemented at major invitational tournaments. For example, the Lafayette Debates hosted by George Washington University and the French Embassy fosters a “unique dialogue that emerges not only between the competing students, but also between the students and the French and U.S. professionals, scholars, soldiers, diplomats and others serving as judges for the competitions” (“The Lafayette Debates,” 2018, para. 1). In addition, students competing at the Madison Cup at the James Madison Commemorative Debate and Citizens Forum are judged by “a three to seven member panel, or jury . . . comprised of local residents, students, professors, distinguished JMU alumni, and special invited guests” (“2018 Madison Cup,” 2018, para. 11).

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The emergence of tournaments like those noted in the previous paragraph have inspired a recognition that innovative tournament designs, including audience participation and judges with expertise outside of debate, may yield major dividends. For example, Mabrey and Richards (2017) documented support for changing tournament designs among students in policy-based formats. They argued debate practitioners should continue to innovate in order to foster pedagogical dexterity and serve ever more diverse stakeholders (Mabrey & Richards, 2017). Furthermore, efforts are underway to promote and sustain reflective experimentation as a cornerstone of what some have taken to calling “civic debate.” For example, the Civic Debate Directors Conference, originally conceived by John Meany of the Claremont Colleges and Paul Hayes of The George Washington University, offers practitioners a forum to design tournaments and other events specifically aimed at achieving civic impact and, in some cases, the inclusion of public audiences (“Civic Debate Directors Conference,” 2016). This annual event, referred to in its most recent iteration as the Civic Debate Conference, has been crucial in the development of “civic debate” including a variety of approaches to planning experimental events that bring debaters into contact with a wide array of academic, community, and government actors (“Civic Debate Conference,” 2018).

The innovations detailed above suggest intercollegiate debate is beginning to cross a threshold into a period of transformative rethinking, one Bartanen and Littlefield (2014) argued is evidenced by, “the presence of multiple frameworks” (p. 304). From their perspective, this multiplicity “marks the entry of forensics into the postmodern era. Instead of unity as an

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overarching value in a zero-sum environment, allowance for paradoxes to coexist within the community to sustain its viability has become the more dominant perspective” (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014, p. 304). I endorse this postmodern trajectory of tournament and format design; however, while new formats, initiatives, and scholarly discussions aimed at integrating the public back into the contest round are gaining ground, scholars and practitioners have yet to engage in sustained and historically informed reflection about the stakes of the choices being made. What we lack is a robust account of how to include public audiences into the competitive atmosphere of tournament debating that both promotes civic education for participants and retains the “competitive spirit” (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014, p. 34) that has driven the participation of students in the activity. Building such an account requires significant reflection on the pedagogical and competitive goals of our new designs, the topic of the next section.

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Cultivating Resources for Tournament (Re)Design

At the 2003 Alta Argumentation Conference, Batt and Schulz (2005) attempted to reinvigorate what they viewed as a largely defunct conversation about tournament practices by proposing a set of “Design Principles” (p. 510) for reconsidering what we do and what we hope to accomplish when we host tournaments and public events. While Snider (1984) had framed the “tournament host” as a “designer” (p. 123) in an earlier article, he did not imagine the transformative conceptualization of design advanced by Batt and Schulz. Indeed, their account went much further than Snider’s in terms of thinking creatively about the design possibilities that might help tournament practitioners move beyond the divide between competitive and public approaches to the activity. For example, at the outset of their account Batt and Schulz (2005) noted, “an overly rigid boundary between competitive forensics practices and broader communication practices of public deliberation and civic engagement” (p. 510). In response, they introduced “the designed debate tournament” (Batt & Schulz, 2005, p. 513) which, they hoped, would inspire reflection about the elements of tournament practice that tend to undermine public access and participation. In this and other ways, Batt and Schulz were prescient. Over the next decade, innovative tournament designs would evolve along many of the trajectories they noted in their paper. However, the reflective intentionality they defended has not always been in evidence in our scholarship or our practices.

Batt and Schulz’s paper not only described a different and more reflective perspective on tournament debating but also tapped into a growing awareness of *design* as a way to (re)conceptualize rhetorical and argumentation theory (Buchanan, 2001; Jackson, 2015; Kaufer & Butler, 1996). They built their argument from a series of insights developed by Buchanan (2001), who was at that time a faculty member in the School of Design at Carnegie Mellon University. Batt and Schulz (2005) noted characteristic connections between debate and the art of rhetoric, emphasizing a series of necessary components for successful design detailed in Buchanan’s (2001) germinal paper: “the useful, usable, and desirable” (p. 198). They expounded on these components to argue in favor of practice changes integrating the competitive and civic dimensions of debate while simultaneously enhancing the satisfaction of the activity’s broader

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stakeholders. They ultimately argued tournament designs should be relevant, accessible, and ultimately enjoyable for a wider array of stakeholders than previously imagined. Only this, they forcefully argued, could make the activity a powerful context for both the revitalization of debate, argumentation, and communication scholarship and the transformation of public deliberation.

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While Batt and Schulz provided a powerful argument in favor of tournament redesign, they left a central theme from ongoing discussions about design in rhetoric and argumentation theory largely unaddressed: the development of “design thinking” (Buchanan, 2001, p. 188; Jackson, 2015, p. 244) or a mode of thought geared for ingenuity in the processes related to design. Adopting “design thinking” requires not only renewed attention to how the elements of a communicative event structure the experience for stakeholders but also a carefully developed thought process that informs the choices made by the designer (Buchanan, 2001; Jackson, 2015; Kaufer & Butler, 1996). Of course, this sort of thinking cannot emerge without a more thorough accounting of elements that drive its successful adoption. According to Buchanan (2001), at least one critical attribute of such thinking was the ability to shepherd a design from ideal to reality, a process catalyzed by “visualization” which involves “artful consideration at each stage . . . of design thinking” often in the form of “sketches, diagrams, and preliminary prototypes” (p. 199). In short, for Buchanan, creating a design required the ability to *visualize* the desired outcome ahead of *manifesting* it in reality and revising it based on the experiences of stakeholders.

“Design thinking” and its attendant process of “visualization” raise a crucial question: What should we be visualizing in contemporary efforts to transform intercollegiate debate? The recent turn to the history of intercollegiate debate noted earlier provides a starting point. Our progenitors experienced a similarly postmodern period of design experimentation when the older classroom and society modes of debating morphed into intercollegiate versions of the activity (Potter, 1954, 1972). This period was characterized by oscillation between the activity’s role in producing civic education and public engagement, a hallmark of Progressive Era pedagogical philosophy (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014, 2017; Hogan & Kurr, 2017a, 2017b; Keith, 2007, 2010), and its competitive features, which reached their apotheosis with the invention of the tournament (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014, 2017; Keith, 2007; Llano, n.d.). Thus, the work of debate practitioners during the early history of intercollegiate debate provides a way to visualize how we might address our current efforts to negotiate a combination of public and competitive debate designs (Keith, 2010). In the next section, I reconstruct an event that addressed the design quandaries involved in fusing public and competitive debating that may provide grist for the inventional mill of contemporary tournament redesign.

History as a Resource for *Visualizing* the Civic Restoration of Tournament Debating: The 1925 Stanford Adjudication “System”

During the early history of intercollegiate debate, judging became an animating theme in conversations about the countervailing pedagogical designs and desires of the activity (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014, 2017; Keith, 2007, 2010; Llano, n.d., 2017; Nichols, 1937; Potter, 1972).

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Cowperthwaite and Baird (1954) detailed several distinct approaches to adjudication practiced from the 1880s to the 1920s including: (1) “the critic judge” (p. 271), more recognizable to us today as the debate coach judge (see below); (2) the omission of formal adjudication (that is, decisions were not rendered at the end of the event); (3) audience voting; (4) shift balloting, a way to capture any changes in the audience’s opinion by measuring it at different points in time; and (5) eminent professionals, experts, politicians, and citizens. We should also note the widespread use of panels, often comprised of three judges, who were significant members of their profession or the community (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Cowperthwaite & Baird, 1954). Each assumed different pedagogical and competitive (or non-competitive) orientations and they were thus viewed as competing paradigms (Cowperthwaite & Baird, 1954; Nichols, 1937). For example, the debate coach judge would be taken as a hallmark of competitive design and would eventually make tournament debating possible, framing it as a more “technical” affair (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014, pp. 55-77, 119-141), whereas audience-centered formats, sometimes without any formal adjudication, were seen as better for public events framed as less or non-competitive (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Broda-Bahm et al., 2004; Keith, 2007). Unfortunately, extant accounts of the history of intercollegiate debate adjudication have largely eschewed conversation about moments when different modes of judging were used simultaneously. In the following paragraphs, I recover an event that embraced a combination of adjudication methods, a strategy with the potential to help us visualize innovative events that cross the divide between competitive contest rounds and public deliberative encounters.

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On April 2, 1925 in the Little Theater on Stanford’s campus (“Immigration Debate,” 1925), just two years after the first recorded tournament at Southwestern University in 1923 (Sorber, 1956, as cited in Llano, n.d.; see also Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Nichols, 1937), the Stanford intercollegiate debate team faced off in a contest with Utah Agricultural College. The public event attracted the attention of the campus newspaper, *The Daily Palo Alto*, and was featured in several front-page stories. The teams agreed to debate: “Resolved, that the immigration act of 1924 should be so amended as to admit Japanese on the same basis as Europeans” (“Utah Aggies,” 1925, p. 1). This resolution focused on the Immigration Act of 1924, a law constructed around racist views of immigrant populations, including those from Japan, and buttressed by the virulent nativism taking hold at the time (Ngai, 1999). Notably, the issue of Japanese immigration was significant in California where powerful forces converged in support of the act (Daniels, 1973). This may explain why the topic was chosen for this debate.

As per the agreement before the debate, Utah Agricultural College proposed and Stanford opposed (“Immigration Debate,” 1925). Unfortunately, as documented in the coverage, the Stanford debaters employed the nativist and racist paradigms that supported the law’s passage as a backdrop for their arguments (“Utah Aggies,” 1925). Utah Agricultural College ultimately prevailed in the contest (see below) but did so by defending a limited view of Japanese immigration that was itself embedded in the dangerous and groundless racial, cultural, and socioeconomic anxieties of many white Americans, especially those in California, during the first part of the 20th century (Daniels, 1973). They elected to “repeal the act of total exclusion and

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return to the ‘Gentlemen’s Agreement’ in force between the two nations since President Roosevelt’s administration in 1907” (“Utah Aggies,” 1925, p. 1). This agreement significantly limited immigration from Japan, which, President Theodore Roosevelt had hoped, would appease anti-immigrant activists and reduce rising discrimination and violence against Japanese immigrants already in the U.S. (especially in California), though it was ultimately unsuccessful in doing so (Daniels, 1973). Thus, the topic wording and argument construction for this debate reveal the highly problematic terrain not only of U.S. public culture but also the activity of intercollegiate debate at the time, an issue I address again later in this essay.

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While the topic for the debate was discussed numerous times in the coverage, the central theme in most of the articles, and my focus in this section, was the experimental design of the event. Key features of this design point to important controversies that drove both the inclusion of audiences in and their eventual exclusion from most competitive events. One can discern this experimental theme in the following article title: “Cardinal Debaters Will Change Style for Utah Contest” (“Cardinal Debaters,” 1925, p. 1). This article noted, “The Oxford Style of informal, direct argument will characterize the style of the Stanford Debating Team” (“Cardinal Debaters,” 1925, p. 1). The stylistic choice was consistent with the expanding use of British debating methods in the U.S. by the 1920s, a style that foregrounded audience participation and adjudication (Cowperthwaite & Baird, 1954). This shift in practice is largely attributable to Baird’s work at Bates College beginning in 1905 to cultivate exchange events with Oxford and other British institutions (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014). Thus, the use of this style is not surprising from an historical point of view. However, its use by Stanford might have been controversial for the chairperson of the debate, William Hawley Davis (“Immigration Debate,” 1925). He had recently transferred from Bowdoin College to Stanford during the 1924-1925 academic year, just as this event was being planned and implemented (“William Hawley Davis,” 1963). In an essay 10 years earlier, Davis (1915) had openly questioned the value of British debating: “in England, where the motive of mere enjoyment so largely supplants that of competition, in athletics and elsewhere, this device of debating is less successful” (p. 107). While Davis certainly could have changed his mind during the intervening years, his concern about the need to retain a competitive *modus operandi* sheds light on a second and more important experimental feature of the Stanford vs. Utah Agricultural College debate: the use of an adjudication method that differed from the purely audience-driven style of British debating.

The method of judging used in the debate was variously described in the journalistic coverage as “unique” (“Cardinal Debates,” 1925, p. 1), “novel” (“Utah Aggies,” 1925, p. 6), and “different from any ever tried at Stanford previously” (“Immigration Debate,” 1925, p. 1). Interestingly, there is evidence that the “Stanford Euphronia debating team” had used essentially the same adjudication process in a debate against Mills College on March 10, 1925, three weeks before the debate recounted here (“Euphronia Debaters,” 1925, p. 1). In fact, the coach from Mills College, Willard Smith, was one of the judges in the April 2 debate, thus making the lack of attribution to Euphronia striking. Regardless of its point of origin, the strategy was innovative, bringing together several modes of adjudication:

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The chairman of the evening will be William Hawley Davis, former coach of debate at Bowdoin College and now of the Stanford Food Research Institute. The system of judging will be different from any ever tried at Stanford previously. There will be three units to the decision, two voted by judges and the third the decision of the audience.

One of the judges will be a ‘critic judge’ who will appear on the platform and explain his decision. Dr. Willard M. Smith, the debating coach at Mills College, will occupy this position tonight. The other judge will have the same vote, but not explain his decision. Professor Robert T. Crane of the Political Science Department of the University of Michigan will be the second judge. (“Immigration Debates,” 1925, p. 1)

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As described in the passage above, there were three “units” of the panel: (1) a “critic judge,” who was a debate coach; (2) a judge with “the same vote” (that is one vote on the panel) who, in a separate article, was referred to as “a ‘balance judge’” (“Cardinal Debaters,” 1925, p. 1); and, (3) an audience vote that also counted as one vote on the panel. Only the critic judge (Smith) offered feedback during the debate. The second judge (Crane) might have been considered a topic expert given his profession as a political scientist but his official title as the “balance judge” indicates his role was to provide balance between the expertise of the coach and the unpredictable decision making styles of the audience. No explanation is provided for why Crane did not deliver a rationale for his decision. We learn very little from the coverage about the audience vote except for the fact it was counted.

The final decision of the panel provides context for understanding how it functioned and why it was designed in this seemingly peculiar way. Utah Agricultural College prevailed “by a two to one decision” (“Utah Aggies,” 1925, p. 1):

Dr. Willard M. Smith . . . based his decision on the superior organization, evidence, and rebuttal of the affirmative speakers, but giving the negative credit for skillful delivery and argument. Professor Robert C. Crane . . . gave his decision as balance judge to Utah, while the audience voted 44 to 64 for the losing Stanford team. (“Utah Aggies,” 1925, p. 6)

The point of disagreement in the decision was between the two votes for Utah Agricultural College, delivered by the critic judge (Smith) and the balance judge (Crane), and the vote for Stanford delivered by the audience. The split dramatized the reasons behind the publically stated purpose of the adjudication method. As noted in the coverage: “Due to the difficulties that have arisen in the past to the fairness of a decision either by judges or the audience, in this debate there will be two judges, and the vote of the audience will be considered as the vote of a third judge” (“Stanford to Debate,” 1925, p. 1). In other words, the event designers wanted to avoid both an audience-driven decision and a decision made solely by selective judges.

That the Stanford event designers were concerned with both methods is crucial. As noted earlier, debate designers have typically preferred one to the other based on different pedagogical and competitive goals; however, in the case of this debate, concerns over fairness drove a

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synergistic innovation. This raises the intriguing question as to the specific reasons this innovation was deemed necessary. As previewed earlier, Davis' (1915, 1916) scholarly work provides a starting point for framing an answer. While at Bowdoin College, Davis had advocated for a civically oriented and simultaneously competitive debate paradigm that would hold debaters accountable to public standards of performance (Davis, 1915, 1916; Keith, 2007; Llano, n.d., 2017). Moreover, Davis had railed against the use of debate coach judges given their tendency to reward practices public audiences would find inappropriate, troubling, confusing, or impenetrable (Davis, 1915; Keith, 2007; Llano, 2017). Curiously, given his interest in developing debate events with public impact, when Davis addressed the question of judging, he refused to endorse audience adjudication. Instead, he defended a selective jury drawn from a larger audience that would apply appropriate public norms and modes of reasoning when reaching its decision (Davis, 1915; Llano, 2017). In an instructive passage, Davis (1915) explained his thinking: "the verdict of a debate audience, except under extraordinary conditions, is not reliable" (p. 111). Davis' comment here was grounded in the growing opposition to audience judging during this time. When audiences were tasked with judging they often made unexpected decisions that ran counter to the assumptions and expectations of debaters and their coaches. In order to maintain the legitimacy of the activity, not to mention fair competition and student participation, the use of audiences as judges slowly disappeared (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014; Keith, 2007, 2010; Llano, 2017, n.d.; Potter, 1972).

Writing much later, Hicks (2002) identified a second risk associated with the use of public audiences as judges: their decisions might ultimately be "simply a reflection of current public sentiment" rather than grounded in a more robust notion of "public reason" (p. 157). From Hicks' (2002) point of view, audiences were not only unreliable in the competitive sense that Davis worried about but also in the sense that they might bring popular (mis)conceptions or deeply problematic beliefs into play when making decisions. Widely held views in favor of Japanese exclusion at the time, especially in California (Daniels, 1973; Ngai, 1999), may explain the results of the audience vote in support of the Immigration Act of 1924 at the end of the Stanford vs. Utah Agricultural College debate. However, due to the adjudication system put in place by the event designers, the prevailing views of the audience were counter-balanced by other judges. We should not find the ultimate outcome of the debate acceptable given that Utah Agricultural College advocated continued restrictions on Japanese immigration informed by disturbing racist and nativist attitudes. However, the adjudication method put in place for this debate contained a design feature with the potential to avoid the concerns of both Davis and Hicks: the possibility of challenging prevailing public opinions rather than merely confirming them wholesale.

We are now in a position to consider some of the potential sensibilities that informed the decision by the Stanford event designers to use what I call a multimodal adjudication system (MAS), a system that applies multiple modes of judging in order to craft decisions that avoid (or at least soften) the pitfalls of any one mode practiced in isolation. Admittedly, there is some evidence of various combinational forms that emerged in other contexts. Potter (1972) noted the

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interaction between specially selected judges and audiences “employed at the Cliosophic Society of Princeton in the 1870s” (p. 76). Nichols (1937) described a system at “the Practice Tournament of 1935 held preceding the Convention of the Western Association of Teachers of Speech” in which “members of the various teams ranked their opponents in addition to the judges’ decision” (p. 277). But the specific combination of design features within the Stanford MAS has not been described in any detail elsewhere. Thus, it suggests new avenues for expanding our discussion of adjudication procedures in intercollegiate debate. The Stanford event designers, in line with Davis’ views about debate, were invested in hosting a public event focused on a salient issue that would retain both competition and public participation. To achieve this end, they created a panel that intermingled public engagement, attention to argumentative technique, and expert knowledge. Whether they fully contemplated all of the implications of their design or not, it would, at least ideally, deter debaters from pursuing argumentative strategies designed only with an experienced professional coach in mind or, alternatively, crafted to draw upon and largely confirm “public sentiment” (Hicks, 2002, p. 157). Given these features, the MAS used by the Stanford event designers offers conduits for visualizing event designs that work across the competitive and public dimensions of debate, a subject I turn to in the next section.



“The MAS used by the Stanford event designers offers conduits for visualizing event designs that work across the competitive and public dimensions of debate.”

The Stanford MAS and a “New Golden Age” of Tournament Debating

The disappearance of the Stanford MAS and the more general decline of audience-oriented contest debating from the 1920s onward could be taken as evidence of design evolution as the activity moved on to methods more fitted to its goals and aspirations (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014). This response is grounded in a view of historical development as progress, a view that has significant purchase in the arena of design. For example, according to Jackson (2015), “Taking a design perspective means, among other things, recognizing contemporary argumentation as a set of historically situated practices that have been building from invention over invention, for many centuries” (p. 244). This passage foregrounds the centrality of progress in Jackson’s (2015) account, an understandable feature because one of her primary examples is science, a perspective commonly set apart as a paradigmatic case of continuous improvement. While Jackson (2015) left room for critical reflection on and even rejection of new practices that fail to work, the general impulse to see contemporary practices as more advanced than historical ones is powerful.

Adopting such a perspective in response to the Stanford MAS is potentially justifiable for several reasons. First, we should note that some choices made in the intervening years were pursued in the interests of justice, inclusion, and fairness. For example, the activity of debate was a segregated and exclusionary space for much of its history. Indeed, significant portions of the

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intercollegiate debating activity during its early history followed racist and sexist policies aimed at excluding African Americans and women from participation as debaters in events just like the one recovered in this essay (Atchison & Panetta, 2009; Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014). Though still far from ideal, contemporary intercollegiate debate has eliminated such policies, offering a more inclusive understanding of participation. Second, the Stanford event designers crafted a topic that, while salient for its audience, was also deeply troubling. Contemporary coaches often assist their students in the development of topics and arguments that to some extent transcend the political, cultural, and social currents of their time, at least in terms of rejecting racism and nativism as legitimate frameworks for advocacy. Third, there are numerous pedagogical and logistical reasons for the development of tournament practices over the last century, none of which are rendered moot by my recovery of the Stanford MAS. Indeed, the value of traditional tournament participation opened this essay and it deserves continued support.

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However, I also find many defensible reasons to view the Stanford MAS as a potentially productive way to visualize new public and civic debate designs. Given its inclusion of audiences and expert judges within a single system, multimodal adjudication may be valuable in realizing what Keith (2010) called “the new golden age for debate” (p. 21) in which competition and public deliberation are once again fused (see also Bsumek, 2009). Notably, Keith envisioned this “age” as emerging from greater awareness of the history of the activity. Below, I map several implications of my effort to unite historical experimentation with contemporary practices, noting how numerous challenges, if overcome, may invite pedagogical and scholarly innovations fitted to our time. My focus throughout the following subsections is on the many options facing contemporary debate directors, coaches, and event designers when considering the use of multimodal adjudication at their tournaments or choosing to attend any number of debate tournaments with public and civic designs.

Pedagogical and Logistical Challenges of Translation

The first challenge practitioners are confronted with when assessing the contemporary use of the Stanford MAS is the inherent risk involved in experimenting with debate’s designs, especially when our goals are more pedagogical than competitive in nature. In their extensive history of the activity, Bartanen and Littlefield (2014) noted, “each well-intentioned effort to increase the educational benefits of debate at the expense of competition resulted in a decline in student interest and participation” (p. 137). Brigham (2017a) offered a similar assessment, demonstrating how Davis’ criticisms of “debate as a game” (p. 84) briefly adumbrated earlier may invite the denigration of enjoyment as a critical driver for both participation and education (see also Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014). I take these warnings seriously. However, translating the Stanford MAS for contemporary tournament design provides an opportunity to embrace both competitive and educational goals. Recall that the Stanford event designers’ innovation arose primarily out of a concern for fairness rooted in the problems associated with debate coach and audience judging when practiced in isolation. As such, the Stanford event designer’s goals were

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as much about promoting competition as about potentially adding pedagogical value or realizing more effective civic engagement.

A second major challenge has to do with the distinction between the Stanford MAS as originally implemented and the tournament model with its numerous rounds of competition. While debate coaches are fixtures at tournaments and other expert judges would not be difficult to acquire on college campuses populated by numerous faculty and researchers, retaining sufficient audiences for each round of competition at a tournament is no easy task. A recent experimental design offers one potential solution to this challenge. At Duquesne University, we have been piloting an event, the Duquesne Debating Society Public Debate Forum (DDSPDF), inspired by the debate across the curriculum literature (especially Snider & Schnurer, 2006). The DDSPDF offers a classroom-based solution to the audience problem. Instead of recruiting individual audience members, we sought out instructors who were willing to offer their classes to host debates. During the first iteration of our event in 2015, we secured nine classrooms (three each for three rounds of debate), thus offering space for six teams. A public audience composed of students, faculty, and community members composed the audience for the final round.

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While our design innovation at Duquesne offers one pathway for guaranteeing audiences in a tournament structure, it does raise two counterarguments. First, one could argue classroom audiences are not public and do not offer a real context for civic engagement. This argument imagines the classroom as a non-civic environment, a view debate scholars have found problematic (Snider & Schnurer, 2006). In fact, using college classes as audiences might provide an important avenue for reinventing the classroom as a site for rhetorically constructing civic identity and encouraging public engagement (Fleming, 2010; Walker, 2011). Doing so may also remind those of us currently tasked with becoming more engaged (i.e., university faculty and staff) that engagement does not require leaving our classrooms. Instead, our classrooms could become spaces of deliberative encounter for our campus communities. Second, one could argue tournament debating should not enter into classroom settings given its tendency to highlight conflict and technical modes of argumentation we would not want our students to imitate (Merrell, Calderwood, & Flores, 2015). While I do not have space to address the risks associated with translating competitive debate into the context of the classroom fully in this section, having student audiences judge debates could potentially control for such risks by incentivizing audience adaptation within the design. Further research would be needed to support this claim. In addition, while student debaters might not immediately embrace audience adaptation, coaches could emphasize different pedagogical and competitive goals during the preparation process, thus assisting students to approach competitions with public audiences differently. This is already a strategy used by public debate practitioners (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004) and could be easily imported into the context of coaching students for competitive public tournaments.

In addition to the use of classrooms, tournament designers might also consider the role of new communication technologies in reaching out to potential audiences. Indeed, the use of new communication technologies to enhance audience access to intercollegiate debating has a long

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history. For example, Stanford debaters engaged in a radio-facilitated debate against Oregon in 1925 on a similar topic to the one used at the Utah Agricultural College event, “thus not only surmounting the breach of distance, but also giving a larger audience an opportunity to hear the debate than could be possible if it were given in an auditorium” (“Gosslin, Frazier,” 1925, p. 1). In fact, the use of radio to facilitate the public uptake of debate was common during the early 20th century (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014). At the time, collecting audience feedback would have been difficult and the article about the Stanford vs. Oregon debate in the *Daily Palo Alto* did not suggest the radio audience was polled; however, the contemporary growth of online debating suggests avenues for resolving this problem. For example, Mabrey and Richards (2017) noted online debate events hosted by Binghamton University and the University of Southern California. As far as I can tell, these and other online events do not currently use public audience adjudication methods, but doing so does not represent an insurmountable design quandary. Audience recruitment would require some ingenuity in the areas of public relations and advertising, but the possibility of asynchronous viewership would eliminate the need to have all audience members tuned in simultaneously, thus potentially increasing participation. The primary question is whether online interactivity would offer the same pedagogical value to all of the participants, a point worthy of future research (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014).

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A third challenge has to do with the limited resources and time debate programs have available to participate in competitions like those contemplated here. Crucially, there are numerous design choices that either ameliorate or make up for such tradeoffs. First, many non-traditional tournaments, including the Lafayette Debates, Madison Cup, and DDSPDF are scheduled late in the season, thus making it easier to place them into an already extensive travel schedule. Second, given their various formats, styles, and rules, civic and public debate tournaments are exciting opportunities to work outside the parameters of more calcified formats. This variety has the effect of leveling the playing field between teams given that students and coaches have not had years to craft format specific expertise, one of the elements of traditional tournament participation that has been criticized by public debate practitioners (see e.g., Broda-Bahm et al., 2004). In this way, the structural unfairness of traditional tournament models (e.g., research support, expert coaching, and pre-round strategizing) might be softened, thus cultivating less predictable and, at least in theory, more equitable outcomes to the advantage of smaller programs. Third, designers of civic and public tournaments can seek funding to reduce or defray food and registration costs and offer low cost or free housing to teams in attendance, design features that have been used successfully by many of the tournaments described in this essay. Fourth and finally, debate directors might benefit from adding tournaments with innovative designs to their calendars as the diversity of options would give them the ability to identify and serve students with a broader array of skills and interests. In short, while there are important resource and time tradeoffs that cannot be fully resolved here, there are already significant efforts underway to make civic and public debating more accessible. These efforts could and should be incorporated into events using multimodal adjudication.

Pedagogical and Scholarly Benefits of Translation: Prospects for Further Innovation

While there are many challenges confronting the implementation of tournaments that make use of multimodal adjudication, there are also fascinating opportunities for innovation that may incentivize participation. First, there are multiple trajectories for reimagining the Stanford MAS. To begin, tournament designers might consider different methods of interaction between judges, audiences, and debaters. Recall that the original Stanford design invited direct feedback only from the debate coach judge. Designers could instead contemplate versions of the MAS involving dynamic interaction, for example, by inviting audience questions and commentary (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004; Merrell et al., 2015) or including feedback from all judges at the end of the debate. Changes to the composition of the panel might also be contemplated. At the DDSPDF, we have used debate coach judges combined with an audience vote and a shift-ballot. The design places significant value on the audience, thus offering a more egalitarian and less expert-driven experience. Moreover, the composition of the audience itself might be worthy of further consideration. Designers might elect to cultivate diverse audiences that include not only direct stakeholders of the topic but also members of populations with very different views of the issues.

Beyond changes to the style of participation and composition of the judging panel, multimodal adjudication also opens up interesting implications for topic and format selection. There are as many theories of effective topic and format selection as there are potential event designers; however, there are a few basic ideals with which most debate practitioners would likely agree. Topics should be of interest to all participants (including the audience), timely, controversial, and debatable (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004). Similarly, formats should be designed to facilitate the specific roles of the debaters, judges, and audience at the event (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004; Snider & Schnurer, 2006). When using multimodal adjudication, questions regarding whether topic experts can easily be recruited, the accessibility of different sorts of audiences, and the specific balance the designer hopes to cultivate between expert and public methods of decision making can and should drive both the choice of topic(s) and format. For example, at the first DDSPDF, we selected the theme of “college life” for the construction of topics specifically tailored to the challenges facing the debaters at the competition and the students in our classroom audiences. We used a modified parliamentary format to make the debate more accessible and audience-centered. In short, the use of multimodal adjudication brings with it the prospect of topic and format flexibility bounded by audience and judge adaptation, thus offering students unique experiences that simply cannot be replicated at traditional tournaments.

Second, and more importantly, the contemporary implementation of the Stanford MAS, or variations on it, raises prospects for innovation beyond those directly relevant to the tournament experience. This is the case in large part because multimodal adjudication reflects and addresses one of the most pressing issues facing public deliberation today: “heterogeneous expertise” (Jackson, 2015, p. 258-259). Jackson (2015) detailed the problem, noting that differential layers of expertise make it more difficult for interlocutors engaged in a deliberation

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to understand one another. She also suggested one outcome of heterogeneous deliberative encounters is the rise of technocracy as experts come to dominate conversation about ever more complicated public affairs. Designs for tournament competition that creatively address questions of expertise by promoting multimodal pathways for feedback, judgment, and interaction between experts and members of the public (Rief & Wilson, in press) could become testing grounds for addressing the quandary of “heterogeneous expertise” (Jackson, 2015, p. 258-259). They might also assist in generating a more nuanced and productive approach to negotiating between expert and public modes of decision making, one better fitted to the challenges of contemporary deliberation and realizing more effective civic education for our students (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2017; Keith, 2010). Using the tournament space in this way also offers the possibility of multiple iterative encounters with the same or related topics, different argumentative strategies, and even different instantiations of the MAS all during a single event, thus suggesting the unique benefits of applying multimodal adjudication in the tournament setting rather than at single public debate events.

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The iterative experience of tournament debating framed through the application of an MAS fitted to the realities of public deliberation might also invite novel approaches to achieving the more robust commitment to debate scholarship many authors have called for during the 21st century (Batt & Schulz, 2005; Brigham, 2017b; Goodnight & Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2010a, 2010b). Again, using multimodal adjudication in a tournament setting yields unique benefits. Indeed, such tournaments could inspire approaches to debate research grounded in comparative analysis of different adjudication methods and the creation of arguments fitted to diverse stakeholders. In addition, the use of multimodal adjudication at tournaments (as opposed to at single public events) would offer multiple opportunities for data collection over the course of a single weekend. Transforming tournaments into sites for “collective knowledge production” (Goodnight & Mitchell, 2008, p. 89; see also Mitchell et al., 2010b) relevant to public deliberation would potentially garner newfound support for their existence including enhanced buy-in from stakeholders in government, academia, and civil society. While such benefits would not have entered into the minds of the Stanford event designers, they are increasingly essential in the uncertain waters of contemporary higher education (Leeper et al., 2010).

Finally, because it involves the inclusion of public audiences, multimodal adjudication might broaden the work of debate assessment (Mabrey & Richards, 2017; O’Donnell, 2011; O’Donnell et al., 2010) by expanding the number of stakeholders included as potential beneficiaries of the civic education the activity provides (Rief & Wilson, in press). The impact of debate events on wider publics has been a largely unexplored element of debate assessment (Rief & Wilson, in press). Tournaments with multimodal adjudication would offer not only opportunities to see how students adapt argumentation in response to “heterogeneous expertise” (Jackson, 2015, p. 258-259) but also how audiences respond to and potentially learn from participation in these events. Students would also learn about new methods of assessing their tournament performances that value both their ability to interact with various publics and their efforts to address experts in argumentation and other fields of study. Furthermore, interacting

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with large audiences and/or with experts during tournaments could become a major selling point when assessing their outcomes. For example, noting the size and composition of audiences, the quality of expert judges, and/or the impact of debates on public decision making in pre and post-tournament descriptions would offer programs added prestige and create new opportunities for framing the benefits of debate tournaments to ever more diverse audiences, a practice already utilized in the world of public debate (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004). In short, multimodal adjudication could augment the role of intercollegiate debate tournaments in creatively approaching the challenges of contemporary public deliberation, producing relevant and significant scholarship, and driving innovative assessment strategies that provide evidence for its importance to the increasingly civic environment of higher education. In all, these are major incentives for program directors, coaches, and students to participate in the development of multimodal adjudication in the years to come.

Conclusion

Throughout this essay, I have argued the civic restoration of the debate tournament should involve a balancing act between competition and education, efforts to include public audiences, and adjudication systems offering opportunities to develop skills cutting across different layers of expertise and public engagement. These arguments do not assume the elimination of tournament formats without public audiences, the need to place civic engagement ahead of all other potential goals in tournament design, or a singular focus on multimodal adjudication. Instead, I have offered multimodal adjudication as one potential design resource with major benefits both in terms of realizing our refurbished civic attitudes and articulating new ways to employ and justify the more competitive dimensions of intercollegiate debating. These benefits also suggest major incentives for debate coaches seeking to expand the civic and public components of their programs. In short, I agree with Bartanen and Littlefield's (2014) appraisal of the postmodern moment we are experiencing. There is no need to find one path; multiple opportunities will present themselves (Keith, 2010). Visualizing new opportunities for tournament redesign through the lens of our history and the exigencies of the present offers endless possibilities for the civic restoration of intercollegiate tournament debate.



“Visualizing new opportunities for tournament redesign through the lens of our history and the exigencies of the present offers endless possibilities for the civic restoration of intercollegiate tournament debate.”

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