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High School Policy Debate as an Enduring Pathway to Political Education: Evaluating Possibilities for Political Learning

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High School Policy Debate as an Enduring Pathway to Political Education:

Evaluating Possibilities for Political Learning

Ellen C. Zwarensteyn

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

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Dedication

For Pete - thank you for your love, patience, encouragement, honesty, and humor.

I would also like to dedicate this debate research to high school debaters who bravely enter into the complex, confusing, difficult, and rewarding world of high school debate. Your coaches are honored by those of you who dedicate yourselves to the academic rigor of the activity.

Similarly, debate coaches provide an everlasting source of encouragement. Coaches who diligently advocate for policy debate continue to remind me to stand up for what is best for our students.

And, in memory of JMB. It was an honor and privilege to watch you become an amazing inspiration for all debaters and debate coaches. We miss you dearly.

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I am indebted to the kindness, tenacity, and knowledge of the Grand Valley State University School of Communications faculty. I am appreciative of Dr. Frederick Antczak and Dr. Alex Nesterenko who served on my committee and pushed me to consider and explore arguments that have helped transform my approach to politics and research. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Danielle Leek. She demonstrated nothing short of a Herculean effort to advise me through this process. She painstakingly muddled through so many iterations of arguments and the paper itself. I am forever grateful. Thank you.

Abstract

This paper addresses the role competitive high school policy debate participation has on key developmental markers of political learning. As identified by the Carnegie Foundation's Political Engagement Project (PEP), political learning includes political knowledge and understanding, political identity, and the development of political skills. Based in interviews with former high school debaters, the results of this study suggest there may be a transformative, politically enduring and engaging experience surrounding policy debate.

Using grounded theory to extract analysis of debaters' experiences, this study demonstrates how sustained competitive high school policy debate experience directly advances political learning and should be a tool to engage students politically. Debaters tend to focus on issues rather than partisan politics, consider themselves well informed on issues of national and international importance, incorporate reflexive political identities, feel their daily lives and activities manifest political actions, and have increased comfort levels employing political advocacy skills including the articulation and design of political argumentation. To respond to a paradoxically increasing partisan and apolitical world, policy debate encourages high school students to access critical concepts of political engagement.

Keywords: policy debate, political knowledge, political identity, political skills, political learning, high school ethics

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Introduction

The word debate conjures many images. Popular media display debates where hot-headed individuals hold steadfast opinions and merely shout at one another. This furious finger-pointing game denies both participants and audiences opportunities to listen for the best in each other's arguments and formulate civility in discussion. One format for discussion that may counter this trend is called policy debate. Many assume that being a debater must mean the student loves to argue – especially about politics. For these students, however, policy debate offers a forum far removed from finger pointing and shouting; policy debate emphasizes deliberative political and philosophical consideration, research, and discussion. Policy debate interrogates and transforms students' relationship to politics. The question yet to be answered concerns how these students come to understand and learn about politics through debate and how their relationship with politics is created or re-created due to their debate experiences. This thesis investigates the American high school policy debate community and asks how participation in competitive policy debate contributes to a personal sense of political learning as defined by understanding the political process, developing a sense of political identity, and employing political skills. By applying grounded theory to interviews of former high school debate competitors, I seek to expose specific critical connections between the communication activity of policy debate and political learning goals.

This thesis is organized in five chapters. The first chapter provides general context into the world of secondary schools' efforts at political learning. I will assess our current levels of political understanding and political climate. I will then look to the world of policy debate as understood by those who participate in the activity and those who critique specific aspects of

debate practices or community norms. The second chapter provides a review of the literature concerning political learning and policy debate. I hope to distinguish between general forms of civic involvement and programs explicitly aimed at teaching for political learning while discerning how political involvement matters to civil society. I then turn to the academic discussion surrounding policy debate. I highlight research examining the effect of high school policy debate participation on student academic achievement and student discipline while acknowledging the dearth of literature connecting policy debate to political communication and political learning. Chapter three provides a methodology for the study. This includes a discussion of grounded theory, interview research design, recruitment procedure, sample size, and notes on reporting used to make meaning from and to unravel themes throughout the interview process. Chapter four contains the findings of this study. The analysis follows the Political Engagement Project's (PEP) three developmental domains of political learning including political knowledge, political identity, and political skills along with the PEP's established political values including intellectual autonomy, civility, intellectual pluralism, open-mindedness, and rational discourse. The final chapter purports the significance of the study by highlighting tentative conclusions, limitations, and suggestions for additional study. Overall, this thesis serves to outline how participation in policy debate contributes to and fosters political learning. The thesis may also suggest how high school policy debate adds depth to political education in secondary schools as well as responding to declining civil and social capital.

Chapter One: Background and Context

Political education does not occur in a political or social vacuum. In this chapter, I explore the overall landscape of political learning in secondary schools and describe central practices and concerns of policy debate as an activity and as a community. I also outline key debate practices, vocabulary, and limitations in effort to make sense of the specialized terminology used in debate.

Political Learning – Secondary Schools’ Political Effectiveness and the Overall Political Climate

The high school environment generally provides few opportunities for meaningful political learning and engagement. Isolated experiences of student council, volunteering, and/or high school civics or government classes, tends to be limited to immediate school needs or tied to a basic, mechanical political education (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007). These experiences do not require personal engagement or connection with local, state, national, and international politics. Rarely are civics or government courses about controversial political issues or discovering a sense of personal political identity. Even more rare are opportunities to question and analyze the political process as existing state and national standards exclude opportunities for in-depth, personal consideration of policy matters (Goertz, 2001). Instead, these courses tend to identify an American political identity through political philosophy and tracing presidential histories. Civics or government courses may also prescribe political characteristics through the American democratic core values, three branches of government, and anything that can be sung to School House Rock anthems.

Perhaps one reason political knowledge is not privileged in schools is due to increased service opportunities masquerading as political awareness. Schools may offer opportunities for

service learning through National Honors Societies and/or Youth Service Programs that encourage community involvement. These activities typically range from tutoring, organizing food drives, helping at local animal shelters, to assisting at homeless food kitchens. While many of these activities have deep-seeded political connections, unless the political connections are explicitly taught, these experiences do not translate into political knowledge (Colby, 2008; Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007). When service learning is offered in a political vacuum, lacking parallels to political ideas and institutions, service may merely translate into an endorsement or invitation to an organization. Moreover, becoming aware of, or involved in, these activities is typically organized and relatively formalized by school personnel requiring little initiative outside of school (Colby, 2008; Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007). While these activities can be civically minded and personally and socially rewarding, the ease and frequency at which service learning opportunities are offered compared to political opportunities is staggering. One program in particular, the Center for Civic Education's *We the People* congressional testimony simulation project, has received acclaim for its ability to produce sustained political engagement (Leming, 1996; Siegal, 2012). This program, combined with Model United Nations or Mock Trial opportunities, are not universal and based largely on an individual teacher's effort rather than school or larger institutional support.

A lack of political learning opportunities reveals how difficult it may be for students to discover or find themselves in politics. As a result, many students are separated and isolated from connections to political worlds and policy analysis. Studies demonstrate how students entering college do not have a firm grasp on political education. Colby (2008) cites an overall decline in political learning despite more students attending college. Moreover, Galston (2001) advances how despite overall advancements in education since the 1950s, political knowledge

levels remain stagnant. “If we compare generations rather than cohorts—that is, if we compare today’s young adults not with today’s older adults but with the young adults of the past—we find evidence of diminished civic attachment” (Galston, 2001, p. 219). Specific measures regarding willingness to talk about the news, caring about current events, voting, watching the news or reading the paper, and other traditional forms of political involvement have declined with each generation (Galston, 2001, p. 220-221). The most recent *National Assessment of Educational Progress Report* documents one consequence to this rote approach to government. Even after a historic presidential election in 2008, students are less involved in political learning and demonstrate less proficiency in 2010 than even in 2006 (National Center, 2011, p. 34). Moreover, “...individuals emerge from the educational system with a lower level of knowledge about current political figures and alignments than 30 or 40 years ago. And individuals of all ages are less able to answer questions about current politics than their counterparts with similar education backgrounds in the past” (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1991, p. 607). Schools seem to focus on teaching facts as the end goal of a political education rather than how facts are necessary to understand the fluidity and complexity of current events. Together, the prospects for enduring and thoughtful political engagement are dim in light of these facts.

Another general concern arises regarding the media’s willingness to expose the public to multiple perspectives on political issues. Television could offer an opportunity to hear and see logical arguments and demonstrate how people can disagree with one another in a civil manner. The majority of television programming, however, fails to demonstrate logical constructions of arguments and instead showcase inflammatory rhetoric coupled with finger pointing, yelling, indignation, and hostility. This personal, one-sided portrayal of news denies opportunities to see legitimate oppositional views “...[T]he extremely intimate perspective that [television] provides

on political disagreement ultimately undermines its ability to serve these ends” (Mutz, 2007, p. 622). Put another way, television news tends to appeal to emotion rather than logic. Studies indicate news directors systematically take their cues from sensational movies, attempting to keep audiences emotionally aroused rather than informed (Mutz, 2007, p. 623). Likewise, selective exposure to news ensures a sort of group think and group polarization, where one viewpoint dominates and ridicules other perspectives. This self-serving bias in news selection makes it unnatural to hear legitimacy in others’ viewpoints creating an artificial distance to differing perspectives. Even beyond exposure to the news, our ability to rely on one another as human beings to present multiple perspectives is diminishing. A study comparing how news is received through mediated sources as opposed to being received from others in person, reveals how people are more insular in their political communication patterns. The result shows people are self-selecting exposure to only people of similar political ideology limiting the airing of multiple perspectives. “There is a disappointing tendency toward homogeneity in face-to-face political communication, whereas the media can transcend interpersonal geography and expose people to views unlike their own... [F]or many Americans they are the main source of exposure to cross-cutting political views” (Mutz and Martin, 2001, p. 110). Overall, a lack of civil discourse in media and among peer groups precludes modeling life-long, genuine, deliberative, and logical discussions for students.

Partisan Political Discourse

“There are two sides to every issue: one side is right and the other is wrong, but the middle is always evil.” Ayn Rand’s political statement in *Atlas Shurgged* appears to be inspiring a new wave of politicians to approach compromise and bipartisanship with disdain and derision. Consider the recent Indiana Senate primary between long standing incumbent Republican Dick

Lugar and Tea Party favorite Richard Mourdock. After his primary victory, Mourdock stated on CNN how he would not bow to compromise. "I hope to build a conservative majority in the U.S. Senate so bipartisanship becomes Democrats joining Republicans to roll back the size of government'" (Camia quoting Mourdock, 2012). Similarly, arguing against bipartisanship, Mourdock told ABC News how "Bipartisanship has brought us to the brink of bankruptcy... We don't need bipartisanship, we need application of principle'" (Good quoting Mourdock, 2012). Mourdock's claims are one example of a renewed, extreme hyper-partisanship which may be re-sculpting the U.S. political landscape at the expense of careful deliberation and compromise.

Granted, this was just one Senate primary race and there are numerous instances where partisanship is beneficial to provide entry into politics and mobilize individuals into political action (Frank, 2004; Levin, 2009). Regardless of these benefits, if partisanship is advanced as an unwillingness to even consider opposing viewpoints, partisan participation may trade-off with deliberation and negatively infiltrate our political discourse. E.J. Dionne (2004) considers how parties, especially pertinent in the dominant two-party system in the U.S., construct false claims along ideological lines preventing political elites themselves from seeing necessary political ground in the center. "Racked by contradiction and responsive mainly to the needs of their various constituencies, liberalism and conservatism *prevented* the nation from settling the questions that most troubled it... Voters were tired of false choices presented by ideologically driven 'either/or' politics" (Dionne, 2004, p. 10). That being noted, something formative has switched in the general public whereby they now, more than ever, prescribe themselves to a party and ideological base.

As Americans head to the polls this November, their values and basic beliefs are more polarized along partisan lines than at any point in the past 25 years. Unlike in 1987, when

this series of surveys began, the values gap between Republicans and Democrats is now greater than gender, age, race or class divides... Overall, there has been much more stability than change across the 48 political values measures that the Pew Research Center has tracked since 1987. But the average partisan gap has nearly doubled over this 25-year period – from 10 percentage points in 1987 to 18 percentage points in the new study (Pew Research Center, 2012).

Thus an interesting paradox continues to develop; more Americans are frustrated with the partisan divide while engaging politically under an ideological umbrella. Perhaps worthy to consider are the political characteristics of those entering the political world as a engaged on specific policy issues compared to entering the political world based on partisanship.

Policy Debate Context

One avenue for high school students to learn about policies and politics is policy debate. This section serves to introduce policy debate by describing overarching governing structures down to individual high school team dynamics, arguments, and operations. The purpose of outlining debate organizations, policies, and practices is to provide terminology necessary for interpreting this study's research and findings

There are several governing structures overseeing competitive speech opportunities including policy debate including the National Forensics League (NFL) and the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS). The NFHS establishes a process by which people propose and states vote on a national 'resolution' or topic for debating. Most schools attending competitive debate events debate the national resolution as established by the NFHS. Similarly, there are national organizations that provide specific national championship experiences. The Tournament of Champions (TOC) compiles individual team competition

scores throughout the year and hosts a prestigious national tournament for the top qualifying teams in the country. Recently, the National Debate Coaches Association (NDCA) began offering it's own national tournament also with a qualifying approach for invitation. Another important policy organization is the National Association for Urban Debate Leagues (NAUDL). This organization has been successful at raising funds for urban school districts to provide policy debate within large, traditionally underserved and impoverished areas. Many states also have their own governing structures providing state specific rules and tournament competitions. Many national programs or even very small programs may not be part of these state or national organizations. Competitive policy debate teams may operate outside of these formal structures for a variety of political, financial, or other considerations.

The resolution dictates the scope of research and argumentation for the year and asks how the United States federal government should respond to a pertinent policy issue. Policy issues range from topics such as poverty, transportation infrastructure, juvenile justice, health care, space exploration, education or renewable energy, foreign policies, military deployment, and trade policies (see Appendix A for a list of recent resolutions). Once the resolution is established, individual debate programs begin researching multiple sides of hundreds of arguments. This research is continuously generated for use in debate rounds.

The Debate Round

An individual debate round has four students competing, two on the affirmative and two on the negative, and one or more judges. The basic goal of the affirmative team is to uphold the resolution by proving need for federal government action. Generally speaking, this is done by demonstrating current problems with U.S. policy and by presenting a specific plan for change backed by copious amounts of researched documentation called evidence. The negative team

generally tries to prove the affirmative's policy recommendation is not effective, devastatingly harmful, operates under faulty or harmful philosophical assumptions, and/or that there are other superior policy option(s). Through a series of speeches called constructives, rebuttals, and cross-examinations, students advance, refute, question, and refine specific argumentation.

Constructives are opportunities to build arguments using evidence, rebuttals are speeches meant to directly compare and contrast arguments built up in constructives, and cross-examinations are opportunities to directly ask and answer questions from the opposing team. It is important to note that constructives and rebuttals are individual speeches; the opposing team, the judge, spectators, and the student's partner usually remain silent, listen, and take notes. These notes are called flowing and utilize a long series of abbreviations in a specific page layout. Ideally, teams formulate their responses from the flow and the judge(s) also makes a decision from their flow.

Arguments, Rules, and Levels of Competition

The vocabulary, structure, and relatively fast paced delivery style expected in competition makes debate a highly specialized activity. Students immerse themselves in literature regarding various policy options, agents of federal, state, or international action, topical relevance, philosophical assumptions, media spin, effects on political capital, and Constitutional questions in order to develop argumentative positions for a debate round. Specific types of arguments are also relatively predictable – formats range from affirmatives, advantages, disadvantages, topicality, counterplans, critiques, and many more. Judges tend to have different frameworks or paradigms which requires debaters to adapt to in various rounds.

Competition occurs at a variety of levels - novice, junior-varsity, and varsity. Debate contests range from in class debates, league competitions, Saturday tournaments, Friday-Saturday tournaments, to three-day tournaments. An overly simplistic generalization is: the

more competitive the tournament, the longer the tournament will last. Weekend invitationals offer a combination of preliminary and elimination round debates. Teams with qualifying preliminary records, qualify for single-elimination ‘out’ or elimination rounds. At weekend tournaments, a successfully competitive team may debate anywhere from five to twelve debate rounds – each of which lasting up to two hours. Some states or school districts now offer policy debate in the middle schools. Policy debate is also an intense activity at the collegiate level.

Secondary School Context

Administering and coaching a high school policy debate team poses unique challenges given the activity’s location within a traditional school environment. The static nature of secondary schools can make the flexibility required of debate team management difficult. Weekly travel, the changing nature of competitive circuits, constantly evolving argumentation, time pressures, budgetary constraints, travel restrictions, recruiting and retaining team members, fundraising, and high school administrative issues highlight the need for creative management and flexibility. There is no one style behind operating a debate program, however, most responsibilities are well established. Teacher/coach responsibilities include communicating tournament information, authorizing travel with parents, arranging lodging, finding financial support, arranging transportation, establishing competition teams, ensuring students have professional clothes, travel, and food money, managing the different levels of competition teams, creating community awareness, developing and implementing curriculum (to match the yearly changing resolutions and student levels), classroom teaching, arranging practices, registering for tournament, hosting debate tournaments, and more. Differing coaching possibilities also exist – some schools having one teacher/coach for the entire team to hiring numerous coaches for individual two-person teams. This immense financial commitment often means budget decisions

at the central office and building level administrations determine if a program exists and to what competitive extent. Administrative financial commitment may cover substitute teachers for the classroom teacher, per diem coverage, registration fees, coaches, transportation, hotels, evidence resources (paper, printers, computers, etc.), and more. Individual students or coaches/teachers often cover these costs if a school does not. Students and coaches also often conduct additional fundraising to cover summer institute costs (most competitive institutes ranging from two to seven thousand dollars), food expenses on the road, hotel stays, and more. Students learn debate in a combination of ways including the classroom, after school practices, and weekend travel. Practice and time commitment varies based on personal motivation and resource levels.

Personal Involvement

My personal involvement in policy debate began as a sophomore in high school. Policy debate was a roller coaster of experiences. Some experiences were negative, and despite those, debate stuck with me. Debating through the rest of high school and for a brief stint in college, I have coached high school debate since my high school graduation. I try to organize regular professional development opportunities, teach introductory and advanced debate classes, coach a high school team, host numerous competitive events, and attempt to promote state-wide community conversations regarding and celebrating debate. I have also taught at several summer debate workshops and institutes.

I have been part of a few programs at the high school level and have since returned to the school where I graduated. This school itself has seen immense demographic changes. Initially a school of relative privilege, the school now has nearly sixty percent free and reduced lunch students identifying it as an at-risk school by the U.S. Department of Education. Despite meeting criteria as an urban debate school, the greater city is not home to an urban debate league.

Struggles within the school include funding, finding enough qualified coaches and teachers, encouraging students to value being (or being perceived) as smart, finding release time to coordinate travel and practices, coaching, teaching the classes (and adapting curriculum to the resolution), and securing administrative support. Virtually every year is a struggle to maintain, let alone increase, funding to respond to our students' needs. Since the school budget is not predictable or large enough to meet the demands of our student body, it is painstakingly difficult to cover the expenses of consistent travel and coaching. Access to transportation for after school practices and access to electronic resources minimize what would otherwise be greater participation. Many students also work to support themselves, their families, or have childcare obligations at home so time outside of school is limited. While initial enrollment in debate continues to climb, sustained commitment does not. Citing the expense of debate and the time required to be competitive, most students do not stay with debate longer than one year. With so many obstacles, we still achieve some competitive success. Our program has won several state titles, several tournament titles, and numerous individual achievements. Anecdotally, many students cite their debate experience as helpful to understanding their political and personal worlds along with providing valuable communication experience.

Taken together, my experiences may sensitize me to concerns regarding access to debate on behalf of students, coaches, and teachers. Throughout the project, I checked my own experiences in order to flush out my biases and limit reading too much into any one particular debater's experience.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Political communication, argumentation, and debate fall within communication studies. These concepts also share consideration by scholars within the fields of educational and political science. The literature reviewed in this chapter provides a brief context into political communication, political learning, and education including an assessment of general political teaching practices, ethical challenges, and a call to revive our efforts at political learning. I then focus on policy debate as a specific critical and transformative dialogic praxis. I explore research informing how participation in policy debate impacts students' lives academically and socially. From here, I pose three research questions regarding how debate contributes to political learning (as defined by political knowledge, political identity, and political skills). This work reveals a need for additional study bridging the work of political learning to policy debate for secondary education and democracy at large.

Political Education, Communication, and Engagement

This section looks at specific forms of political education. First, I look at justification for teaching political process and politics within American primary and secondary schools. Then, I look to secondary school efforts to provide civic experiences through programs aimed broadly at civic and service engagement compared to those aimed directly at political learning. I fold that discussion into one of greater meaning by exploring its relevance to broader concepts of citizenship, civil society, or an engaged citizenry.

Political Education

Questions regarding appropriate timing to expose students to political learning permeate American classrooms and the legal system. Daily (2006) focuses her work on the Constitutional and psychological connection made early in development. Daily (2006) traces the influence of

Supreme Court decisions including footnote 11 in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the temporary decision in *Minersville School District v. Gobitis* (1940), to draw critical connections between “...early care-giving relationships and the reasoned thinking of adult citizens” (Daily, 2006, p. 432). Termed the ‘maturational trajectory,’ early exposure to politics matters; Daily (2006) calls for increased understanding of how early democratic reasoning develops psychologically. Daily (2006) also argues how schools are legally justified if not encouraged to play a role in positively shaping our understanding of young students’ political worlds as schools have an immense impact on developing rituals of citizenship. Her overall argument, however, exposes developmental limitations for those working to teach critical aspects of politics in secondary schools or collegiate environments.

White (2009) concurs how early political formations matter to long-term critical political understanding. White (2009) argues there may be too much emphasis on how high school students, college students, and the older general public understands the political world as political learning happens much earlier than in secondary schools. White (2009) diligently unravels how schools fail to challenge the political notions, especially patriotic ideas, students bring with them from early education. For White (2009), a patriotic education indoctrinates the youth and is disguised as a political education. Using the work of political psychologist David Easton, patriotic inculcation impacts children by precluding genuine and authentic political learning at a later age. White (2009) illustrates how even reciting the pledge on a daily basis is a form of symbolic ritual invoking emotional if not religious dedication. Citing federal and state law including the Nebraska Americanism Statute and post 9-11 efforts, White (2009) notes a consistent effort to drill a ‘love it or leave it’ mentality into our political psyche. This ‘my country can do no wrong’ patriotic ideology may mitigate any chance of later political learning

(or unlearning). When patriotism is conditioned with militarism, Christianity (a God), unity (not dissent) through ritual and symbol, "...patriotic education infringes upon the right to unmanipulated political choice" (White, 2009, p. 509). Understanding patriotic indoctrination helps explain a contemporary tendency against critical thinking in political learning. This adds to the obstacles political educators face in the classroom, creates limits in political candidates' campaigns in developing nuanced policy positions, and imposes difficulties on policy-makers when evaluating complex policies.

Overall, schools are legitimate place for political learning; explicitly teaching politics falls within the jurisdiction of secondary schools. Adhering to principled considerations including encouraging multiple view-points and avoiding indoctrination or inculcation provide a basis for an energetic political education. Political education is legitimate, justified, and critical for a healthy democratic fabric. Questions concerning how to teach for political learning remain.

Political Learning

As the senior scholar at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Anne Colby contributes significant work to the field of political learning by systematically addressing the state of political learning in secondary schools and undergraduate education. Colby (2008) begins by addressing what political learning is.

Political engagement... includes community and civic involvement that has a systematic dimension and various forms of engagement with public policy issues, as well as electoral politics at all levels. A key criterion is that political activities are driven by systematic-level goals, a desire to affect the shared values, practices, and policies that shape collective life (Colby, 2008, p. 4).

Intentional political education is explicit; it should center around “[l]earning about political institutions, issues, contexts, and practices...” (Colby, 2008, p. 8). Colby defines political engagement as an intentional and explicit practice.

Much of Colby’s recent writing is based on her work with a team of education specialists at the Carnegie Foundations Center for the Advancement of Teaching as the co-director of the organization’s Political Engagement Project (PEP). In *Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Responsible Political Engagement*, Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold (2007) present their findings regarding programs aimed directly at increasing political learning. Their terminology and findings will serve as a basis for the rest of this study. After studying students enrolled in courses or programs with explicit political content, specific political developmental clusters emerged. Those are political knowledge/understanding, political identity and motivation, and political skills (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007). Questions remain about the relationship between these developmental clusters and in what order they typically develop to provide a foundation for political learning. These developmental clusters also reveal five core academic values. The five core values are intellectual pluralism, rational discourse, intellectual autonomy, open-mindedness, and civility.

Colby (2008) hopes to re-conceive political understanding as a dynamic process requiring “a commitment to basic democratic principles such as equal opportunity and majority rule” (Colby, 2008, p. 5). What Colby (2008) calls “the imperative of open inquiry” transcends petty differences and encourages meaningful discussions around central political values and tenets (p. 6). Open inquiry as learning underpins successful education in all areas of study and should be embraced as fundamental. Colby (2008) successfully addresses the intrinsic value of political

learning for personal growth, cognitive development, collegiate and professional, as well as benefits for an active, healthy civic society.

Colby (2008) outlines the findings of the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA). The CLA is a tool designed to assess “students’ critical thinking, analytic reasoning, problem solving, and writing abilities” through a variety of tasks (p. 7). The results prove how explicit attention to politics is necessary to develop a sense of one’s self as a political being in addition to building political knowledge and advocacy skills. Intentionally political curricular and co-curricular activities, internships, and other experiences demonstrate “...active pedagogies [that] are especially well suited to accomplish deep and enduring learning, because they engage students simultaneously on several different levels: intellectually, emotionally, socially, and personally” (Colby, 2008, p. 6). Stated otherwise, “[t]he richest political learning is achieved when students participate in both curricular and extracurricular political learning activities” (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007, p. 296).

Colby (2008) also analyzes broad types of engagement distinguishing between volunteerism (or community, civic service, or civic engagement) and political learning. Colby (2008) argues that volunteering is not inherently political for three reasons. First, general community service does not translate into long-term meaningful political learning. Second, knowledge from volunteering that is unconnected to political study does not result in immediate political learning and learning that does occur drops off by more than half after college. Third, community service opportunities tend to exist externally unconnected to explicit, intentional political learning (p. 4).

Political learning opportunities tend also to be ignored in high school in favor of community service projects. Community service opportunities are encouraged and rewarded at

the high school level – often tied to honors programs or specialized diplomas. Colby’s studies found “...the route to becoming politically engaged remains unclear to most students. Politics is unfamiliar territory, whereas community service has become almost as familiar as going to school” (Colby, 2007, p. 23). The ease at which students’ involvement in service learning is promoted reflects the lack of institutional support for political learning. Delli Carpini and Keeter (2001) also found a systematic lack of opportunities for political learning compared to plentiful opportunities for service learning. Summarizing the results from the 1998 National Election Studies, Delli Carpini and Keeter (2001) convey how “America’s youth are highly engaged with volunteer activity and yet very disengaged from traditional activity: they are more trusting of government than their elders and yet feel much less politically efficacious” (p. 636). Service learning does not present political learning *unless* political facts are explicitly taught and connections are explicitly made in these programs.

Many proponents of volunteerism argue that the skills developed in community projects may help teach political strategies. Colby (2008) dismantles this idea by advancing how these skills are not inherently political. Apolitical civic involvement and service learning does not guarantee political learning because “...students are seldom helped to connect their volunteer work with systemic issues that relate to it and are unlikely to make those connections on their own” (Colby, 2008, p. 5). Thus, any student can volunteer without any knowledge of the issue’s political potential. Civic participation, from tutoring, cleaning neighborhoods, or serving meals to homeless persons does not require “...kinds of politically relevant skills” such as “planning and running meetings, writing memos, various kinds of public persuasion, and many more” (Colby, 2008, p. 5). The theme remains; politics must be an explicit focus to achieve political effectiveness.

The PEP researchers conclusively demonstrates how service learning programs fail to reach political learning goals. The PEP outlines three salient points relevant to secondary school political performance. First, only an education with the expressed intent to teach and practice the three developmental domains and five academic values meets expressed political learning goals. Second, love of the political world is not necessarily innate; love for the political world is developed and practiced over time. Citing the work of Youniss, McLellan, and Yates (1997), the PEP researchers advance

...motivation is largely the result of engagement rather than the cause. Young people are recruited to participate in civic or political institutions for many reasons, including incentives that may have little to do with intrinsic motivation. Then, in the course of participating, they develop relationships that inspire them and make demands on them, gain satisfaction that they could not foresee, and begin to expand and reshape the values and goals that led them to participate, often shifting their identity in the process (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007, p. 43).

Finally, shifting political identities is not a source of concern. The PEP researchers found how teaching for political learning did not change students' fundamental values. Instead teaching different political concepts helped align students to their own political identities; teaching politics helps students explore their own internal argumentative consistency and beliefs. Evaluating "tensions and consistencies among values and beliefs or between values and actions is an important part of working toward a more 'examined life' and a more fully integrated sense of oneself as a civic or political person" (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007, p. 262). Thus, political learning practices help students realize their own political identity through careful consideration of multiple viewpoints.

Wiese (2009) advances a slightly different conceptualization of political learning creating a sequence to political involvement. Wiese (2009) distinguishes between commonly conflated terms; she does not assume service learning necessarily establishes political learning but does argue that political learning may establish civic engagement. Wiese (2009) is appropriately critical of those who assume that volunteering in the community or other non-profit organizations necessarily translates into political participation. Most importantly, Wiese (2009) critiques the mis/ill-conceived concept that political learning is and should be a top-down, unidirectional flow of information. Wiese (2009) argues that political learning is not a fact-based, authority driven pop quiz of candidates or cabinet members. Instead, “Political learning happens when students develop the skills necessary to help make those changes possible” (Wiese, 2009, p. 4). Wiese (2009) provides an example of political learning in practice. During the 2008 presidential campaign, Wiese’s communications courses focused on the elections. With politically intentional and directed discussion, Wiese aided students through a process of political learning through self-discovery. This demonstrates how political learning is a dynamic process – one that requires interaction and constant re-examination and re-formulation during the learning or teaching process. This also demonstrates Colby’s (2008) argument; requiring students to dialogue with politics often begins the process of establishing motivation for additional political engagement. Authority is removed from the instructor and shared with the students as they discover critical political connections.

Constructions of Citizenship and Democracy

It is as if Colby (2008), Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold (2007), and Wiese (2009) are writing to directly answer Dalton’s (2009) argument in *The Good Citizen*. Dalton (2009) addresses service learning skeptics and distinguishes between two types of citizenships –

a parallel resembling Colby and Wiese's distinction between service learning or volunteerism and political learning. Dalton (2009) argues there is no single good citizen rather the public has separated citizenship concepts into duty-based citizenship and engaged citizenship. Duty-based citizenship includes traditional obligations of citizenship – formal voting, serving on juries, paying taxes, and belonging to a specific political party. Dalton acknowledges duty-based citizenship continues to steadily decline despite some brief renewed voting energy in the 2008 presidential election. The second type of citizenship is engaged citizenship. From volunteering at non-profits, organizing community events, and responding to natural disasters, this form of citizenship is increasing. Reminiscent of Tocqueville's observations of the American spirit, Dalton (2009) celebrates the rise of engaged citizenship. Dalton (2009) provides no evidence that engaged citizenship causes or correlates with increased duty-based citizenship. This emphasizes Colby's (2008) argument that volunteering in the community may not translate into meaningful political learning since there is no explicit attention paid to developing a political pathway through knowledge, identity, and skills.

In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam (2000) advances a cautionary tale regarding the decline of American communities and indirectly answers Dalton's optimism. Putnam (2000) values community advancing how "Social connections are also important for the rules of conduct that they sustain. Networks involve (almost by definition) mutual obligation; they are not interesting as mere 'contacts.' Networks of community engagement foster sturdy norms of reciprocity" (Putnam, 2000, p. 20). From this view, a deeper and broader *generalized* reciprocity may materialize benefiting social communities and by effect political communities. Conjuring an almost Hobbesian concept of mutual obligation or a strategic golden rule (or mutual aid), Putnam (2000) argues how reciprocity makes society more efficient because cooperation helps facilitate

a common language and trust. While trust is valuable from an efficiency standpoint, it may come at a cost for people outside this society. Putnam's description of community helps to bridge people together to promote internal values such as cooperation and external values such as civic discourse and deliberation. Moreover, there are traditional political benefits to community development. Putnam (2000) argues "...those who took part in voluntary associations in school were far more likely than non-participants to vote, take part in political campaigns, and discuss issues..." after participating in voluntary service in high school (p. 339). It remains to be seen how enduring this participation was. The diminishing nature of trust and community may also help explain the rise in uncivil political commentary and a turn to insular, self-selecting groups for political discussion. As people turn less to outsiders for political discussion and engagement, distrust grows.

Putnam documents a dangerous decline in civic participation and community involvement in the United States. Putnam's work seems to offer call for greater political learning similar to Colby (2008) and Wiese (2009). While Colby and Wiese may interpret political learning more broadly and more deeply, Putnam's vision of community involvement falls within their analysis. Putnam (2000) argues that a supply and demand for social experiences must emerge at the individual and institutional levels (p. 403). Teaching politics and argumentation may be one additional way to provide opportunities for social connections while enabling space for healthy disputation. Such a space and may help create the bonds for social cohesion and trust as trust may emerge from civil and rational political deliberation. Thus, teaching politics and debating skills may offer critical avenues to motivate and hone honorable disagreement, relationships, communication, and political knowledge necessary for a democracy.

The point of folding a political learning background into a broader concept of democracy highlights the importance of an informed, energetic, and active citizenry. Moreover, it helps to determine what knowledge and skills are required to successfully participate in the American political process. How and what students learn therefore have a direct impact on the future of the democracy. Exploring which learning activities achieve political learning can only add to the fabric of democracy. This warrants additional discussion regarding how policy debate may contribute to individual, community, and ultimately democratic growth.

Policy Debate

Academic Achievement and Empowerment

Robust evidence documents how policy debate aids traditional markers of academic achievement. The growth of the Urban Debate Leagues has provided research opportunities to advance the earlier findings of Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, and Loudon (1999) measuring improvements in students' academic achievement. Mezuk, Bondarenki, Smith, and Tucker (2011) study at-risk children in districts with Urban Debate Leagues. They found students who demonstrate sustained involvement in policy debate experience higher measures of academic achievement (Mezuk, Bondarenki, Smith and Tucker, 2011). Surveying the results of over 900 children in Chicago's public schools over ten years, Mezuk, Bondarenki, Smith and Tucker (2011) gathered data regarding graduation rates, test scores, college-readiness, and more among American urban high school debaters. After accounting for bias in self-selection, their extensive study documents sustained improvements in ACT scores, attendance rates, vocabulary, and Grade Point Averages for policy debaters. Furthermore, Anderson and Mezuk (2012) studied how policy debate participation uniquely impacts the academic lives of at-risk students within the Chicago Urban Debate League. Anderson and Mezuk (2012) looked at the academic

performance of debate students by the quantity and success rates of at-risk debaters compared to at-risk students not involved in debate. Policy debaters achieved higher graduation rates, higher ACT scores, and had fewer drop-outs demonstrating policy debate to be a successful strategy for at-risk student intervention (Anderson and Mezuk, 2012, p. 8-10).

At the 2012 National Association for Urban Debate Leagues Annual Dinner, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan (who was the CEO of the Chicago Public Schools during much of the Chicago Urban Debate League start up) called these academic improvement measures remarkable. Noting the current disparate levels of educational attainment and the importance of education, he stated “...in our urban high schools, competitive debate is one of the great equalizers of educational opportunity. Urban debate leagues help ensure that teens in the inner-city get the same exposure to academic rigor as teens in wealthy suburban schools—where competitive debate teams have long been a fixture” (Duncan, 2012). Secretary Duncan relayed anecdotal stories of how and why debate hooks students and how debate fits the new model of education, curriculum, and instruction. Secretary Duncan identified the established four “Cs” of 21st century learning skills - critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity and then added a fifth “C” for civic awareness and engagement. Secretary Duncan’s comments suggest debate sparks a life-long love for political learning – by developing a sense of a political self. Unfortunately, there is little to no systematic research documenting the relationship between high school debate and political learning. Anecdotal stories, such as those told by Secretary Duncan, have yet to be qualified and measured.

The model of Urban Debate League participations identified by Secretary Duncan traces back to work started in Atlanta in 1985. Preston (2006) highlights that “...debate participation improves grades, increases a willingness to argue and increases debate knowledge among its

participants even within a year” (p. 160-161). Preston (2006) begins to question if debate helps “...student’s ability to discover *political* empowerment later in life” a skill going beyond gains in crystallized knowledge (p. 161). Preston (2006) asks if debate is a “...vehicle for constructive social change” for students traditionally marginalized by educational systems. Despite individual stories of political empowerment and students finding voices to express themselves politically, Preston (2006) remains concerned about the long-term benefits of debate within this political context arguing “...to conclude that on the political empowerment issue, the jury is still out” (p. 166). He hopes that future research will help determine if and how debate impacts personal relationship to political change and activism.

In addition to traditional measures of academic achievement identified by Mezuk, Bondarenki, Smith and Tucker, Winkler (2010) tracked discipline and other behavioral markers for students involved in two urban debate leagues. Winkler’s work in Milwaukee and Atlanta concludes that for students engaged in debate, overall disciplinary actions decreased significantly. Involvement in these urban debate leagues resulted in improved student conduct as measured by disciplinary incidents including fighting, excessive noise, cursing, talking back to their teachers, roaming the schools, sleeping in class, and using cell phones in addition to suspensions (Winkler, 2010, p. 85-86). Specific skills emphasized in these debate programs allowed student to practice various skills that prevented behavior characterized by acting out or tuning out of the educational process. Students practice civil discourse, listening, anticipating and respecting difference in opinions, and acting and speaking with confidence. One area studied by Winkler (2010) stands out among the rest. Reading, a skill central to debate success, may have a direct result on student behavior. Student surveys shed light onto why these reading skills matter. Students responded how they may ‘act out’ when asked to read in front of their

peers to preempt their embarrassment –acknowledging how students may choose disciplinary action instead of the humiliation association with illiteracy. Winkler (2009) points out how “After-school debate programs, steeped in a repetitive focus on oral reading activities and coupled with a series of competitions against other students from other schools, provide below-grade-level readers a low-risk way to improve vocabulary, increase fluency, and enhance reading comprehension” (p. 87). Students found this practice essential in preventing or correcting disruptive or otherwise anti-social behavior. Students responded how debate aids “...the communicative skills (listening, empathy, and persuasiveness) necessary to negotiate the conflicts that forestall their ability to lead successful lives” (Winkler, 2010, p. 86). Specifically, debate requires face-to-face communication requiring practice to civilly agree and disagree with one another in the same room. Winkler (2010) concludes how competitive policy debate has the transformative power to change how students perceive themselves and their opportunities by placing the onus of learning and responsibility on the individual student.

Closely linked with Winkler’s (2010) observations are studies of students’ self-perceptions as political actors or agents of social change. The closest parallel to political learning that has been studied reveals how debate students can grow as activists. Warner and Brushke (2001) emphasize the transformative potential of policy debate to bring to students crucial tools of empowerment. Focused on the setting of competitive tournament experience, Warner and Brushke (2001) “...examine the possibility of rekindling academic debate as a true solution to disempowerment and academic defalcation in marginalized schools” (p. 2).

Students learn to speak outside their comfort zones and engage in difficult dialectics about policy matters. The process of debate requires a critical stance of proving current government policy insufficient and requires questioning opposing teams’ arguments.

Students in the habit of questioning the claims of others and thinking through the possible objections of their own claims easily develop the mental faculties needed to become active consumers of information... [S]tudents almost automatically begin thinking through possible objections to any knowledge claim and developing probing questions about it (Warner and Brushke, 2001, p. 6).

A debate education becomes a way for students to think of themselves as activists and critics of society. This is a practice of empowerment. Warner and Brushke (2001) continue to highlight how practicing public speaking itself may be vitally empowering. Speaking in a highly engaged academic environment where the goal is analytical victory would put many on edge. Taking academic risks in a debate round, however, yields additional benefits. The process of debating allows students to practice listening and conceiving and re-conceiving ideas based on in-round cooperation. This cooperation, even between competing teams, establishes respect for the process of deliberation. This practice may in turn empower students to use speaking and listening skills outside the debate round and in their local communities skills making students more comfortable talking to people who are different from them (Warner and Brushke, 2001, p. 4-7). Moreover, there is inherent value in turning the traditional tables of learning around. Reversing the traditional classroom demonstrates students taking control of their own learning through the praxis of argumentation. Students learn to depend on themselves and their colleagues for information and knowledge and must cooperate through the debate process. Taken together, policy debate aids academic achievement, student behavior, critical thinking, and empowers students to view themselves as qualified agents for social change.

Adversarial Dialectics, the Learning of Empathy through Argumentative Pluralism

Other scholars note benefits to debate outside traditional academic achievement or behavioral measures. These studies theorize the importance in face-to-face communication and adversarial dialectics. Galloway, Debate Director at Samford University, studies the benefits to communication through dialogue and the switch-side requirement of policy debate. Galloway (2007) encourages audiences to view debate as a critical dialogue, where every argument is crafted to begin a meaningful, if not strategic, dialogue. The values not only advance intellectual gain, but also to look for argumentative consistency and personal validity.

[I]n a dialogical exchange, debaters come to realize the positions other than their own have value, and that reasonable minds can disagree on controversial issues. This respect encourages debaters to modify and adapt their own positions on critical issues without the threat of being labeled a hypocrite. The conceptualization of debate as a dialogue allows challenges to take place from a wide variety of perspectives. By offering a stable referent the affirmative must uphold, the negative can choose to engage the affirmative on the widest possible array of “counterwords,” enhancing the pedagogical process produced by debate (p. 12).

Viewing debate as a dialogue, helps move understanding debate beyond students set in one political ideology to those who must consider the best in arguments from multiple sides of an argument. One of the most compelling arguments as to how debate increases empathy, regards the practice of debating multiple sides of the same issue. This practice is one of political understanding as it helps create empathy by humanizing people who advance opposing arguments. This practice bridges the world of argument with political and personal understanding. “[T]he unique distinctions between debate and public speaking allow debaters the

opportunity to learn about a wide range of issues from multiple perspectives. This allows debaters to formulate their own opinions about controversial subjects through an in-depth process of research and testing of ideas” (Galloway, 2007, p. 13).

Galloway (2007) also advances an argument concerning the privileging of the resolution as a basis for debating. Galloway (2007) cites three pedagogical advantages to seeing the resolution and the first affirmative constructive as an invitation to dialogue. “First, all teams have equal access to the resolution. Second, teams spend the entire year preparing approaches for and against the resolution. Finally, the resolution represents a community consensus of worthwhile and equitably debatable topics rooted in a collective history and experience of debate” (p. 13). An important starting point for conversation, the resolution helps frame political conversations humanely. It preserves basic means for equality of access to base research and argumentation. Having a year-long stable resolution invites depth of argument and continuously rewards adaptive research once various topics have surfaced through practice or at debate tournaments.

As referenced above, the resolution provides a basis for research and discussion. Using the resolution as a starting point, students will debate the same resolution dozens or hundreds of times each year on both the affirmative and negative. This practice, called switch-side debate, establishes the expectation that a student will defend and answer multiple sides of similar arguments throughout a debate season. As a result, this practice increases one’s intellectual flexibility and understanding of multiple sides of hundreds of issues. Galloway (2007), Harrigan (2008), and Mitchell (2010) add to this discussion. Galloway (2007) theorizes the benefits to communication through switch-side debate. In part due to the rules requiring both sides be heard for equal amounts of time combined with the etiquette of listening, flowing, and answering all of

an opponent's argument, debate forces structured dialogue. In such, demands for fairness surface. Galloway advances how demanding dialogical fairness "...takes the form of a demand for equality of voice. Far from being a banal request for links to a disadvantage, fairness is a demand for respect, a demand to be heard, a demand that a voice backed by literally months upon months of preparation, research, and critical thinking not be silenced" (Galloway, 2007, p. 6). Underlying strategic calls for fairness, fairness of equitable debatable ground in switch-side debate demands recognizing a basic humanity in all persons involved. Viewing the first affirmative speech as the invitation to the rest of the debate, Galloway (2007) continues to articulate the academic benefits to switching sides. Theorizing the benefits of taking multiple sides of an issue, even sides of an issue someone does not agree with, Galloway concludes how debate encourages critical thought, meaningful exchange of ideas, and a better defense of one's own thought since ideas need defending against opposing argumentation.

After surveying literature dating back to the policy debate controversies of the 1950s and 1960s, Harrigan (2008) weighs the arguments for switch-side debate against the potential shortcomings associating with losing a sense of one's own personal convictions and/or the loss of intellectual certitude. Harrigan (2008) fuses these two concerns together in his answer. Submitting arguments for a debate surmounts to their dissection – exposing arguments to their assumptions, representations, framing, inferences, and consequences is the ultimate intellectual rigor of any given argument. "Switching sides grounds belief in reasonable reflexive thinking; it teaches that decisions should not be rendered until all positions and possible consequences have been considered in a reasoned manner" (Harrigan, 2008, p. 47). While debaters do not speak from a personal standpoint, they air arguments for critical consumption which may impact later personal advocacy. A paradox emerges; it is this distance from the argument that lays the

foundation for personal advocacy. "...[S]ound convictions can only be truly generated by the reflexive thinking spurred by debating both sides" (Harrigan, 2008, p. 46). Furthermore, promoting argumentative pluralism offers hope for developing empathy, acceptance, and understanding. Acknowledging possible truths from a variety of perspectives lends credibility to belief in individual reason and the kernels of truth rooted in many perspectives.

"[A]rgumentative pluralism holds great promise for a politics based on understanding and accommodation that runs contrary to the dominant forces of economic, political, and social exclusion. Pluralism requires that individuals acknowledge opposing beliefs and arguments by forcing an understanding that personal convictions are not universal... [I]nstead of being personally invested in the truth and general acceptance of a position, debaters use arguments instrumentally, as tools, and as pedagogical devices in the search for larger truths" (Harrigan, 2008, p. 51-52).

Taken together, switch-side debating at its best holds immense potential not only for argumentative critical thinking but also for the creation of critical personal advocacies and social forces encouraging social inclusion and democracy.

Switch-side debating has been taken to heart by many in the debate community as well as attracting attention at the top levels of government. The 'real-world', a world conceived as being occupied by persons no longer engaged in debating contests, appears to be paying close attention to the benefits to switch-side debates. Mitchell (2010) conjures the up the ancient work of Protagoras and what he "...called *dissoi logoi* – the practice of airing multiple sides of vexing questions for the purpose of stimulating critical thinking" (Mitchell, 2010, p. 97-98). The US Intelligence Community and the Environmental Protection Agency are two real-world examples of organizations attempting to thwart the dangers of group-think. By encouraging switch-side

debate within their organization, their goal is “...to untangle disparate threads of knotty technoscientific issues, in part by integrating structured debating exercises into institutional decision-making processes” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 95). By training persons within their organization in switch-side debate or by bringing in trained policy debaters to debate for their organization, multiple issues are aired which might not otherwise be given space for consideration. Switch-side debate “...requires more than the sheer information processing power; it demands forms of communicative dexterity that enable translation of ideas across differences and facilitate cooperative work by interlocutors from heterogeneous backgrounds” (Mitchell, 2010, p. 100). This deliberation often checks against dangerous institutional group-think and counters traditional formulaic decision-making process. Switch-side debating offers a forum for the relatively safe exploration of a variety of issues and invites arguments from multiple sources of authority. This practice may prove to be a bulwark against insular and isolated institutional or partisan practices. Citing Munksgaard and Pfister, Mitchell demonstrates the unique perspective debaters may bring to the table.

‘Having a public debater argue against their convictions, or confess their indecision on a subject and subsequent embrace of argument as a way to seek clarity, could shake up the prevailing view of debate as a war of words. Public uptake of the possibility of switch-side debate may help lessen the polarization of issues inherent in prevailing debate formats because students are no longer seen as wedded to their arguments. This could transform public debate from a tussle between advocates, with each public debater trying to convince the audience in a Manichean struggle about the truth of their side, to a more inviting exchange focused on the content of the other’s argumentation and the process of deliberative exchange’ (Mitchell citing Munksgaard and Pfister, 2010, p. 110).

Basing debates on a predictable resolution invites discussion centered on argument and permits continuously adapting multiple perspectives in and out of a student's world-view.

Controversies and Limitations

High school students experience unique developmental challenges as they search for their own identities and establish relationships with authority and their peers. In addition to social changes, high school students also actively seek information, challenge systems of power, and negotiate their own world-views amid conflicting messages of childhood and emerging adult expectations. High school debate may heighten this search as students seek to know more about their own political identity through relatively mature exchanges of information. These maturing dialogues do not trade-off with stereotypical teen-aged irresponsible acts of foolishness. From a sociological perspective, Fine (2004) investigated the high school debate community and observed students' behavior, attitudes, and characteristics. Fine (2004) advances that adolescents are agents of their own world. They interact with institutions and persons that determine their sense of self and their world-views. What those experiences are that influence that child's development help determine immediate behavior and long-term identity. Thus, "...adolescents shape their actions in light of how they are viewed and treated by adults and adult institutions, how they are viewed and treated by their peers, and how they desire to view themselves" (Fine, 2004, p. 2). Both mature and childish, high school debaters "...have the power to construct their own lifeworlds, but not always in ways that adults endorse" (Fine, 2004, p.7). Questions of moral and ethical development surround what type of arguments students are exposed to, what type of competition students experience, and overall how coaching can impact a child's development. Each of these questions raises ethical questions within the debate community.

Controversies do emerge that question debaters' dialogue, the mechanics of debate process, and the intensely competitive world of high stakes policy debate. Competition may fundamentally challenge how students, coaches, and teachers treat one another. Positioning debate as an ethical dialogue acknowledges the potentially devastating world of competition and manipulation. As early as the 1970s, questions and concerns regarding how changes in style were impacting the collegiate and high school debate communities. The decline in participation in high school and college participation has often been attributed to the fast pace of speaking, judges' reconstruction argument (as opposed to basing decisions primarily on what was spoken in the round), and relatively inane construction of arguments that may favor quantity over quality of argument (Rowland and Deathridge, 1988, p. 247; Rickert, 1978; Tumposky, 2004). Rowland and Deathridge (1988) are among many who cite decreased collegiate participation as reflective of the inability to sustain such a specialized activity. Gerber (2009) also documents the tension between keeping debate a specialized, 'hard' activity and appealing to general audiences. Given that "...quoting expert testimony or literature, in mass quantity, and at speeds of 300 words-per-minute is the norm in American college debate" (p. 82). Gerber (2009) argues this could be alienating to both audiences and potential participants. This college practice is driven down to the high schools. Looking at high school numbers, "high school policy debate practices closely mirror and indeed are modeled from the intercollegiate policy circuit" (Gerber, 2009, p. 83). Moreover, the highly technical aspects of debate began "...rewarding debaters who relied more heavily on the expert testimony of others than on their own persuasive abilities and public speaking skills (Gerber, 2009, p. 84). The convergence of the fast pace, heavy reliance on evidence, and highly specialized jargon remain at the center of the controversy within policy debate.

Ethical questions also surround classroom teaching practices – especially regarding politics. Concerns of bias and indoctrination often cause teachers to shy away from current political issues (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007). Warning flags of bias or moral indoctrination arise when teachers attempt to complicate students’ world-view by asking how their textbooks may be biased or how they might resolve conflicts differently. This fear can crush curiosity, inquiry and intrigue among teachers and students. Parents and/or governments may be concerned that the school instills or shapes values inconsistent with the home (Buzzelli, 2001; Mahoney, 2009). To further White’s (2009) analysis, it is important to consider how not questioning information is political and a practice of power. Information schools teach as truth, may damage a student’s ability to authentically evaluate and synthesize truth and values.

Mumby (2011) applies Habermas’ project to demonstrate school’s power over the individual student. The educational sphere, he advances, is colonized by specific knowledge. “...[E]ducation functions strategically as a means to produce workers, managers, and an administrative elite, rather than as a means to enhance possibilities for emancipation and social transformation” (Mumby, 2011, p. 87). Schools crystallize specific pieces of information – creating a hierarchy of pre-packaged knowledge bits where students passively consume information. If the model of teaching is based on transmission, it is easy to see why teachers may be reluctant to talk of politics since any political ideas students’ may be traced back to a teacher. Thus, teacher-as-deliverer-of-information denies a chance for students to read, explore, discuss, and re-evaluate their own political issues and identities. Rarely are current teaching practices or decision-making processes problematized as being innately political. Teaching acquiescence to authority figures, unquestioned reliance on textbooks, or uncontested budget and

curriculum decisions teach submission to sometimes less informed authority figures. Failure to acknowledge this education practice as political solidifies hierarchies of power and privilege and can train learned helplessness. Policy debate practices may counter this traditional transmission model of teaching. As an ethical model for teaching, debate may remove the risk of indoctrination as it allows students to explore political issues on their own.

A final background note provides context for re-evaluating curriculum. If the intrinsic worth of the individual (through behavior or communication) does not motivate debate involvement, the state may see value in teaching politics and ethics for new testing measures. As schools saunter away from traditional standardized tests that measure crystallized tidbits of information, new measures are being established. The International Center for Leadership in Education is successfully advancing the “Common Core” approach to learning thereby reshaping how academic skills are classified and taught (Daggat, 2010). In particular, the push toward “Quadrant D Learning” requires students to piece together disjointed pieces of information and ‘synthesize’ a coherent world-view of personal understanding and advocacy. Quadrant D learning requires students to apply a process for understanding how to apply knowledge to unpredictable, controversial situations (Daggat, 2010). The pedagogy behind an education steeped in ethics establishes the reasoning skills required for complex situations (Bouhnik and Giat, 2009). This assists students to address controversial and sensitive concepts such that “...learning occurs through the accretion of intelligent habits that reflexively guide human action and inquiry” (Ralston, 2008, p. 75). Given the Common Core’s goal to assess students’ application and manipulation of knowledge in a controversial and unpredictable world situations, a policy debate education could help immensely. It could aid in developing “...the ability to

communicate across disciplinary boundaries about the products of our separate inquiries... It is that goal of making what is originally sequestered to separate and specialized (scientific) communities of inquiry into what is common, and thus a part of a broader or more encompassing community” (Ralston, 2008, p. 77). These controversies are important to acknowledge as they inform the political and communicative possibilities for debate.

Research Questions and Terminology

To summarize, targeted political learning opportunities directly correlate with increased political learning. In addition, policy debate increases academic achievement, improves students’ behavior, establishes a sense of empowerment, and generally improves communication. What has been left out of the research is a study connecting the practice of policy debate with explicit tenets of political learning as studied by the Political Engagement Project including political knowledge and understanding, political motivation, and political skills (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007). As outlined in the next section, I have attempted to investigate and bridge the gap in research regarding participation in policy debate and political learning. Based on the PEP research, the three questions advanced in this thesis are:

1. How does participation in competitive high school policy debate contribute to political knowledge?
2. How does participation in competitive high school policy debate contribute to one’s political identity and sense of political efficacy?
3. How does participation in competitive high school policy debate establish political skills?

Chapter Three: Methodology

The goal of this study is to discern *how* participation in competitive high school debate contributes to political learning. As explained, the Carnegie Foundation’s Political Engagement Project (PEP) identified three development domains of political learning including “...political knowledge and understanding, political motivation, including interest in politics and a sense of political efficacy and identity; and a wide array of practical skills of democratic participation” (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrich, Corngold, 2007, p. 5). These domains motivated the primary research questions advanced in this thesis:

1. How does participation in competitive high school policy debate contribute to political knowledge?
2. How does participation in competitive high school policy debate contribute to one’s political identity and sense of political efficacy?
3. How does participation in competitive high school policy debate establish political skills?

Secondary to these research questions, participation in policy debate may also impact how students internalize core political values established by PEP. PEP’s core political values are intellectual pluralism (understanding of multiple perspectives on any specific political issue), rational discourse, intellectual autonomy, open-mindedness, and civility. Overall, the design of this study helps to determine how policy debate uniquely contributes to political engagement and also in ways qualitatively differently from service learning. Moreover, it may provide insight and answers to the cry lamenting the fall of civil and social capital.

Grounded Theory

Introduced in 1967, grounded theory offers helpful guidance to arrange qualitative data in a purposeful way. Corbin and Strauss (1990) explain, “The procedures of grounded theory are designed to develop a well integrated set of concepts that provide a thorough theoretical

explanation of social phenomena under study” (p. 5). Grounded theory not only permits establishing a conceptual framework through which theories are established, but it also scientifically organizes data (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Researchers are called upon to observe, reflect, organize, and reflect again in an on-going effort to refine both their understanding of qualitative data, and their own role in the research process. Rather than positing a single hypothesis, grounded theory offers opportunities for the researcher to make observations and postulate or predict relationships between concepts and phenomena through exploratory research. Thus, grounded theory directs scholars toward particular approaches to research.

For this project, I chose to interview former high school debater students. Grounded theory is uniquely suited to make meaning of interview data by systematically organizing, filtering, and analyzing the interview process. Interviewing allows a researcher to interrogate both acts and the meaning of those acts for individuals. Interviews also give the researcher important opportunities to engage in the reflective process while advancing a theoretical understanding of data (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). These procedures signify Strauss and Corbin’s constructivist perspective on meaning making. As a former high school debater myself, it was important to consider my objectivity regarding how I asked questions or which questions warranted follow up questions. The constructivist approach to grounded theory, along with criteria established by open coding, met this demand and allowed a healthy interplay between the subject and me. I could interrogate my own biases and ask conceptually based questions to effectively draw out various phenomena. As someone who could speak the debate language, I could access thoughts and practices unique to the debate community – a practice consistent with the constructivist approach to grounded theory. “Constructivists study how participants construct meaning and actions, and they do so from as close to the inside of the experience as

they can get. Constructivists also view data analysis as a construction that not only locates the data in time, place, culture, and context, but also reflects the researcher's thinking" (Charmaz, 203, p. 313). Grounded theory provided a meaningful format for me to interview former high school debaters.

I adapted the PEP survey into pertinent questions for former high school debaters. Those preliminary questions served as a base for evaluating and revising additional questions. The interview questions began a directed conversation between the respondent and me. These questions then "...shaped but not determined" the path of the interview (Charmaz, 2003, p. 319). As concepts became more relevant, common, or irrelevant, I further adapted the interview protocol. By asking open-ended questions, respondents reported their unique experiences in their own words with more depth of insight than a written survey. As a means to collect 'multiple realities,' the constructivist approach called for me to simultaneously analyze respondents' answers and develop more questions surrounding particularly provocative answers. This continuous analytical process established the groundwork to clarify, nuance, and complicate each answer. For example, the iterative process of writing theoretical memos between interviews yielded additional insight into concepts common between high school debaters that may not have otherwise surfaced. Concepts regarding debate as a political community, teaching as a political act, experiences associated with travel, and networking questions emerged only after listening and re-imagining the critical concepts of high school debate participation.

Furthermore, at the end of each interview, I spent time to ask questions not outlined by the PEP survey including those that explicitly asked about the limitation of political knowledge and frustrations within policy debate. This provided an opportunity to compare and contrast individual debate experiences while also looking for commonalities of experience. Also,

although the initial PEP survey assessed the three developmental domains (political knowledge/understanding, political identity, and political skills) effectively, it did not inquire into the relationship between the three.

Grounded theory provided a concrete structure to conduct interviews of former high school debaters in order to search “for commonalities among responses (Frey, Botan, and Kreps, 2000, p. 281). Finding commonalities in turn created a collective story of similar and varying experiences within the high school debate community. These inductive steps allowed me to study and theorize political realities for these former high school debaters while “...rendering a conceptual understanding of them” (Charmaz, 2003, p. 311).

Research Design

Interview Question Design

To demonstrate how the PEP survey was adapted to meet the research questions, I will first describe PEP’s basic survey procedure to compare its relevance to research on high school debate. The PEP surveyed 612 American college undergraduates before and after their involvement in a political learning opportunity (see Appendix B for the PEP survey). These opportunities ranged from internships for persons in political involvement, internships at political offices, participation in Model United Nations, enrollment in political theory courses working on Democracy in Action projects, CIVICUS learning programs, urban literacy projects, and many more. Participation in competitive speech activities such as policy debate was not included.

The PEP survey focused on students’ political knowledge, political identity, and political skills pre and post participation. The PEP survey utilized a six-point Likert scale wherein students self-assessed various aspects of their own political learning. PEP asked students to evaluate their political knowledge including awareness of governmental institutions, current

events, economic and democratic theory, and ethical considerations of government along with assessing their sense of themselves as political beings and their comfort levels with political advocacy. I adapted the PEP survey to meet the specific considerations and practices of the policy debate world by altering questions to be relevant to debate practices, directing students to comment on their debate experience, and turning the questions into open-ended opportunities for reflection, clarification, and nuance.

To make explicit the type of questions I used to conceptually tie together my theoretical framework, I outline by research question the interview questions which served as the basis for my data analysis. The first research question asked how does participation in competitive high school policy debate contribute to political knowledge? This question is geared toward understanding basic political processes, political theory, and political philosophy. Questions I asked to target this developmental domain were:

- How often would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs? Do you feel you follow news stories differently because of debate?
- Did debate in any way help you understand the political world? Please describe your comfort or knowledge level with the following:
 - Current national or international political issues, such as those on the front page of major newspapers
 - Current local or state political issues, such as those dealt with by city councils or state agencies
 - Political leaders and their roles
 - Political institutions and how they work
 - Current economic issues
 - Organizations that work on social and political problems
 - Understanding of a particular issue or set of policy issues in depth
 - Understanding the values and ethical dimensions involved in politics

These questions provide a basis for understanding how debaters perceived their comfort and knowledge levels regarding various aspects of the political landscape and process.

The second research question asked how participation in competitive high school policy debate contributed to one's political identity, motivation, and sense of political efficacy. This

question deals with the individual's ability to have consistent, thoughtful political ideas and a general understanding of themselves as a political person. This question directs attention to the debater as a politically engaged and motivated person. Questions on the interview protocol that focused attention on how debate translated into personal relevance included:

- Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a political person? How? Do you differentiate between being partisan and being political?
- Do you feel debate has changed, solidified, or in any way altered your political identity? If so, how?
- How would you describe your role in the political process after your debate experience? How do you approach political conversations?
Looking back, do you feel that your experience suggests that debate:
 - Encourages students to express their political opinions?
 - Encourages students to be open to diverse political opinions?
 - Helps students consider political issues from a variety of perspectives?
 - How qualified do you feel you are to participate in the political process?
 - Do you see your daily activities as political?
- Reflecting on your debate experience, have you ever or how likely are you to get involved in community/social or political events? In the future, do you think you will be connected to social organizations or political activities?

These questions exemplify how debate may influence a sense of political self. Respondents had a chance to identify themselves politically and analyze their own sense of political awareness and efficacy evolving from their debate experience.

The third research question inquired as to how participation in competitive high school policy debate establishes political skills. This question targets how the process of debate may impact participants' ability to be an effective advocate for themselves or impact social and policy changes. Questions I asked that aimed at specific skills included:

- How qualified do you feel you are to participate in the political process? If you needed to make a policy change (community, government, school, organizing a benefit, or volunteer work), how hard or easy would it be for you to accomplish your goals?
- Reflecting on your debate experience, how did debate help your comfort level or knowledge with the political world? In other words, how well can you _____
 - Articulate your ideas and beliefs to others?
 - Reach a compromise?
 - Help diverse groups to work together?

- Deal with conflict when it comes up?
- Make a statement at a public meeting?
- Talk about social barriers such as race, class, gender, and privilege?
- Assume the leadership of a group?
- Recognize or define conflicting political interests?
- Write well about political topics?
- Know whom to contact to help resolve a social or political problem?
- Weigh the pros and cons of different political positions?
- Engage in civil discourse?
- Learn skills and methods for addressing political problems?
- Listen to others' political ideas?
- Defend a political view using reason and examples?
- Evaluate political information or arguments?
- Debate the strengths and weaknesses of different political views?
- Work effectively with others on political goals?
- Design and implement strategies to address political problems?

Respondents were encouraged to answer these questions and offer any additional insight regarding other skills they received from their debate experience. Moreover, these questions revealed if debate provided portable political skills for 'real' political world beyond the academic game of debate.

Overall, these questions converged to create a final interview template (see Appendix C). These questions aided in assessing how debate contributed to political learning. Whereas the PEP surveyed undergraduates about undergraduate experiences, this project interviews undergraduates about their high school experience. The PEP expressed hope to discover secondary level programs that influence and inform students to be politically engaged especially in light of the dismal reports noting the diminished levels of political knowledge among high school students. Combined with the literature noting the importance of early political identity formation and practicing political participation, this study attempts to provide analysis regarding the benefit of competitive policy debate to political learning goals at the secondary level.

Sample of Participants

Selection of Sample

Participation in competitive high school policy debate was a requirement for members of the target sample population. This study sought the feedback of former high school students at least 18 years old, graduated from high school, and those who demonstrated a sustained commitment to competitive policy debate (as defined by competing in at least five tournaments over at least 2 years of high school debate experience). These students proved their commitment to competitive high school debate and have had time to reflect on their high school experiences.

I sent email requests to summer institute directors and many high school coaches in the spring of 2012 (Appendix D). Those who responded were in some way connected, at least geographically, to debate programs at University of Georgia (GA), Georgetown University (DC), George Washington University (DC), Michigan State University (MI), and Wayne State University (MI). Once I received permission to conduct the study, institute directors and coaches communicated with their staff or their former debaters about the study. Directors and coaches then communicated with me about appropriate times and places for interviews. Invited interviewees were not limited to hired students; any former high school debater was welcomed to interview, provided they met the criteria for the sample. Thus, participation in college debate was not a criterion for consideration. I traveled to summer debate institutes and talked with their employees and friends as part of a convenience sample. I conducted the structured interviews entirely in person throughout June 2012.

Description of Sample

The targeted and actual interview size was 25 participants. Guest, Arwen, and Johnson (2006) explain how interviews within a relatively homogenous population achieve saturation. Full saturation, reflecting the depth and breadth of possible answers, is reached at twelve interviews whereas most trends can be identified after six interviews. Given that competitive

policy debate is a relatively small community, most themes and trends would begin emerging between six and twelve interviews. Increasing the target number to 25 allowed me to supplement findings and purposefully investigate redundancy in responses. Moreover, the number of interview subjects permitted a variety of voices from different geographic regions, different debate programs, and different levels of debate experiences into the fold for analysis.

The sample also represented various demographics. Demographic information is provided in general terms so as not to reveal respondents identities given the small community of debaters. Public, private, and charter school attendance was represented along with a wide array of socio-economic statuses. While most students identified as middle class, a few self-identified as upper middle class students. Many students self-identified as lower class coming from Urban Debate Leagues, more rural programs, or were existing on loans or college stipends. Ages ranged from 18 through 39 years old. The median age was 24 with the mean age of 24.82 years old. Ten of the twenty-five interviewees were female; a few participants self-identified as African, African-American, or Indigenous Mexican – the only self-identified races or ethnicities other than white or Caucasian. Only one described any attempt at military service. All but one had registered to vote and all but two had the experience of voting. The years of high school debate experience ranged from two to five (having starting in middle school) and the median years of high school experience was four years.

Participants represented both first generation college students and students from a long line of advanced college degrees. Thus, this sample included various student demographics – students of higher socio-economic status who may have self-funded their debate participation, students whose school districts may have funded their travels, and students who participated because of Urban Debate League funding. This range hopefully included a multitude of

experiences to fully answer how policy debate contributes to political learning. While the interviews occurred in only three states, students were from various states including programs from Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nevada, Missouri, Kansas, Texas, as well as the District of Columbia.

Interview Process, Data Collection, and Analysis Process

Interview Process

Participants received information sheets in lieu of collecting informed consent signatures to prevent any loss of confidentiality. The information sheet (Appendix E) informed the respondent about the study itself, the scope of the study, all procedures, contact information, potential risks, potential benefits to the study, and information where they may retrieve the study results. Respondents were guaranteed that their consent to participate in the study is voluntary and could be rescinded at any time.

There were minimal risks to the subjects in the study. To preserve confidentiality, all respondents received a randomly generated number and were assured demographic information would be reported in general terms. The other main risk to participants concerned time. Interviews took an average of 50 minutes. Respondents were allowed to take breaks as needed and to rescind participation if necessary. No one rescinded. There were no financial costs or benefits to the participating students. Institute directors were also not reimbursed or compensated for their time in helping to coordinate and gather participants. Motivation for participation was centered on helping to provide insights regarding participating in high school debate and political learning for policy debate coaches, teachers, curriculum directors, and more.

Data Collection and Organization

To collect interview data, I had a set of the prepared interview questions to guide me along with an electronic voice recorder. At the beginning of each interview, participants were identified by number and then proceeded to provide demographic information for my analysis only. The voice recorder documented the interviews as I took notes on interesting responses that might generate follow up questions or require clarification throughout the interview process.

I asked directed questions based on the interview protocol. Participants reported their experiences regarding high school policy debate and its contribution to political learning. The voice recordings were used to transcribe the participants' responses after the interview. I organized this data into a spreadsheet – with questions down one side and interviewee numbers along the top. Each response was transcribed into its appropriate location within the table.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory provided the theoretical framework to extract meaning from respondents' answers. As noted, many questions were re-imagined and revised throughout the process. I embraced the interrelated process of data collection and analysis. This began by testing the initial interview protocol four times. Throughout the fieldwork, I continued to analyze the data for cues and insight overlooked by the initial questions. Using relevant components of open, axial, and selective coding, I started with concepts of open coding by comparing "...events/actions/interactions... with others for similarities and differences" (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 12). Initial conceptual categories were established from these responses. Moreover, during and after each interview, I coded common and differing experiences that complicated or exposed critical connections among the debaters' experiences. I took time between each interview to write theoretical notes and memos in order to retune my ear for particularities in responses and revise questions for later interviews.

I then used axial coding to create initial overarching observations (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 13-14). I used the transcription process to map out connections between questions and concepts. Once completed, the spreadsheet created a visual to assess the relationship between and within each question. This facilitated comparing and contrasting the range of answers as well as looking for nuanced or competing experiences in order to build conceptual frameworks for analysis. Finally, in the later stages of this research, I used selective coding which is the “...process by which *all* categories are unified around a ‘core’ category” (Corbin and Strauss, 1990, p. 14). Cross-cutting concepts were parsed and integrated into their core categories.

A Note on Reporting

In order to preserve confidentiality as policy debate can be a tight-knit community, throughout the remaining chapters I use terms such as most, many, several, a couple, and one to refer to demographic information rather than using specific numbers. ‘Most’ refers to at least twenty respondent answers, ‘many’ refers to upwards of ten respondents, and ‘several’ refers to at least three respondents. These definitions help clarify the interpretation of qualitative data collected for this project. Similarly, I do not reveal the exact dates of the interviews as doing so could reveal a respondent’s identity to other debaters involved in the research. Finally, the terms respondent, participant, debater, and interviewee all refer to persons who were interviewed in conjunction with this research project. I represent the exact words respondents used by indenting and italicizing them throughout the remaining chapters.

Chapter Four: Analysis

To answer how policy debate contributes to a political education, I address the Political Engagement Project's (PEP) political learning developmental domains and values. After introducing each developmental domain, I examine each in depth by exploring the range of responses provided, parse trends within those responses, and embed discussion of the five core values throughout the analysis to understand debate's contribution to political learning.

Knowledge and Understanding of the Political Process

Political knowledge and understanding of the political process depends upon a fundamental grasp of how government works. This includes basic knowledge of the branches of government, government agencies, key leaders, and nuanced details regarding how committees are created to impact policy formation. Ideally, basic knowledge functions as a gateway to a deeper appreciation for the interplay between branches, agencies, and leaders within government informing why and how policies are created, compromises are reached, and particular political strategies are developed. Without a doubt, every debater interviewed demonstrated increased comfort with and knowledge of the political world as a direct result of their debate experience. Many debaters offered specific examples of policies, agencies, and leaders to prove how their thinking was heightened or even changed as a result of debate. Similarly, many former high school debate students volunteered comparisons to their high school government, collegiate political science, or even law school education to show how their debate education captured the intricacies of the political process and provided a philosophically critical education superior to other experiences. I explore specific trends regarding debate as a political education - ranging from the resolutional mandate of switch-side debate, strategic argumentative choices, and the

competitive necessity of following the news followed by a discussion of the limits of this education.

In-Depth Political Knowledge

The first trend to emerge concerns how debate fosters in-depth political knowledge. Immediately, every resolution calls for analysis of United States federal government action. Given that each debater may debate in over a hundred different unique rounds, there is a competitive incentive thoroughly research as many credible, viable, and in-depth strategies as possible. Moreover, the requirement to debate both affirmative and negative sides of the topic injects a creative necessity to defend viable arguments from a multitude of perspectives.

As a result, the depth of knowledge spans questions not only of what, if anything, should be done in response to a policy question, but also questions of who, when, where, and why. This opens the door to evaluating intricacies of government branch, committee, agency, and even specific persons who may yield different cost-benefit outcomes to conducting policy action.

Consider the following responses:

I think debate helped me understand how Congress works and policies actually happen which is different than what government classes teach you. Process counterplans are huge - reading and understanding how delegation works means you understand that it is not just congress passes a bill and the president signs. You understand that policies can happen in different methods. Executive orders, congress, and courts counterplans have all helped me understand that policies don't just happen the way we learn in government. There are huge chunks of processes that you don't learn about in government that you do learn about in debate.

Similarly,

Debate has certainly aided [my political knowledge]. The nature of policy-making requires you to be knowledgeable of the political process because process does effect the outcome. Solvency questions, agent counterplans, and politics are tied to process questions.

When addressing the overall higher level of awareness of agency interaction and ability to identify pros and cons of various committee, agency, or branch activity, most respondents traced this knowledge to the politics research spanning from their affirmative cases, solvency debates, counterplan ideas, and political disadvantages.

One of the recurring topics concerns congressional vs. executive vs. court action and how all of that works. To be good at debate you really do need to have a good grasp of that. There is really something to be said for high school debate - because without debate I wouldn't have gone to the library to read a book about how the Supreme Court works, read it, and be interested in it. Maybe I would've been a lawyer anyway and I would've learned some of that but I can't imagine at 16 or 17 I would've had that desire and have gone to the law library at a local campus to track down a law review that might be important for a case. That aspect of debate is unparalleled - the competitive drive pushes you to find new materials.

Similarly,

I think [my political knowledge] comes from the politics research that we have to do. You read a lot of names name-dropped in articles. You know who has influence in different parts of congress. You know how different leaders would feel about different policies and how much clout they have. This comes from links and internal links.

Overall, competitive debaters must have a depth of political knowledge on hand to respond to and formulate numerous arguments. It appears debaters then internalize both the information itself and the motivation to learn more. This aids the PEP value of intellectual pluralism as debaters seek not only an oversimplified 'both' sides of an issue, but multiple angles of many arguments. Debaters uniquely approach arguments from a multitude of perspectives – often challenging traditional conventions of argument. With knowledge of multiple perspectives, debaters often acknowledge their relative dismay with television news and traditional outlets of news media as superficial outlets for information.

I've definitely discovered more depth on the issues. Television news is almost worthless even when they are doing a story in depth because it is only a 3 minute high level summary of something. I didn't realize until debate that most newspapers and television stories are just an overview and often the issue is much more complicated than the average person ever gets to see - which is fine - but if you really do want to go learn

about an issue you need to look at it from as many sides and try to gather everything you can.

All respondents attributed a vast amount of or some of their initial motivation to seek political knowledge directly to their debate experience (with one exception who was motivated not only by personal interest and by competitive success in debate but also by a fear of being caught and shamed on national television by Jay Leno's *Jaywalking* crew!).

Selection of Stylized Argumentation

Solvency, agent or process counterplans, the politics disadvantage, and critiques emerged as the major issues contributing to a political education. In effort to make these issues transparent, I use the debaters' reflections to address how each stylized argument may contribute to a political education. Solvency questions concern specific plans of action. An affirmative is tasked to present a plan of action of in response to the resolitional demand. For instance, as two debaters independently recalled, in response to a resolution calling for increased academic achievement in secondary schools, they proposed including curriculum regarding gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgendered person's contributions to society or the protection against firing teachers who were gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, or transgendered. An affirmative could choose to specify a branch of government to implement this proposal – to have Congress enact, the Courts rule it Constitutional, the President to issue an executive order, or a number of other methods to implement this plan. The negative could use solvency arguments to question the effectiveness of this plan of action. Questions about Congressional efficacy, Congressional horse-trading or backlash, Supreme Court activism or enforcement questions, or an executive's unbridled use of executive authority to demonstrate presidential power, begin a long train of possible negative arguments based on the political process of advocating and implementing specific proposals. Thus, the negative may choose to force a debate regarding the specific branch of action, the

specific merits of the plan, and/or may argue how the policy may impact governmental leaders' other initiatives should they advocate for the affirmative's plan. Regardless of the negative strategic attack, the research required to engage in this debate demands political knowledge.

Another specific argument referenced by the debaters concerns counterplans. As mentioned, the affirmative typically presents a plan of action. The negative then may choose to advance their own plan – a plan counter to and allegedly superior to the affirmative's proposal. These counterplans may question the process the affirmative utilizes. Using the GLBT example above, should the affirmative choose to advocate for Congressional enactment, the negative could present a different branch for action – say the Supreme Court. Debates ensue questioning the merits of each side's chosen agent of action. The winner of this debate will need to prove that there are strategic 'net benefits' to their chosen method of implementation. Debaters will then argue about advantages and disadvantages to Congressional action compared to a Supreme Court ruling. These debates can go even deeper. Debates may center on which agency, cabinet, inferior court, or committee should advance the plan or counterplan. Debaters who referenced energy and environmental resolutions discussed plan and counterplan debates surrounding specific agency and cabinet level offices. These debates would require research regarding if the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Department of Energy, or even the Bureau of Indian Affairs should approach a plan. As a direct result of these potential advocacies, debaters have a competitive incentive to plan, research, and formulate strategic arguments in favor of and against numerous intricate processes resulting in a relatively sophisticated level of understanding.

One argument consistent throughout debater responses highlights the importance or even the frustration with a negative disadvantage known broadly as 'politics.' As an affirmative

presents their plan, the negative has the right to introduce a series of arguments highlighting disadvantages to the affirmative's proposal. This happens within the structure of a disadvantage itself – as it contains a statement of what negative consequences may occur should the plan be enacted. These bridges, or links, function to reveal the political chain reaction of the plan. The politics disadvantage may start as broadly as asking if the executive or the legislative branch may take credit or blame for a specific policy and how that may impact its own political agenda. As one debater referenced, he was keen on debating specific legislative and executive agendas because the politics disadvantage offered a way to introduce politically relevant and contentious topics including the Law of the Sea Treaty, Equal Pay Act, Affordable Health Care, nuclear arms reduction treaties, and much more. If a plan was implemented, the negative may argue it created a political backlash or drained a president's political capital making him less able to advocate for a specific agenda item. Knowledge of the political docket, political horse-trading, and how policies may be framed for political gain requires debaters to know not only the merits of specific agenda items but also to identify where the president and key members of Congress stand on specific issues. Knowing the process, committee members, and their stances on political issues is a natural process for the debater. Almost every debater identified this process as self-motivating. Many knew that whether they initiated this debate or instead just had to answer the disadvantage, they had internalized the need to research this political knowledge.

Debaters repeatedly commented on a final type or style of argument called critiques. Critiques (or as commonly spelled in debate – kritik) offer opportunities to question underlying philosophical assumptions behind policy action, language choices, identities, and representations of information. For many debaters who are bored with or skeptical of process debates, critiques offer a different form of political knowledge and engagement. Critiques may span from pointing

out flawed market system assumptions underpinning solvency action, racial, gender, homophobic, ableist, or otherwise dehumanizing language choices, flawed democratic theories, and more. Almost every debater said that this is also a form of political knowledge – a knowledge more broad and healthy than the narrow focus on political leaders. Many debaters acknowledged the critical aspects of debate as their hook into sustained debate participation – as it provided a way to challenge and formulate ideas about themselves, their world, as well as their policy choices. A few debaters found critiquing personal identities and experiences potentially emotionally devastating as it made the debate about their personal experiences instead of an external evaluation of research. Those who found the personal critique practice difficult did not feel that style of argument was an authentic advocacy nor was policy debate the proper venue to air those concerns. With time, however, most debaters said they have learned to rethink their previous assumptions or word choices in response to the critique debate. Even apart from the in-round discussions of critiques, many take discussions of gender, race, class, and other questions of privilege outside the debate round. Described as foundational by multiple debaters, being exposed to these critical arguments during early stages of social development can have a lasting impact on one’s political understanding. Consider the following story of a debater who grew up in a self-described conservative region of the country.

I grew up playing sports so I grew up in a culture of masculinity around derogatory terms used toward women and people of different sexual orientations. In my junior year of high school I was exposed to and decided to read a sexual orientation education as my affirmative - to add glbt curriculum into secondary schools as means to increase academic achievement... Through that process I grew - not only socially but also politically to realize that gay rights positions are more than this is what conservatives think and this is what liberals think but that there are pragmatic and social needs that can be addressed with ideas like this. That affirmative helped me fall in love with debate. That affirmative helped me change my view toward other people that might be different than me in terms of their sexual identities. It certainly helped me think about the language I used at the time - instead of using derogatory terms or referring to everything at the time as 'gay' which I tended to do when I was younger I learned that wasn't the

smartest idea ever. I got a clearer picture of the complexity of the world and how the black and white nature I thought it was when I was growing up was not really case.

The critique, or questioning of assumptions, applies to both the affirmative and the negative. Thus critiques are ubiquitous in debate; they may be employed at anytime should a team find another team's assumptions, language, or representations problematic. As many debaters internalized these ideas and made them part of their political identities, debaters may be expanding the question of what is political beyond the more narrow scope of the Political Engagement Project.

Debaters revealed how critiques uniquely allow practice posing and answering questions about privilege both for personal and competitive benefit.

I am much better at [talking about privilege] given that debate is in my life. Part of it is being more aware and more knowledgeable and forming way to start and have those conversations. My partner and I would make a lot of gender arguments in some ways that would cause others to freak out and be really angry and other times not. We try to figure out that scale of how to talk about something that is difficult to talk about - debate can be helpful for that. I know use it when talking to people outside of debate... Those debates inject a bunch a lot of productive discomfort into debate. ... Even if you are very angry, I think that they produce something different and more.

This 'productive discomfort' presents its own controversies. Despite a few debaters viewing the personal arguments about privilege within debate as deliberately destructive – made to make the other team uncomfortable and unable to use their traditional policy debate training in response - most identified value in being exposed to these arguments at an early age. Whether to initiate the argument or to respond, these arguments are considered important to opening the door for discussion and contemplation. Consider how this debater sees critical connections to identity issues outside of the debate round.

Debate is a springboard for those issues. Project teams and other discussions of critical issues in debate rounds help debaters understand race, class, gender issues so they can take them somewhere else. Debaters tend to be the more knowledgeable ones at the schools - like the GLBTQ or race groups - I think debaters tend to be a part of those

groups because they have read literature. I think we are more tolerant and more educated about the issues.

Similarly,

I don't know if I never would've thought about those issues. I don't think I would've been comfortable talking with anybody about those issues unless debate had helped me with the knowledge about them and given me a place to break the ice and talk about them in a safe place to talk about them.

Many debaters identified this process as personally transformative and vital to finding personal relevance in debate.

All of the issues are issues I have dealt with in my pre-debate life - race, class, gender and sexual identity are inherent parts of my life. Debate gave me a mechanism to feel comfortable talking about them productively and talking about those issues to a diverse set of people. I am able to talk about issues with some of the most conservative people that generally speaking would not be acceptable and I am able to mediate the very far extreme left on all of those issues as well.

Many debaters felt talking about social issues was a skill they could transfer outside of the debate round and bring to their peer groups and personal relationships. Debaters may be able to engage in discussions about assumptions differently. Ironically, debaters revealed how they may also be almost less likely to take these questions personally than those without this exposure to sensitive arguments because they have more practice. One debater spoke about how this influences his daily life.

There are more people [also former debaters] who are willing to call me on my crap. If I need to check my assumptions about something there is a never-ending supply of people to tell me about it from a variety of perspectives. I am unlikely to be able to have a political view where I am able to dismiss the question of privilege or not consider it. I find those debates are productive.

Most debaters were grateful to debate for exposing them to literature on social barriers at such an early age. Most debaters also identified these conversations as inherently political as they call into question institutions and systems of privilege.

News Following

Another contribution debate has in establishing political knowledge concerns the internal and enduring motivation to follow the news. Unlike the discussion above regarding how the public may distrust or self-select the news, debaters see value in the news even if it is politically slanted. Debaters described a process of checking on political news stories - from several times a week to hourly - to locate updated political information. They attributed this to competitive necessity at first, which in turn became more personally fulfilling down the road. Moreover, every debater felt a strong desire to follow the news topics for whatever the current resolution or favorite current strategies were. Most identified previous resolutions as a basis for a greater comfort level, fluency, and interest in a variety of political topics. Some noted how previous affirmative cases became areas of expertise – such as understanding now defunct Don't Ask, Don't Tell policies, NATO expansion considerations, and the Supreme Court ruling in *Bowers v. Hardwick*. The debaters expressed great joy in following the news when it reflected policies they had invested so much time in and felt personally connected to. This translated into a sophisticated ability and willingness to follow the news. As one debater explains

I think the affirmatives are definitely a guiding post and the politics disadvantage leads to things that are very easy to follow down the line, but certainly affirmatives are one area to follow. Stories I do follow in the news come from policy affirmatives, politics disads, and counterplans I was reading but that is not to say that the other [critical] research did not go off in other directions.

Overall, every debater described a special interest in following certain political topics from previous debate years despite being out of the activity or debating a different college topic. The lasting impact debate has on long-term news consumption demonstrates how policy debate participation can establish and embed an enduring desire for life-long political awareness.

Another example of how debaters stay with a news story is how news interests become college and career pathways. In addition to following selective news stories, following could

literally translate into a life-long desire to follow concepts and themes introduced by participation in policy debate. A vast majority of debaters cited pursuing undergraduate and/or graduate degrees in international affairs, political theory, constitutional democracy, law, education, communications, and political science because of how debate tuned them into these issues they could follow in the media.

What I have debated certainly has impacted what I have chosen to study.

Another cites specific resolutions that influenced his specific course of study.

I think the various topics and the order of those topics influenced what I wanted to study. In 2010 and 2011 the topics involved international topics - troop presence and space - both geopolitical. It definitely opened my eyes to international relations and politics as a future major... In respect to the politics disadvantage it also influenced my drive to study international relations.

Debate can carve interest in following a news story through to a life-long career.

Regarding what level of news debaters tend to follow, there is a trend to follow national and international news over state and local politics. While most debaters were comfortable with key leaders and agencies at the national level, few expressed comfort with local politics. Several explanations were offered. One concerns the structure of debate itself. The resolution demands inquiry into United States federal government action. Researching these resolutions therefore demands attention at the federal government level almost at the expense of state and local issues. Many debaters feel more connected to national and international politics and sense national and international news are more important than state and local issues. As a result of talking primarily about national politics, many debaters have de-prioritized state and local action. While some topics may lend themselves to analyzing the effectiveness of federal action relative to state and local action, the federalism debate still occurs in the context of national action. Also, as many debaters cite the convenience and stability of national and international politics as a motivating

factor to primarily follow national news, especially for those who move a lot. For a few debaters who do desire to follow local and state news, they felt they were more able to follow local news from afar due to their research skills.

I don't think without debate I would've had any idea how to research local things from far away... I think most general populations may think local politics is of more importance - but debate gives you the ability and knowledge that there is stuff that exists outside of you and your locality so you see the interest and connection between more national level politics and you as an individual.

So while debaters undoubtedly follow news regularly and demonstrate longitudinal interest in following many stories directly from their debate experience, news consumption seems to be isolated more to national and international news over state and local politics.

Limitations to Political Knowledge

Despite overwhelming benefits to political knowledge, debaters discussed a few frustrations with the policy debate process. Two limitations rose to the top – the primary focus on federal government politics and a sense of cynicism. As mentioned above, there is a tendency to privilege national politics at the expense of state and local politics. Knowledge of political actors and agencies were more prevalent than governors or individual state agencies. Many debaters acknowledged the “perceived importance” of federal government action may trade-off with getting involved or being aware of important local politics.

A second limitation of political knowledge concerns how well it may or may not translate into a traditional sense of political activism or engagement. While many of these former debaters actively work in the political arena or as professional political academicians, a strong sense of cynicism prevails that comes from knowing more about the horse-trading, partisan polarization, and unsettling compromises in politics.

I'm so cynical that I grudgingly vote. Now I'm mad that I voted last time. Most amount of participation I do is through teaching and getting people involved in the political

process. As a debater, I became really cynical about seeing how the process works and how the sausage is made but working with students who are more hopeful helps make me more hopeful about change that the older, more cynical part of me holds.

As a direct result, many debaters found meaning in using their political knowledge to help others navigate the political system through education and teaching. Other debaters took this cynicism and fueled it into running for office themselves or assisting in specific political campaigns, political research, or assisting with think-tank advocacies.

One benefit to being exposed to so much political knowledge is the greater awareness of a multitude of political issues. One debater reflects how in response to the political abandonment such cynicism may cause, political exposure provides time and space for self-reflection and engagement.

There is always some core of truth in what [the opponent] is saying. Part of the value of debate when you are learning how you express yourself – especially as a high schooler – which was something I really liked - because there isn't a set truth debate is trying to find a middle ground. It less causes nihilism and more helps people understand what they actually believe because they are exposed to a lot of different ideas. After a debate round you reflect on the things you have talked about and you start to ask 'how do I feel about that.' It really helps you when you hear lots of different arguments to figure out what you actually think about it.

This reflection transitions into a discussion regarding how debate may foster a political identity.

Political Identity

The PEP describes how political learning should aid in developing one's sense of self as a political being. The PEP advances a politically engaged identity as one involving

...seeing or identifying oneself as a person who cares about politics and has an overarching commitment to political participation. This is likely also a person who has at least an emerging sense of his or her political values and views, which should evolve over time even as the overall sense of politically engaged identity remains relatively stable (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007, p. 17).

Thus the second overarching research question for this project asked how does participation in policy debate contribute to a sense of political identity and political motivation. The consensus among debaters interviewed is that participation in policy debate indirectly provides the tools and time for critical introspection about themselves as political beings translating into a variety of political activities. Moreover, by providing vocabulary, tools and practice, debate facilitated a more authentic and enduring sense of political identity. Identity based trends emerged concerning participant's core values and political self-identity, the format of debate and the length of the season, feeling of qualification involved in the political process, transferring of authority, identification of one's social location, and self-perception as political actors emerged.

Core Personal Values

The identity portion of the interview began with a discussion of the participants' core values along with inquiring if and how debate contributed to their personal qualities. I then asked the debaters if there is a distinction between being political and being partisan in general terms and then if that distinction applies to them. Almost all participants identified key personal characteristics of themselves they could trace to their formative years in debate. Echoing the majority of debaters strong work-ethic, one respondent noted

Debate has shaped me to be someone who is driven and inquisitive.

In addition to a diligent work-ethic, debaters described other qualities central to who they are as a person. Many debaters identified as aware of and connected to issues of equality, fairness, and social justice.

I identify as a calculating liberal. I try to base decisions on greatest good with a bias toward maintaining issues of social justice. In most decisions social justice would come into play.

Another acknowledged

I am an excessively progressive liberal who is primarily concerned with what is right and what is wrong and questions of social justice.

Similarly,

I value kindness in people - in society I think that being aware of your own biases is important - especially being able to talk about politics. Some people feel like politics is like rooting for a football team - so whatever their team does is right and the other is wrong. I am sure that is tied back to debate.

Questions of right and wrong and a willingness to check biases, assumptions, and privilege were strong reactions in response to the open-ended question about how these debaters self-identified. Open-mindedness, logical reasoning, and a desire to seek knowledge also emerged as key to the self-identity of a debater. Implicit to the development of this identity is an ability to seek, integrate, and filter through a wide variety of information.

I think having good reasoning is important to me. Being able to justify decisions and explain things - being open minded to lots of different possibilities before making a decision.

Likewise,

Being open is important to me. I seek knowledge which is important to me and how I value people depends on how much they want to improve their lives by knowing things. I like being open to new ideas and having discussions about new ideas.

Citing education explicitly, one respondent notes.

Education is very important - education is one of the most important things besides family, religion, and such. When you get to society, I think education and educating the future are the most important values. Education means making sure everyone understands how to learn and what to learn and how subjects like math, science, English, social studies, etc. relate to the real world.

One final comment concerns the patterns of thought and logic established by debate.

I'm looking for answers. What drives me is to figure stuff out. I enjoy being a graduate student because it in some ways feels like being able to continue the sorts of tasks that I developed in debate. The things that go into writing a really good strategy that is designed to defeat someone else's affirmative strikes me as similar to the work that goes into writing a really great paper that is designed to contribute to some really great

conversations that are going on.... This has to do with nuance and also detail and complexity.

Although the original PEP survey did not ask about personal characteristics, adapting the PEP to ask this question aids the discussion of how and why debate may ‘stick’ and become a more permanent part of participants’ psyches.

Being Political as Self-Identifying

A second component of self-concept concerned the question of being political. All respondents identified that they felt they were a political person – to greater and lesser degrees. When defining what political meant, interviewees revealed a greater understanding of issues outside of traditional partisan politics. Furthermore, most revealed a certain disdain for traditional partisan politics due to their heightened understanding of political issues.

I certainly think the distinction between political and partisan matters. You can be political without being partisan. I do think that I am probably both political and partisan. Realistically, I think that partisanship is something I would try to avoid and am suspicious of because it doesn't seem as reasonable to me to be partisan. It seems obvious that being political is better than being partisan because being political means searching for answers and being partisan signifies that you already have them.

As politically minded persons, these debaters seemed to research specific issues in order to figure out where and how they stand on issues. One of the younger respondents had a difficult time with this question in part because she had yet to deconstruct a political identity apart from a partisan affiliation. After visiting Republican groups on her campus, she felt increasingly isolated because she did not appreciate the hyper-partisanship and unwillingness to deliberate on policy issues. She felt misled by popular partisan politics and that if she did not fit into one party, she had almost no political identity. Here she describes where she was at in the process of self-identification.

I feel politics is more about fundamental social issues. I think that is where a lot of my confusion may come from. I don't agree with either parties – Republican or Democrat-

ideals. I feel you have to place your own ideals first. That is where I have gotten confused. I have an ideal that fits with Republicans but then others that definitely don't. I think you have to figure out your own social interactions and how you feel about those before you identify yourself as being partisan.

As another described:

There is a distinction. Politics helps you understand why. Being political is a prerequisite to being partisan. If you identify as a Republican or Democrat, you have done the issue specific research to know why you are voting that way.

That theme – of not fitting unquestioningly into one party– was consistent among most respondents. Many debaters felt that their political identity surrounded being aware of and interested in political issues. Most debaters did not feel that being active in partisan politics was a requirement for political identity. Many debaters did both, however, as they were politically involved as political researchers, campaign managers and volunteers, along with working directly with political parties. Without question, most debaters felt that being political was tied to an awareness and possible action tied to considering the public good.

With that noted, most debaters did tend to align themselves more often with one political party than another. Several initially identified as Republican before joining debate and switching their political identity to Democrat as a result – usually due to social issues. Likewise, many initially identified as Democrats prior to debate and later exposure to particular foreign policy and hegemony, military and nuclear weapons policies, or economic issues find themselves as moderates or Republicans. Without a doubt, the trend among these debaters interviewed connected a sense of social liberalism with a more moderate stance on military and foreign policy issues. What is interesting is the process by which many debaters either solidified, altered or changed their political beliefs. Debate created opportunities to be exposed to differing views.

Before debate I didn't know the difference between a Republican and a Democrat and I didn't care. The process of learning how to construct an argument - made me really value things I didn't think were valuable. I started to care about things beyond me.

For others, debate began a journey of questioning and relearning previously held positions.

... When I was growing up I would parrot whatever my parents would say... And being in debate is 1000% the reason I am a democrat now. There are formative things I remember - I remember having a conversation after 9/11 and saying how we should bomb everything because that seemed to be what the republican response was. I remember having conversations with my debate coach who asked why, who and who gets the blame. Not to be cliché - but talking through it opened my mind to new possibilities and that I was wrong about most things.

This concept of asking questions opens the door to research and an increased education.

The aspect about debate that influenced my political choices was an increase in education about many of these issues. Then as you watch either the conservative or liberal news stations you see much of the propaganda being set up on both sides. I can read through the most conservative and more liberal propaganda and ignore the propaganda. I could see through what I thought to be the fair.

Overall, being exposed to debate allows students to ask, relearn, and locate one's self within the political literature – in ways previously not done.

... Debate has made me a lot more self-reflexive. I definitely think about the choices I might a lot more. They might change some especially on specific policy questions that I know a lot about because of debate. It has made me a lot more hostile to the idea of being political apathetic. My peers I know best from high school and college would definitely fall into that category - whether conservative or liberal. I am definitely more hostile to the idea of political illiteracy or not caring about things.

One frustration a few debaters expressed was the relatively reductionist style of argumentation early debaters often employed. Questions of unrealistic internal link chains or oversimplified impact arguments might attract initial intrigue in the argument but was cautioned against as part of an actual political education. As one person noted it was empowering to develop extravagant analysis inevitably resulting in nuclear war and/or extinction – it brought a sense that she may have important issues to think and talk about that adults were willing to listen to. Overall, most felt that over time this tendency toward reductionist claims is self-correcting;

the more time in the activity the more time there is to research the nuance, realities, and complexities of argumentation.

Format of Debate and the Length of Season

The structure of debate itself and the length of the season lent itself to helping debaters develop a political identity. Since debaters must take multiple sides of an issue, it encourages students to don numerous perspectives. Debating and anticipating opposing argumentation increases one's ability to play with many arguments. The switch-side format, therefore, encourages debaters to consider, even if for the sake of competition alone, and take arguments seriously. One debater described this as “*in real life I don't believe this but I get to play as if I do in debate*” phenomenon as both fun and helpful to establish own personal identity. Being able to take on different personas aids in developing one's political identity down the road. The process at first can be painful, confusing, and frustrating. Many debaters identified how debate exposed their lack of substantive political knowledge. This lack of knowledge motivated them to learn more.

When you first realize how little knowledge you have then that really shakes your sense of your political identity... When you first set out to research a topic, especially in your early years, and realize this is just one topic – and Congress deals with every topic – you realize there is a lot to know and it is unlikely that anyone really knows it all. Then when you start to come out on the other side and feel confident in your beliefs again as a result of the skills you have – you have more confidence – and more deserved confidence.

From this lack of knowledge, when debaters were given opportunities to engage in switch-side debate and evaluate multitudes of argument, slowly a political identity emerges. Consider the following answer in response to if and how debate aids political identity formation.

Debate aids political identity formation in a very direct way. This is the central mechanism of the pursuit to understand all sides to an argument, it makes it playfulness in understanding argument, can play devil's advocate, take an argument and deconstruct it into parts and advocate irrespective of personal beliefs, and makes it less passionate and more clinical way.

This component of switch-side debate, combined with the necessity of debating four to twelve distinct rounds at numerous weekend competitions, means there is both time and space to consider these arguments. Many debaters attributed the repetition of debating as provoking a creative incentive to develop arguments from multiple angles – all angles which then allows the debater to position themselves and play with the argument. One benefit to this format is how

Debate teaches you some self-control that a lot of people don't have. Not only do you research and look at things from both sides - debate is also stretched over a whole year. You are not rushing to make some decision - you are refining and going back. It is a lot less emotional in that way and that is an important skill in civil discourse. If you are at a town meeting - you are not going to scream - you are reserved. Some of this is because of the rules and some of it is how long the season is.

While choices of how to integrate political identity into one's self-concept seemed to be personality driven, debate overwhelming permitted space and time to formulate a sophisticated, individual relationship to politics.

One important consideration regarding political identity formation and the format of debate has less to do with actually being the devil (in the devil's advocate analogy) and more about researching anticipated opposing arguments. For whatever position debaters choose to defend, there could be dozens of strategies to oppose their argument. Thus, the structure of debate drives competitors to completely and thoroughly understand opposing arguments. One respondent provided this analysis by drawing an analogy to an abortion debate.

I don't know that it is necessary for that in order to learn the nitty-gritty of both sides that you have to take a pro-life position in one debate then a pro-choice decision in the next round. But I think the inevitability that if you take a pro-choice position - eventually somebody is going to make the argument that life begins at conception. You need to cope and grapple with that argument and persuade an external third party of your position. That means you have to take it seriously and not just treat it like a strawperson. I don't know the value of debate is that you are forced to take positions you disagree with or that you will invariably encounter well-researched positions that disagree with you. Whether one takes the 'you have to learn about it by playing the devil's advocate position' or that 'you have to be fundamentally committed to one argument' - you are exposed to both

sides of a given argument regardless. With enough time someone will find a point of clash at every level of argument so you have to be intimately ready to understand the process of how you got there.

Opposition research allows time to play with multiple takes on a position. Since this research and initial argument formation happens ‘behind the scenes,’ it can manifest itself in two ways. Many noted the safety that the time and space of research provided in playing with personal identities. One could test ideas in rounds without having to identify the idea as their own personal conviction. This distance fostered personal deliberation regarding the argument. On the other hand, since debate does not require personal conviction, just argument for competition’s sake, it does not necessitate political identification; debaters do not take a personal stand or translate beliefs out of the debate round. Consider the following

There is a potentially negative effect of debate, one where we kind of become pessimistic in our views as political views, we feel we aren't agents for change, and we are just bodies that pretend to participate in these activities. But we don't have say so, we read United States federal government should, not what we think individually. I think policy debate tends to make people less in tune with what goes on in the real world, it makes people go into a fantasy world where things are utopian, there is inherency and solvency fixes it all, we tend to believe there is 1 simple solution to problems that can work without our influence, the process of debating for so long.

Sometimes being so caught up in the competition, the real-world considerations at best may fall to the wayside and at worst may be resented because they interfere with and interrupt how the argument functions in debate. One other caveat regarding identity formation emerges. One reflected how it had taken him

...a long time to form my own identity, so many sides to the issues and each has legitimate claims, I felt uncomfortable to frame it for myself. I had to wait to later in life working against a normal path for me given my upbringing and background...I wouldn't change it for a minute but process is different and end result is probably different but I liked where it took me.

With those qualifications, the overwhelming majority of these debaters thought the indirect process by which political identity formation occurs within debate overwhelmingly impacted their lives positively.

Open-Mindedness and Intellectual Autonomy

Open-mindedness, as related to political identity, is one of the PEP's core values. Regardless of the motivation, debaters must have an open mind when approaching arguments. Again, the motivation may be pure in developing empathy for others' argument or purely as a result of competitive necessity. Regardless, debaters must be open to a diversity of opinions. When asked if debate encouraged debaters to be open-minded, debaters responded

I think it does - even for those whom it hardens their own positions – [debaters] can't help but notice the diversity of opinions that are out there. They have to figure out how to interact and get along with [those opinions]. You can't unlearn it. Some of it has profound effect – for example I can't unknow the things I know about privilege or whiteness and I can't not notice that now...

Similarly,

Yes, profoundly so. This is one of the biggest things debate did for me was create an intellectual tendency to evaluate issues from both sides which make you sympathize with others you disagree with and recognize their intellectual merit. When you switch side debate, there is a logic to opposing and favoring various issues - this is defining for me and [makes me] different from others – I'm fair to the point of indecisiveness and that frustrates others around me.

While debate may complicate identify formation, the process, regardless of motivation, is beneficial.

One possible constraint on intellectual autonomy concerns the ability to select genuine arguments. Several debaters felt that when a debater enters a particular school or team, many individual argumentative choices were already determined thereby limited intellectual autonomy. Consider the following two responses.

On its face, people initially think they are learning it, gives the tools to develop it, there is a definitely set of prescribed notions in the community and there are intellectual norms and values that are held up, that are very strong.

In agreement,

Especially in contemporary debate, there are certain debate squads that have their own political identities that shape or force the argumentative, intellectual, and research choices that people have... There is a sort of external constraint on the intellectual autonomy of debaters.

So while competition motivates debaters to seek out information on one's own, there may be constraints on forming an autonomous political identity.

Political Qualification

One aspect of the PEP survey questioned how qualified individuals felt they were to participate in the political process and their confidence in bringing about social change. All but one debater felt they were qualified to participate in the political process. A couple debaters answered that everyone, by virtue of living in a democracy, is qualified. More debaters answered that compared to the average citizen who did not debate, they felt significantly more qualified to participate because of their ability to assess political arguments behind a candidate's positions rather than voting on a personality or campaign propaganda. Most identified voting and analyzing arguments as involvement in the political process. For example

Yes - almost to an egotistical level. I think I know how to make decisions and I understand there is a very long and complicated process to decision making which is the way that any part of the political process - whether it be voting or making actual policy decisions is necessary. I think I would be able to make good decisions because I understand and have studied the process of decision-making.

A few debaters felt qualified to participate by working for campaigns, conducting political research, or discussing issues with their peer groups and families. One debater, who self-identified as being very unelectable, still felt compelled to be involved in the political process in order to fix inadequacies in the political parties. Her desire to be involved was a reflection of her

confidence in being able to help identify and fix problems within a political party combined with a desire to reconstruct the structure and message of the party. This requires feeling qualified to make change. Overall, most felt comfortable with the tools to analyze argument that then made them qualified to participate in the political process.

Transfer of Authority

Recall the research identified earlier acknowledging the role of authority and scholarship as inherently political acts. The structure of the debate may initialize an important transfer of authority from the traditional ‘expert’ to the student. In any given high school policy debate round, students speak for 64 minutes. No adult has any formal role in speaking or directing during this time; while adults may be involved in violations of debate etiquette or rules, intervention or interruption is rare. This means adults listen to the ideas and arguments of students. A reversal of the traditional classroom and learning environment – many respondents identified that this concept is itself radical. The students are responsible for negotiating the process - their speeches, transitions, and often their own preparation time. Moreover, the students take on argumentative responsibility. Then the students get to ask questions after the debate round of their judge or critic. Many debaters noticed this transition and turning point to their own ownership and authority over argument when they realized others – especially adults – were listening to their ideas about public policy matters. For example,

There is something about being 15 and learning about nuclear weapons policy and realizing that you have an opinion and people will listen to it.

Likewise,

From day one when I walked into the debate room, the process of breaking down my traditional expectations for authority in the classroom had begun... I feel like from the beginning I was encouraged to be an active participant in the learning process rather than just a passive receptacle of knowledge. I recognize there are different squad philosophies on how that is approached but I would say in general that the ability of the

average high school debate student to challenge the truth claims that are made by their instructor, their coach, or their peers who have more seniority on the team is a lot greater than in a typically high school setting.

This transfer of authority to students stimulates a sense of one's self as an advocate of argument and, by extension, a scholar of political argument. Although this outlook does differ from team to team and has its own controversial history, many debaters acknowledge the process of establishing a culture where students take active ownership of their arguments is critical to informing their political identity and developing a sense of political efficacy. One former high school debater who identifies herself as a debate "lifer" (meaning she has committed to a career of working with high school and college debaters) commented on her coaching intentions to encourage debaters to assume authority in argument. More than streaming together quotes from other authors,

At debate's best, you are teaching students to synthesize and form your own opinions. ... I was impressed when students said "we are the scholars" we agree with this part of this author and another author. They were able to position themselves as the scholars. They were trying to come up with their own research and their own ideas. I think that is ideally what we should be looking at.

In the discussion regarding evidence, another former high school debater noted

The notion of evidence is only one form of creation of argument in debate. I work with a lot of students who create arguments in an entirely autonomous manner - no evidence and no appeals to authority but instead an appeal to social location and life experiences as it relates to a topic. I see a more diverse understanding of how argument is structured in debate than simply cutting evidence and making an argument.

What emerges from this discussion is a sense how each team, each coach, and each individual may approach research and authority differently.

In direct relationship to the question of authority, another of PEP's political values – intellectual autonomy – relates to how deeply students respond to taking on the role of scholar.

Respondents expressed a diversity of responses regarding how genuine the debate experience can

be in regards to seeking information. There were two lines of responses. Almost all cited that to be successful in debate, debaters must demonstrate a strong work ethic and curiosity to know more about current events and know more about their specialty arguments. Thus, a universal benefit to competitive debate is how participation instills the motivation research and practice speaking on one's own. A second line of response concerned the nature of research conducted as conforming to a team identity.

I think that is very squad dependent whether or not a debater is taught to see themselves as a scholar, researcher, an advocate or if they see themselves as someone as a part of the squad who has to win a tournament.

Those respondents who identified as coming from a larger squad who had hoped to develop arguments different from the team's already established argumentative style and identity, suggested there may be less options for intellectual autonomy. For instance

I might say no because you are really not producing any of your own arguments - you are recreating arguments from other people. So depending on your definition of intellectual autonomy that kind of matters. You are really a professional plagiarizer but you are really creative within that. It depends on how you manipulate a combination of different people arguments to make the one you need.

One concern that is raised about the structure of debate is the continuous "collage" of quotes from other authors – at the expense of original research. Almost in response to this professional plagiarism criticism a different debater responded how

The creativity and neatness of debate is how those pieces of evidence are combined into debate. That is the value added by the person doing the research is creating. At some level we might be plagiarizing because we are reading quotes from people but I don't think we are plagiarizing because we do compile them into an argument and then we use our own ideas to extend them and talk about them in the last rebuttals.

As a technical clarification, it is important to note that debaters are required to provide citation information for all evidence they cite in debate rounds. The requirement for what is written is different for what is spoken – with very limited information required to be vocalized in round

compared to what is required of citation within any traditional APA or MLA academic context. When someone is referencing a piece of evidence in a debate, a debater must identify the author or source and the year (or it is also acceptable just to refer to the month and day if the argument is from the current year). Information regarding the qualification of the author, exact date of publication, journal, and page number are to be written but not necessarily spoken. It may be strategic to volunteer this additional information (for example the qualification of the author to compare credibility), but it is not required.

Others were very complementary regarding intellectual autonomy in debate. One observes

I think overall debate is very good for that. But at the time all that intellectual energy was focused on the topic at hand - in that sense when you are in the middle of the competition season - I didn't feel like I had the autonomy to go read a book on some completely separate topic... I think that is true [intellectual autonomy depends on squad culture] and your relative level of experience. When you first start there is so much to learn - debate needs to be a little more rigid and someone needs to give you the building blocks. Then as you get more experience you learn how to write your own stuff and go off in your own direction.

Succinctly put

Competitive desires create an incentive for intellectual autonomy - creativity is held in high regard when it comes to debate. So I would say yes.

Overall, the question of intellectual autonomy exposes nuanced experiences regarding philosophical differences in argument selection and team cultures.

A final discussion regarding political identity and a sense of political efficacy bridges how debaters perceive themselves in a political role or as persons performing political action. Debaters had varying self-perceptions of themselves as political actors. One debater began this discussion by identifying how all education practices are already political. As a result, everything students do within the 'real-world' should be seen as somehow political.

Education itself is inevitably political. In any given teaching situation there are political ramifications. You are either teaching them to sit quietly and hear what authority has to tell you about the subject or you can teach the possibility of the more radical inquiry. You can expand [students'] horizons by exposure to the different types of adults. Being exposed to this before college does a lot to broaden horizons. In college when professors want you to speak up and challenge them, debaters always seem a lot ahead on this.

Almost every debater discussed the importance of education and teaching as political acts – both from the perspective of what issues students are exposed to as well as the pedagogical performance. A majority of interviewees have coached or judged debate as well and those participants discussed teaching and mentoring students through the debate experience as a political act.

The reason I wanted to teach was that I viewed the process of teaching and instruction as a meaningful contribution to the world. Since I'm teaching politics it has to be political. I don't see myself as indoctrinating and then releasing them to do my bidding. The central goal is not to teach the content but ways of thinking and approaching the world and debate has influenced that. I have made college students stand up and debate [issues] like drone strikes - the big goal is to make others appreciate both sides of an issue and think beyond formal and informal civics lessons that the typical American high school teaches. Debate exposes radical viewpoints, especially kritik movements. Nobody else gets Foucault as a 17 year old. I still use that training in PhD level stuff and I was 16 and trying to figure this stuff out.

Similarly,

As a debate coach and teacher, it is my responsibility to make sure kids are voting. But more than that it is important for kids to understand why they are voting for Romney or Obama. Partially my role is to make sure that they are researching and reading their research and taking something away from that that is more than how will this make us win a debate round. So when asked why are they voting for Romney and Obama, they can reference the debate research.

Political Skills

The third developmental domain outlined by the PEP research addresses political skills. These are broadly defined as those skills connected to advocacy – creating arguments, researching, reading, writing, speaking, and implementing social change. While nearly all debaters said most skills were actively developed in debate, the question remains how well

debaters are equipped to transfer these skills to design and implement real-world political change.

Argument creation and research

Almost every debater felt more equipped to identify and define competing political interests. This is in large part due to learning argumentation and evaluating thousands of arguments. Debaters begin this process by reading text extremely closely. Debaters do not paraphrase authors (at least in their constructive speeches); debaters develop arguments using exact words from authors and by referring to their arguments by author name. This establishes some accountability and confidence in understanding argument. This also teaches an active process of active reading for understanding.

Debate taught me how to look for topic sentences and argument first before you find the evidence and support for it. It still helps me in grad school figure out what the author is actually trying to say even if they don't explicitly say it. It definitely carries over to how I teach. I try to teach other people how to do that too - efficient reading. Even if they don't explicitly say it – what are they are they actually trying to say – debate helps you see biases and investments in things that they won't explicitly state.

In the days of primarily paper-based debate, debaters commented how the underlining, summarizing, and tagging process thoroughly checked how well they understood the argument. Today, as more debaters migrate to computer based debating (otherwise known as paperless debate), the 'cutting evidence' process remains much the same – just without the hand-writing. Furthermore, this research process creates a positive feedback loop for understanding which then fuels motivation for more understanding.

It was a confidence booster when you can put together your own argument and know that you are prepared for a debate. I think it also helped know where other people would be coming from so you could predict other arguments you would be exposed to.

Debaters unanimously identified the practice in creating and understanding arguments learned in debate as a process relevant to their academic lives. Debaters felt this practice developed an

intellectual confidence translating outside the debate round and into their ‘real’ lives. One debater speaks to the benefit research practice has had into his daily, political life.

I'm much more prepared to understand the issues and obstacles that are likely to come up against the changes - to anticipate what those reasons are going to be and preempt those objections. I think that has made me much more effective - especially in my career. The way I think about things now tends to be about issues and arguments. If there is a problem, I can break down all those issues and tackle those more systematically. I think many other people are more random and can't see the big picture. I'm much better with the big picture.

Similarly, one debater compared his debate experience against his law school experience.

I really enjoyed law school but debate was a better education than any graduate program or class that I took in teaching you to actually make an argument and have it sound halfway decent. There is nothing like doing debate over and over again and having people give you feedback and tell you flat out that your argument is stupid, which is really taboo in the real world.

The continued practice of argument creation and research is a perpetual skill that translates into all aspects of one’s abilities and skills.

Speaking

The PEP survey asked how comfortable and able persons were with articulating their ideas and beliefs to others, along with a willingness to speak in public settings. I approached these concepts in the interviews in two ways. First, I asked debaters about their initial perceptions and experiences with debate. Just about half of the respondents had horrible initial experiences with debate. Many were terrified by debate due to their chronic or situational shyness or were otherwise forced to join debate. Just over half of the debaters interviewed loved the activity instantly because it was an opportunity to fuel their competitive drive in an intellectual environment. Asking about debaters’ initial experiences, unintentionally served as a way to assess if debate has any unique contribution to their comfort level with speaking. Secondly, I asked about speaking comfort levels in various settings. Debaters universally

identified being able to develop arguments publicly as a benefit to their debate participation. Everyone said debate helps develop familiarity with articulating ideas and opinions to others (even if those ideas were not their own). Several identified debate as critical to their ability to even speak in public. Many discussed how having to debate others and speak in front of a judge(s) in a round helped overcome their shyness. Others discussed a new comfort with thinking on their feet.

You have to get over that fear of actually standing up and you have to think on your feet. Being there [in the debate round] adds a different level of stress and competition.

Similarly,

Reflecting on it, debate was a big part of how I developed socially. It made me more comfortable socially and speaking to broader audiences.

Debaters also noted how the practice of speaking aided specific skills of efficiency and effectiveness.

I think debate has taught me things like word economy and being able to make a case for myself. I am much more effective than I would've been otherwise.

Most debaters pointed to the feeling of unending practice speeches, practice debate rounds, and tournament rounds where they were compelled to try and try again. Another debater pointed to the specific value of the cross-examination in debate – a place where debaters can freely ask questions of another and expect answers to their exact questions.

Part of [the benefits to speaking] is what cross-examination does – it forces you to explain arguments in your own way based on the research you have done. For instance, it makes you explain how 'if you believe this, then why do you also believe this'.

This reflection cuts to the point of being able to point out contradictions in argument and/or identify consistency in argument. In the professional environment, one debater turned teacher notes how giving speeches in public environments is

So much easier. I get this so much - other teachers comment on how I make speaking in front of others look easy. Fear is inevitable for everyone but debate makes it more manageable. I used to be super shy and now I give speeches for a living. I think that is because of debate.

Comfort with giving speeches, asking and answering questions, and adapting to judges yields additional benefits. One current graduate student notes how often she recognizes the skills former high school debaters bring into her classroom.

When I teach and there are former debaters in the class they are always the loudest, the first to speak up, their speeches are always better, and so people tend to naturally look to those students as examples. Debaters have an easier time asking questions and they are more likely to question you when you are teaching which is nice in a lot of ways.

There were two interesting caveats about speaking – one respondent said debaters, maybe because they like to hear their own voice a little too much, may over-explain concepts whereas another said the logical shortcuts permitted by a debate vocabulary may cause debaters to under-explain concepts to a non-debate audience. All debaters, however, felt these limitations were self-correcting. Overall, debaters felt their ability to articulate ideas was greatly enhanced through their debate experience.

Judge adaptation is a feature of debate impacting communication strategies. In a debate round, debaters compete for a win or loss as written on a judge's ballot. As a result, debaters have a competitive incentive to acknowledge and conform to preferences expressed by the judge. This means debaters adapt to judges with a wide variety of preferences – from traditional debate through to identity based projects. Many noted the value in judge adaptation; judge adaptation is a portable talent that can, with practice, translate into the world beyond debate and contribute to developing political skills.

I think debate substantially increases ones advocacy skills. I think this is not only the speaking and researching but also because the judge is ultimately the one who decides who wins and who loses. So judge adaptation shapes the way we advocate and we can debate in front of somebody who is or isn't familiar with speed or the activity. That

greatly impacts the way we develop our advocacy skills both in the debate world and in the real world.

There is one significant constraint regarding how universal audience adaptation skills may be. Many tournaments have adopted a system by which teams have input into whom their judges are – a system called mutually preferred judging. Here, teams may eliminate or strike certain judges and rank-order other judges they would prefer to adjudicate their round – a practiced used primarily at advanced high school and collegiate tournaments. Some lament the tendency to select judges who fit entirely within their team’s style of debate. As a result, some debaters need not adapt to judges who do not already conform to their style of debate and many judge adaptation benefits are lost.

Mutually preferred judging is good and bad. It is good in some ways in that for some teams it meant there was a possibility of a getting a fair shake. In a world without mutually preferred judging there were some cases where you may have judges who literally wouldn't write down anything you said because they didn't think it was an argument. On the other hand, it means you can so narrowly craft your pool of judges that you don't learn to appeal to people on the margins of where you are at which I think can come back to haunt you in elimination rounds when the pool is much smaller and the choices are much more constrained that teams more far on either side teams struggle.

Although the concept of mutually preferred judging has its place in advancing particular styles of debate, this system can also be used to minimize a team’s interaction with other judges. Several debaters thought this practice created more harm than good by citing how self-selecting judges diminishes socially and academically beneficial socialization across a variety of debating preferences. The result of the self-selection of judges may be contributing to an increasing polarization in both the highly competitive high school and college debate community.

I am disturbed by the polarization of the debate community at large. I think there is a problem from a pedagogical communication perspective. In the real world we do not get to self-select our audience whenever you want to - there is no mutual preference system in the real world. We hamstring ourselves and prevent debaters from really learning true persuasion skills by allowing debaters to only speak to people who feel and think the

same way they do. We got to get over that - but I don't think that is going to happen because of the competitive interest.

While all debaters acknowledged how debate makes most participants more comfortable with speaking in a variety of professional settings, there are a few philosophical and strategic considerations when attempting to generalize its benefits.

Listening

The Political Engagement Project asked its participants about listening to diverse opinions. As addressed in the earlier discussion of open-mindedness, debaters, even if solely listening to attack, must listen to opposing viewpoints out of competitive necessity. When asked, debaters felt that there was something special about policy debate that developed unique listening skills. Listening was universally identified as essential to debate success. One respondent noted how he now has to listen for

...attention to detail. For me debate is like steroids for that. I ignore a lot less things than I think I would otherwise.

When asked how debate makes people listen differently, one debater provided this analysis

There is a physical and literal part of debate that forces you to listen better. We talk really fast and you are forced to listen and process information very quickly. That is a material thing about debate that forces you to be a better listener. A second part is that you have to answer all of a person's argument - so you have to listen more thoroughly and critically to what people say and I think that this is an example of good debaters... Bad debate is when listening shuts down.

Several debaters clarified how lesser developed debaters might listen to a claim or tag line without fully listening to the warrants. With time and experience, listening skills evolve and mature. While debaters may begin by listening only to initial claims, soon they hear nuance and complexity behind an argument.

Debate has made me better as an active listener if only because you have to accurately represent your opponents view point in order to refute it. I feel like that is one thing I struggle with some of my younger debaters... One of the frustrations I have is that it is a

very much a 'we say yes and they say no' – an automatic to say the opposite of the other team.

Time and experience begins to resolve this oversimplification of argument. This listening skill not only applies to hearing one's opposition, but also to a necessity in listening to judges.

Listening to judges is very interesting. Feedback and conversing with judges is good. I think it has made it easier to communicate with others - teachers especially - I find it very easy to be engaged when I am talking with another person. It has made it much easier to question. Being encouraged to ask questions about criticism has been critical.

After the formal speeches in a debate round and the debaters shake hands, the judge typically provides some immediate feedback for the debaters concerning strategy, speaking, and/or suggestions for additional research and argument. The debater's reflection above regarding being encouraged to ask questions of the judge is one that many former high school debaters miss and wish was more applicable to the real-world where questioning authority figures is often met with criticism. Questioning judges for feedback and intellectual development establishes a different relationship between students and adults where adults model listening skills, students practice listening skills, and then adults and students immediately engage in a dialogue demonstrating listening, comprehension, and usually appreciation.

Two downsides to listening were also noted. The first questioned how genuine the listening act was. Given that listening occurred in a highly competitive environment, listening may not always be authentic. A second downside relates back to the idea of speed and the rate of information processing. While this respondent notes the beneficial skills practiced by listening in a debate round,

Because I am accustomed to the rate and speed of information processing or that we have learned in debate, when I have to sit through a regular lecture I find myself bored, just playing a game, and following along with maybe 10% of my brain power because they are going so slow and I have to do something else to keep focused at all. You can listen better but it is a lot harder to when they are going at a rate half the speed and have to do something to keep myself from getting too bored and stop listening all together.

On balance, most debaters said listening was a concrete skill developed because of their exposure to debate. Irrespective of motivation to listen, the prized skill of listening to the entirety of one's argument and meeting it at its best part in order to respond to it was highlighted by these former high school debaters.

Writing

Another critical skill outlined by the Political Engagement Project concerns writing. Debaters provided a range of responses regarding benefits debate brings to the writing table. While seen as primarily a spoken activity, much of the research and planning of argument happens through writing. All debaters applied their foundational logic skills to writing—from organizing written thoughts into claims, warrants, and evidence to writing research papers following the traditional format of a first affirmative constructive. Most echoed this idea:

I think that my writing is more logical than it would have been otherwise. There is a lot more reasoning in my writing.

Several debaters noted an increase in their vocabulary which provided access to ideas and concepts debaters could then reflect in their own writing.

Yes. I definitely think it has helped in my writing about political topics. Maybe because I understand more of the jargon thrown out in political reviews or because I can throw some of that in there myself. Debate has made me more comfortable in writing.

A couple debaters did not feel that debate has a strong impact on their writing skills. While debate was excellent for

training for the logic side of it but not necessarily at the writing. I can solve a puzzle and put together an argument but to actually write a paper without block quotes --that is a bit overstated but that is the idea.

Another debater nuanced and qualified writing limitations more.

I don't know. I don't do a lot of writing about properly political topics but I think debate helps. I think you implicitly learn the Toulmin model of claim, warrant and that type of thing which helps with writing. You learn to make an argument over a sustained time.

The one problem I think I've had is that I try to approach papers like writing a first affirmative constructive. The one thing that I've noticed that in the writing I've been asked to do is that you are asked to make a new contribution – not to make a collage of other people's contributions but make a persuasive case on their own. So I think it has made me good at building an argument but not as much so as in developing an original idea.

Overall, the structure of argument influences the debater's thought process influencing the outline of written arguments and ability to successfully integrate research into their own work. A few questions remain how beneficial debate is for advanced, original research.

Compromise and Conflict

Academic debate is a game of winners and losers. As a result, there is no obvious reward for compromise within the activity. Many debaters, however, felt that the process of debating and being exposed to the political realities within the federal government brought out an understanding, appreciation, and at times disdain for political compromise. Of all the questions asked during the interviews, questions regarding compromise and dealing with conflict caused the most pause before answering. A few paused out of genuine reflection while others wanted to tell personal stories of debate rounds where stubborn personalities precluded any chance at compromise. The discussion surrounding compromise was nuanced. For a few, debate unequivocally helped with compromise. This usually related to the idea of understanding one another's argument through switch-side debate. In discussing the strategic advantage of compromise within debate, one debater notes how

You can't win a debate round without compromise. There is always some core of truth in what [the opponent] is saying. Part of the value of debate when you are learning how you express yourself – especially as a high schooler – which was something I really liked. Because there isn't a set truth, debate is trying to find a middle ground. It less causes nihilism and more helps people understand what they actually believe because they are exposed to a lot of different ideas. After a debate round you reflect on the things you have talked about and you start to ask 'how do I feel about that.' It really helps you when you hear lots of different arguments to figure out what you actually think about it.

Similarly,

I'm pretty good at [compromise] because it is one of the values I hold dear to myself. I'm not perfect at it obviously there are things you are vested in that you think are right and you don't want to compromise. It is something almost exclusively from my exposure to debate. Part of it is...I was exposed to viewpoints I wasn't exposed to before and I saw the 'truthiness' in those ideas to cause me to question my previously held beliefs and realize that you can change your mind.

When applied to federal level politics and negotiation, one debater saw how he understood the value of compromise more.

Because we learn both sides of an issue they can recognize points of consensus. A lot of this is based on personality. At the national level - we are more likely to realize that government compromise needs to happen because a huge part of debate is learning to identify problems in the status quo and recognizing if the government needs to take action to solve it. We see time and time again how much partisanship can inhibit that ability. At least we can recognize that the government needs to be more compromising even if we are not more compromising.

As referenced earlier, one debater identified his acute understanding of the decision-making process and a foundation for understanding political compromise. When translated to the individual, many debaters noted how debate has helped them pick and choose which battles they cannot afford to compromise on and which issues there was room to negotiate. The concept of 'picking your battles' was often one that translated outside the immediate debate world. While being interviewed together, one person in a committed relationship said of compromise after a slight hesitation how debate did help compromise and conflict resolution. His example was his relationship.

We are both debate people. I am forced reluctantly to acknowledge when [my partner] makes a good argument. She is skilled enough in the wisdom of argumentation to tell me when I'm an idiot and do it in a way that makes me say "ahh man - she's right" - not a lot of people can pull that off. In a weird way, debate does help us compromise.

The desired outcome of making intelligent, informed decisions often highlighted many debaters understanding the necessity or benefit in seeking compromise.

On the other hand, several debaters did not feel debate either helped or hurt their compromise skills while a couple felt debate solidified their reluctance to ever compromise. Several debaters said either they were innately too competitive to ever compromise and/or debate itself fostered competition at the expense of compromise. A few respondents volunteered distinctions between compromise with former debaters and compromise with non-debaters.

Debate can teach you to be stubborn. Since you...understand why you believe what you do, it is difficult to compromise. Debate can help you understand how compromise can work, but it is a double-edged sword. It can create stubbornness because you are very comfortable in what you believe. At the same time, I think that as a debater you are willing to agree with others if they have a better idea simply because you know how to analyze argument.

This compares to compromise between debaters.

With debaters – it can be harder to come to a spot of compromise because debaters are so solid in their opinions and able to back them up through so thoroughly that it can be hard to come to compromise or area of agreement. However, with those not in debate or between two non- debaters I think debaters have a unique perspective at being able to a) being able to resolve the conflict and b) coming up with creative ways to solve the problem at hand. Ultimately debate does help - because the world is not a debate world - it is a real world - in the end it does help us come together with compromise but not in every instance.

Overall, the discussion of compromise – at the individual, community, and national level – reveals various personality traits among debaters along with benefits brought by participation in policy debate. Finding merit in one another’s arguments tends to provide an overall basis for compromise.

Discussing Social Barriers

While referenced heavily in the political identity section, the Political Engagement Project asked about skills relating to discussing social barriers including race and class. I expanded this discussion to broader concepts including gender, sexuality, and other forms of privilege. Every respondent felt debate exposed them to previously unknown and unquestioned

beliefs about all concepts of identity and privilege. Then, as a result of debating teams or initiating debates concerning questions of identity, most debaters now feel they possess sophisticated, precise, insightful and sensitive skills for communicating and discussing these ideas.

All of the issues are issues I have dealt in my pre-debate life - race, class, gender and sexual identity are inherent parts of my life. Debate gave me a mechanism to feel comfortable talking about them productively and talking about those issues to a diverse set of people. I am able to talk about issues with some of the most conservative people that generally speaking would not be acceptable. I am able to mediate the very far extreme left on all of those issues as well.

While the previous debater mentioned his concern with these questions throughout his life, the majority of those interviewed had never grappled with these questions.

Debate has given me the forum and tools to talk about those issues. I don't think I ever would have considered them without debate. It has also given me the ability to talk about those issues more effectively.

Similarly,

I don't know if I ever would've thought about those issues. I don't think I would've been comfortable talking with anybody about those issues unless debate had helped me with the knowledge about them to break the ice and talk about them in a safe place to talk about them.

As a skill, there was one important qualifying note. There seemed to be a steep, and at times painful, learning curve to developing and acquiring skills in discussing privilege. At first, debates surrounding identity (here called project) ideas may be taken (or may be intentionally directed) personally. Over time, the merits of these discussions take root in the community transforming and turning name-calling into positive deconstructions of privilege.

At first [identity debates] were annoying - you are a sophomore and you have that first debate - you are annoyed and frustrated. But as you become better friends with everyone in the community you become better friends with the project teams. A part of that for me has been that I've become better friends with the project debaters and I have actual conversations with them about what it means to them and understood the argument a lot

better. I started realizing how important it is. I would never have thought of this before debate.

More often than not, debaters felt these conversations translated into real-world awareness regarding institutions of privilege. A valuable skill in and of itself, policy debate appears to provide opportunities to develop these skills.

Networking as Advocacy

While the Political Engagement Project did not directly ask generally about social networking, they did ask about knowing whom to contact in political situations. Thus I asked about contacting appropriate leaders and also about their own comfort level with social networking for a variety of political purposes. Again, the responses revealed a range of experiences. Some felt that debate had no impact on this either because of a chronic shyness or because the skill is not explicitly taught. Most, however, pointed to the benefits accrued through advanced research – even in high school.

The research aspect of networking is beneficial. You know that you can figure out things through your research rather than feeling in the dark about that. The networking aspect is really true.

Several noted specific instances of needing to network, either to fundraise as a high school student to travel to debate tournaments or as a coach to help their high school team.

I think that is much easier to network because of debate. Coaching and teaching requires fundraising. Debate has made it easier to go and approach people. The activity teaches you how to research and you can eliminate bad networking efforts. You find that out through research and talking with people. Debate really teaches you to look at your sources before going after them.

Concurrently, many noted the laundry list of “who’s who” within debate or among former debaters as a leg up in the networking world.

Yes. It helps a lot. Because you see the same people every weekend, I would feel comfortable approaching someone. A lot of people in the debate community do that. I

know some debaters who randomly go work for [important politicians], for instance – so it would be really easy to find someone with a connection to politics.

Likewise, many debaters become known for specialization in one area of argument. One debater interviewed noted how she felt more comfortable networking because she could share common interests with another person in the debate community.

There are a lot of people in debate who are in it because they do believe in helping to alleviate social issues. I feel I've met a lot of people in debate who are passionate about that that I could contact.

One other consideration regarding networking refers back to the discussion regarding the transfer of authority to the student. Many debaters felt personally connected to arguments and, by extension, their authors. Numerous debaters noted sending letters, making phone calls, or writing emails to experts to inquire more about their argument as high school students. While not an obvious pathway to networking, this willingness to seek out scholars should be noted as a benefit connecting scholarship to social communication in a professional setting. A few debaters experienced internships or college options because of their willingness to reach out to scholars at a young age. So while networking is not explicitly taught, there are real-world benefits to becoming active within the community translating into career pathways and involvement in specialized interests.

Civility, Civil and Rational Discourse, and Developing Thick Skin

As the interviews progressed, it became evident that a skill unique to the political process, and perhaps unique to many debaters, is the process of civilly disagreeing with someone else. Debate offers the space for debaters to practice, whether successfully or not, the mechanics of how to best behave in a heated exchange. Furthermore, the Political Engagement Project identifies both rational discourse and civility as core political values. These values intertwine

with disagreement skills to expose the potential and limitations of participation in policy debate on civil and rational discourse and behavior.

Civility and Civil Discourse

Certain structural elements of debate increase its potential for civil behavior as debate requires students to practice qualities demonstrating basic levels of respect. For example, standard speech times, taking turns, not interrupting, sharing evidence, asking questions, and note-taking (known as flowing) are required of every debater. One example noted by several debaters that serves the practice of civility concerns the activity's demands for reciprocal expectations of giving and listening to any given speech - without interrupting and then learning to respond without ad hominem arguments.

Other etiquette norms surround how to approach cross-examination. While a few of these question and answer periods may get heated to the extent of yelling, very seldom does that happen. There are two common conditions within debate that establish this civility. The first element is strategic; cross-examination is an opportunity to explain and almost embellish one's argument. This means there is a competitive desire to be forthright with answering questions since it communicates a debater's understanding of an argument and its strategic impact on the debate round to a judge. The second element is that a debater's opponent should and typically does expect an answer to the question posed. This sense of accountability to an answer often yields mutual benefits in the practice of civility. This is not to say this always happens, but it does get closer to a practice of civil exchange.

One debater observed the uniqueness of the debate round against other forms of political or legal dialogue. She raises possible exceptions to civility in debate and answers how the activity provides checks to enforce some aspect of civility.

We don't get objections and can't interrupt, definitely a difference in civility. Debate teaches a focus on arguments instead of people and the structure recognizes ad hominem arguments are not valuable. At same time, there is hubris and arrogance and can think others are stupid or ignorant, but debaters still must engage this at a non-personal academic level.

Similarly,

There are debaters who are great at it but it doesn't seem to be a requirement. There are procedural norms – that you don't speak when someone else is speaking for example – and those are rules that you respect. You expect to be respected so there is some civility in that but there is also a debate about how civil should our discourse should I be... There is no competitive incentive to be a jerk – but... this is technical arena of discourse.

Many respondents emphasized the role of argument and ideas; arguments and ideas are debated – not other people. Ad hominem arguments are actively discouraged and discussing ideas provides a healthy distance between ideas and the people. Regardless if this practice is genuine, there is also an embedded strategic incentive to be civil.

Debate is a small community and people will remember you. They will remember if you are not polite person and it will hurt your speaker points so therefore it forces people to be more civil which I think is good because it teaches people to be more polite in general which increases cooperation in the real world.

One other more mechanical element of debate also brings out a practice of civility. After any given debate round, regardless of how one feels about the arguments or the justness of the judges' decision, debaters must shake each others' hands and then carry on the rest of the tournament. This usually means eating together. Numerous debaters highlighted the unifying power of lunch and dinner. Debaters create a community among themselves, often because they spend upwards of fifteen weekends a year and their summers together learning debate. There is a social and personal incentive to maintain friendships which, while may be suspended during the debate round, more often than not heals itself over pizza. One notes how this impacts him today.

Disagreements about politics don't bother me as much because I am not super wedded to ideology by itself. So if somebody thinks I'm wrong its fine - it doesn't threaten my identity. Some people who have a very rigid belief system once they feel like someone disagrees they perceive they are under threat and all they can do is put up a wall. I don't feel like I have to argue to save face.

This concept of becoming less defensive regarding one's ideas signifies how this practice translates into personal values. A healthy distance from argument oils thick skin; separating one's self from argument permits a safe space to discuss ideas. Many also noted how their conversations regarding ideas grant life-long permission to have high-stakes, heated political discussions while preserving their personal relationships. While many respondents felt this was more easily done among fellow debaters, many could begin to translate this into a wider audience spectrum.

One telling comment concerns how debaters take and enjoy criticism. Many thought that losing and learning how to lose was a fundamentally transformative element of debate. No debater (from any available record) has ever won every debate over his or her lifespan. Debate can, usually depending on squad culture, teach one not to invest every bit of one's personal identity into winning.

Debate is great in that it teaches you how to lose. Especially your sophomore year of high school - you lose a lot of debates. You learn how to fix mistakes. It teaches you how to look at someone else's opinions - it is inevitable that you will lose debates but you will hear constructive, critical feedback as to why you lost those debates. It helps with your own reflection.

The idea of civility then comes full circle when grounded with an incentive to be reflective and to value one's one intellectual and social growth.

On the other end of the civility spectrum, a few felt the inherently competitive environment of debate derails any chance at achieving civility. While all still thought the

activity was overwhelmingly valuable, a couple of debaters qualified or completely disagreed with the idea of civility. Consider these responses.

[Debate teaches civility] for the most part but it is tricky. There are some people who take the competitive part too seriously. For the most part at the end of the day they aren't offended if someone reads a disadvantage to their affirmative.

Noting the competitiveness,

Debate is bad for civility, it's overly competitive. I would like magically to change this.

And with reflection and regret, one spoke of how it was personally difficult to view debaters as valuable outside their debate success.

I do think debate teaches you to view your competition in terms of their success. It is only after being removed from debate a bit you see how people who were at 3-5 the tournaments are brilliant, doing amazing things, have amazing jobs, and are really impressive people. It's amazing how I look back and at the time and I didn't think they were talented but are talented people. Even the people who are mediocre at debate are twice as smart as anyone in your high school or college classes.

A few debaters commented on having to unlearn, primarily from their college experiences, devaluing other human beings based on their impression of their contribution to their team's competitive success. With that noted, most still said they had the tools to unlearn this behavior and now advocated, with tempered restraint, how debate can be potentially beneficial toward the practice of civility. These debaters emphasized how squad cultures, through active consideration of these elements, could reverse any negative trends.

Rational Discourse

Again both a skill and value of political learning, rational discourse had its unambiguous fans and those who felt there were qualifications to this claim. Many respondents initially chuckled when asked about rational discourse. This led to the following examples of answers.

How we break things down and have logic and reasoning. Even when you choose to do something crazy there is a logic behind it.

And

It's weird because some of the arguments are so outlandish - but it is a rational because people know what they are doing.

Most debaters felt debate was extremely if not hyper rational in its approach to logic – the way arguments are structured and the rational approach to linking arguments together – regardless of the feasibility of the final impact statement. Similarly, several debaters pointed to the switch-side aspect of debate and decision-making criteria learned in debate as evidence of rationality.

Other debaters echoed earlier comments how community norms aided civility.

Definitely. It helps people be more rational. Debate is good because it teaches you how to be composed even if you feel very fire-y about something. It does give people an outlet to express that passion in certain spots. Unspoken decorum rules in debate that aren't written down anywhere. You learn that there is a time to ask questions and there is a time to speak. You learn that ad hom is not an argument. You have to express yourself in a way that actually engages the other person if you want to win. The competition part of this helps a lot. People realize that if they say something stupid they aren't winning anything.

All respondents felt more equipped to practice and value rational discourse. The mechanics of the debate round and debate argument structure preserve rationality, even if the arguments may not sound realistic or be immediately transferable to the traditional policy-making world.

In Round Debate Political Skills as Real-World Political Skills

Aspects of political skills questioned by the Political Engagement Project included how comfortable students were to be involved in political projects. Methods of involvement, knowing how to understand and identify problems, designing strategies for action, organizing people for action, and implementing political strategies encapsulate real-world political action. Debate advocates initially recognize that this is a game that does not directly intend to result in political action. Many debaters, however, acknowledged the transferability and portability of skills and the likelihood that debaters are inevitably involved with some sort of political project.

Most debaters felt they were well-equipped to identify and communicate political problems as a result of their exposure to so many issues.

The sheer amount of information you are exposed to shows you issues you didn't even know you needed to care about and then you do care about it because they exist. It gives you the drive to find out more and so when you hear about some injustice or something unfair you are more likely to research about it and figure out what is going on. Now you might feel more comfortable going out there and doing something about it.

Similarly, one debater thought there were 'huge' benefits to real-world activism noting how the process helps debaters

...learn the existence of centers of power, ways to engage, and debate about how movements should engage political process, oftentimes by debating critical stuff such as rejecting political action against the affirmative wants to find a rationale for engaging in the political process.

Moreover, many debaters noted how the process of developing a constructive – choosing agencies that should address resolitional questions expose at least a basic academic understanding of designing and implementing political strategies.

Others were quick to point out how certain concepts in debate – notably the use of fiat – bypasses the necessity of questioning the likelihood these strategies are relevant to the real world. Fiat allows debaters to bypass the question of 'will' a plan of action ever be done and instead whether or not 'should' a plan be done. Skipping past 'will' and debating 'should' allows debaters to debate the merits of a plan more hypothetically. While all those who discussed fiat agreed the concept is immensely educational, it exposes its own set of limitations.

In some ways debate is good for that in that it can give you the tools to come up with research or advocacy statements or influential and persuasive strategies to get people involved. But it fails in how to translate it into real world action.

Likewise,

Debate doesn't necessarily teach you how to get involved but it does give you the skills, for example the self-presentation skills, so if I wanted to get involved I could feel comfortable doing that. I would be comfortable in that role and debate helps teach you

research so you can figure it out. You feel empowered enough to figure out how to get involved in different contexts.

Overall, debate appears extremely useful in the academic and research side of political involvement. It creates skills necessary to approach real-world issues. Translating into real-world action, however, is not a skill rewarded by debate involvement alone. Yet, most of those interviewed felt their involvement in the world was political and utilized skills fostered in debate.

Chapter Five: Discussion

A less informed and hyper-partisan American political world proves increasing necessity to find any and all activities that have an enduring impact on genuine political engagement. As explored in this study, competitive high school policy debate may provide possibilities to increase political understanding and civil political deliberation. This project utilized the Carnegie Foundation's Political Engagement Project (PEP) to outline three central research questions connecting political learning to high school policy debate. The PEP's developmental domains of political knowledge, political identity, and political skills drove an interview process asking former competitive high school debate students how sustained participation in competitive high school debate informed each developmental domain. Through the use of grounded theory, the former high school debate students interviewed suggest participation in competitive high school policy debate provides meaningful pathways to politically engaged and deliberative political learning.

Research Question One – Political Understanding and Knowledge

All the debaters interviewed experienced a substantial increase in political knowledge. Respondents indicated participation in policy debate substantiates their understanding of the political world from broad ideological concepts to nuanced interactions among agencies and branches. Regardless if a debater's motivation for learning is purely competitive, purely intrinsic, or some combination of the two, a policy debater is immersed into a world of political contemplation, deliberation, and playful argumentation. This study may add to understanding policy debate as a pathway to political knowledge through the activity's resolutive demand for policy action, switch-side debate, and identifying competing political claims.

Accumulation of Political Understanding and Knowledge

One of the overarching concerns governing political education discussions relates back to Galston (2001), Delli Carpini and Keeter (1991) and Colby, Beaumont, Ehrich, and Corngold's (2007) documentation of the contemporary decline in political knowledge. Noting an inability to identify key aspects of governmental policies and leaders along with an overall diminished political understanding despite more students attending college, policy debate may provide an avenue for political growth. Specifically, the increased political education experienced by debaters may help ease Galston's (2001) concerns regarding the political knowledge level of future generations. Participation in policy debate may also increase "civic attachment" – through caring about news, depth of argument, argumentation training, and more proving to be a vital stepping stone to an advanced, politically aware public. In fact, several debaters interviewed were first generation college students demonstrating how exposure to policy debate may stimulate a life-long academic interest in political issues.

Life-long News Followers

Each debater recognized how their understanding of the news and political events is qualitatively different because of their debate experience. The tendency for policy debaters to follow news and political stories with more depth and criticism contributes to the transition from being solely a student of politics to both a scholar and life-long learner. Viewing one's self as an intellectual and/or academic also changes the motivation to follow stories. As the PEP researchers advise

... We know that relatively easy access to political information is insufficient for supporting responsible citizenship. Without a strong foundation of institutional knowledge, or an ability and willingness to evaluate information critically and with an open mind, it is far less likely that individuals can learn as much from media or political

debates, assimilate new information about political issue, put international events in political context or allow their opinions to be shaped by pertinent information” (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007, p. 48).

Without hesitation, debaters integrate a breadth and depth of political knowledge providing a foundation to be critical connoisseurs of news information.

Resolutional Focus and Switch-Side Debate

As discussed previously, sources of political information matters to how politically pluralistic the general public is. Mutz (2007) and Mutz and Martin (2001) fear the public is self-selecting both the source of their news along with their peer groups preventing the airing and hearing of multiple sides of an argument. This study suggests debate has two supportive roles to help resolve these fears. First, to debate outsiders, the resolution may appear obscure, boring, or isolated from their daily lives. For debaters, however, they must embrace the resolution and soon come to realize a rich complexity of argumentative potential permitting students (or teams and squads) to choose areas of the topic that are intellectually intriguing, competitively beneficial, and/or personally rewarding. The resolution then requires switch-side debating – enabling a depth of argument unrivaled by other high school experiences. Benefits to switch-side debates have been offered by Galloway (2007), Harrigan (2008), and Mitchell (2010). Speaking to the intellectual flexibility required of policy debaters, this study concurs how switch-side debating enables a range and intensity of argument and how switch-side debating indirectly encourages students to find personal meaning in argumentation.

Many debaters interviewed compared their experiences to other high school opportunities and identified a depth of argument in debate unparalleled by civics, government, student councils, other simulation activities, or various service learning opportunities. The competitive

necessity to anticipate and research all sides of an argument prior to being in a competitive round encourages a thorough examination of relevant political literature. In a debate rounds, debaters must listen to all of another's argument, answer the argument at its best intention, consider strategic compromise on argumentation, anticipate the competitive direction of the argument, and directly compare arguments against each other. This practice demands a practice of open political inquiry. As a result of the demand for open inquiry, students are challenged "...to rethink unsubstantiated claims or arguing for positions they personally do not hold, playing devil's advocate to make sure the full range of positions are well represented or to challenge a too-simple formation that has not grappled with possible objections" (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007, p. 74).

Second, debaters must present multiple sides of an issue. This practice enables hearing legitimacy in opposing argumentation as debaters do not have the luxury to entirely self-selecting arguments for presentation or for defense. Thus, debate releases an umbrella of intellectual ideas. Once the ideas are released, debaters can develop personal advocacies and identities through argument. Even after establishing argumentative preferences, students recognized their success was tied to an intellectual flexibility to respond to numerous arguments. This study confirms the work of Galloway (2007) by establishing debate as a dialogical imperative whereby planning, listening, and responding may help establish empathy through seeing the humanity and credibility in one another's arguments.

Identification of Bias and the Practice of Reading through Propaganda

Training in argumentation also aids debaters to see through propaganda and competing political claims. The debaters interviewed discussed their enhanced ability to identify political bias, boil down political rhetoric to its actual argument, and ask poignant questions of stated

information. The sheer repetition of debates, research, and length of the season trains debaters to see through, dissect, and predict an argument's political orientation and purpose. This 'purposeful redundancy' of debating creates a healthy distance from argument answering Mutz's (2007) reservation about sensationalized political rhetoric.

Research Question Two – Political Motivation and Identity

Research question two asked how participation in high school policy debate contributed to a student's sense of political motivation, political identity, and a sense of political efficacy. One of the benefits to policy debate, appears to be the ironically non-confrontational practice of debate. The distance offered in the development of political ideology, provides opportunities to relearn, socialize, and broaden definitions of being political.

Unlearning, Learning, and Relearning

The background of many conversations relating to secondary education concerns the appropriateness of teaching politics. As referenced in chapter two, Daily (2006) and White (2009) stress the importance of early political identity formation. While the American polity recognizes the necessity of a political education both in the home and in the schools, the education received may not be as authentic as perceived. One immense benefit to the policy debate experience may relate to the time and space given to political identity formation (for those without an identity), re-formation (for those with a dissonant identity), or solidification of an existing identity (for those with a consistent identity). Switch-side debating combined with the personal distance from argument, provides a relatively safe space for playing with argumentation. Policy debate participation may uniquely answer White's (2009) concern regarding the indoctrination of unquestioned patriotism, religiosity, and militarism in American schools. Participation in policy debate forces an intelligent academic defense, unraveling, or

navigation through these concerns. Many debaters unlearn their ‘America can do no wrong’ perspective and develop an ability to understand and qualify American policy decisions both at home and abroad. This practice is inherently and genuinely political. As Colby (2008) concurs, political leaning does not compromise one’s political ideology but rather aids in intellectual integrity and clear critical thinking (p. 6). Revisiting Galloway (2007) emphasis on dialogue, debate helps students realize positions outside their own have meaning. This practice opens students up to new intellectual and academic perspectives and values. Overall, this study finds debate may help aid the development of an authentic political identity. “Evaluating competing arguments in this way causes students to think harder about things they have previously taken for granted” (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007, p. 115).

Authority and Empowerment

For those debaters in this study, what makes political identity especially pertinent surrounds the immense exposure to political news stories – un-sheltering and expanding their awareness of the world beyond their community. While this practice may be unnerving, it is an ethical imperative to raise the level of political engagement required to advance democratic reasoning. Picking up on the theme of following the news, Preston (2007) believes knowledge can transition into political empowerment. For Preston (2007) the jury was ‘still out’ on this finding, however, this study found this to be true among most debaters interviewed – especially for those traditionally marginalized by traditional education. Debate became a powerful vehicle providing knowledge and skills to reform one’s political identity.

Moreover, this study suggests how the tendency to follow news and political stories with more depth contributes to the transition from being a passive consumer of politics to one of a scholar and life-long learner. Viewing one’s self as a potential and actual intellectual, academic,

and/or scholar also changes the dynamic and motivation to follow stories. Policy debate creates an environment that rewards and privileges understanding the political world; knowledge of the political world then situates the individual as an individual political actor. Warner and Brushke (2001) identified how debate turned students into social critics and questioners – developing the intellectual rigor to question themselves, their opponents, authority figures, and society as a whole. This study suggests how debate may provide the structure in which debaters practice the role of social critic. This in turn provides the critical motivation for debaters perceive or re-conceive themselves as political beings. This study had the unique opportunity to ask about personal core values and their educational experience within their high school environment. One noticeable departure from many of the more traditional political learning and service learning environments concerns how high school students begin to re-envision the role of adults. Many begin to breakdown the hierarchy between teacher/adult as authority figure to teacher/adult as colleague and collaborator. Many debaters noted how this fundamentally altered their ability to approach scholars within fields of study they liked or changed how they interacted with teachers. As a result of turning the tables and by placing the teacher as the listener, debate simultaneously deconstructs traditional authority figures and constructs the value of argument as the central, primary component of an academic relationship. The structure of debate aids in privileging argument over authority which may prove to be an important point of political development.

Debate Community Socialization

Revisiting the concerns raised by Daily (2006) and White (2009), it is important to ask if and how debate may influence political identity development. White (2009) revealed elementary schools' indoctrination through teaching politics as unquestioned patriotism which could potentially undermine the student's ability to question themselves as political beings and

question political systems around them down the road. Daily (2006) and White's (2009) apprehension concerned the developmental lateness of a secondary or undergraduate political education – asking if secondary or undergraduate education is too late to unlearn uncritical political teachings. Working against years of operant and classical conditioning, students may have immense difficulty in ever re-conceptualizing ideas and symbols.

This study suggests policy debate offers important political socialization opportunities which positively impact a genuine and attached political identity. Debate may overcome the psychological limitations imposed by an early education as noted by Daily (2006) and White (2009). Being involved in a community of students discovering or re-discovering political concepts may counteract early indoctrination and provide debaters the space and distance to 'figure things out' for themselves. Fine (2007) may agree. Fine's (2007) sociological study tied high school debate communities to their developmental impacts on high school students. Fine demonstrated how adolescents shaped their interactions with the world in light of their treatment by their peers and adults. This study adds how debate may privilege argumentative primacy and turn the tables of authority around, submerging the policy debater into a world where they are socialized into political beings. Mumby (2011) may also concur. Since the school is no longer the sole source of top-down unquestioned truth, debaters see themselves as part of a community of critical academics – aware of issues beyond the scope of the school day or their communities. Debaters may be socialized to see themselves as participants in social transformation.

In response to the ethical concern of teaching politics, debate may offer many rewards. Debate may best be conceived as a process by which students come to learn about various perspectives and make informed choices concerning their own beliefs and behavior outside the direct influence of a teacher. Moreover, a debate ethic is an appropriate and necessary response

to exercises of power found in educational systems. Debate unravels how one might “productively conceive of the relationship between ethics and power in a context where communication is a defining – rather than peripheral – feature of the human condition” (Mumby, 2011, p. 84). Using debate as a format for an ethical education would then pave the way for students to understand complex political worlds and may make traditional educational curriculum more appealing and relevant for students (Bouhnik and Giat, 2009). Citing the work of Warner and Brushke (2011), Azzam (2008) argues “[Debate] empowers students, especially marginalized students, by giving them a voice; it can transform them into advocates for themselves and their communities” (Azzam, 2008, p. 69). Understanding debate as an ethical teaching practice achieves the goal of individual inquiry and substantiates the process by which information is interrogated and identities are safely questioned.

Similarly, there are political ramifications to realizing the world is bigger than previously known for most high school debaters. Debate participation may have caused many high school debaters to choose colleges and career paths not accessible in their home community. Consider the following examples. One student noted how because of debating the United States assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa resolution, she was inspired to travel to Uganda (where she contracted malaria – one of the affirmatives from that topic). Another student noted the immense benefits to socializing among fellow debaters.

A lot of my friends I have who I consider my truest friends are people who I met in debate. They are people not only on my team I competed against, interacted with, or worked with later in life. Had I not been in debate, given my loner tendencies, I very might well not have gotten out of my shell and been social enough to really meet these people. The geographical requirements of traveling elsewhere and meeting people from other schools is good.... I don't become friends with someone from Utah or Chicago unless I go to debate camp or compete against them. That is an important socialization benefit of the community... we are an insular community but geographically large. Traveling and competing allow us to interact with people in different ways.

The concept of travel permits more than just time out of school, but rather an opportunity to see the world beyond one's backyard. This study suggests that travel should also be considered to be a political act.

There is something to be said even if you are just traveling within your state - visiting other campuses, meeting students outside your town, getting away from your parents for the weekend - all those are incredibly valuable experiences regardless of the activity.... I would hate for kids to lose that - it changed so much about my future direction to realize there was so much outside my town.

Moreover,

Debate camp was very key for socialization and impacts how we see forming friendships. Getting away from home and being pseudo-supervised were very formative times for me and friends. The travel breeds a level of independence that can be difficult to get otherwise, in the gray zone of partial supervision, making basic decisions like when to eat or what to eat or when to go to bed, may not teach skills but gives experience in practicing them.

Redefining what being politically aware and motivated is, opens the door to analyzing the benefits inherent in being exposed to and learning to understand differences among people and in how students are taught. Some teams are explicitly using travel to teach about the world by visiting museums, scholars local to their tournament destination, or landmarks of the area. Tying debate travel to a greater sense of community reveals worlds previously unknown. As a result, students may be exposed to colleges, people, or professions otherwise off the radar screen. This exposure serves to cause a student to self-reflect on their own social location relative to their new landscape. This could be seen as a political act as it expands our understanding of what is political.

Not surprisingly, food was often a hot topic. Many debaters noted their new found love for specific foods once considered to be too 'ethnic' or 'foreign' for consumption. New love for Thai, Indian, and Middle Eastern food captured the attention of many respondents. In addition to

expanding a high school student's exposure to argumentation and ideas, traveling, meeting people from different regions of the country, and even trying new foods begins to reshape a student's political identity.

Together, this theme of developing an engaged political community may help mitigate Putnam's (2000) dismay of diminished social and political capital. Proof of how debaters commit to careers requiring political awareness and how debaters continue to socialize among each other, may actually promote trust and social ties while building politically aware communities.

Broadening of the Political – Partisan, Social Location, Travel, and Teaching

Colby, Beaumont, Ehrich, and Corngold (2007) write

A goal shared by many PEP faculty is to help students understand democratic participation in broader terms than partisan battles and voting in national elections.... Expanding students' conceptions of politics is closely linked with the development of political motivation, because these forms of participation often seem less remote and imposed than electoral politics on the national level (p. 114).

An important point of consensus and departure from the PEP findings, is that policy debaters a) share a belief in the primacy of considering one's self political and not partisan and b) do not walk away thinking that electoral politics on the national level is imposing. This study suggests debaters share a sense of being aware of issues – a distinctively different characteristic than being partisan. While many debates do align themselves or work on behalf of partisan groups, most first identify as political. Conversely, most high school debate students feel more connected to national politics. Debaters, motivated by competition, follow the news and interact with the ramifications of national political decisions on a daily or – during debate tournaments –

minute-by-minute basis. In fact, most debaters suggest there is a more intimate relationship to politics at the national and even international levels than at the local or state level.

Thus, it is useful to see policy debate as a way of broadening the definition of what is political. While the mechanical/structural debate routine is relatively unchanging, expression, phrasing, and representations of debate continue to evolve. Participation in policy debate may aid in understanding how discussing issues of social location and privilege are intrinsically tied to a political awareness. Consistent with the analysis done by Warner and Brushke (2001), debate does broaden one's self-concept as a social actor. This study may suggest an additional benefit in including analysis of social location as a form of what is political. One participant in particular identified this concept as political – his experience in an urban debate league made him the political activist he is today. He began the journey of analyzing himself relative to institutions of power surrounding him which may have otherwise curtailed his academic potential. Identifying one's social location was identified as a politically transformative act for him and many others.

This study suggests another activity may be considered political – teaching. Participation in policy debate influences debate students later in life as several were motivated to become teachers or coaches. The nature of asking questions, exposing students to a depth of controversial and multi-sided arguments, and debating influences later teaching practices. At the end of the interviews, open-ended questions revealed how debate impacted their understanding of education as a political world. The most revealing answers broadened the definition of being political to include specific and intentional teaching practices. Former debaters in turn talk through argumentation in their classes, host debates, and ask and encourage questions – all reflecting a critical sense of political identity and political efficacy.

Research Question Three – Political Skills

The third research question of this project asked how participation in policy debate contributes to the development of specific political skills – including creating arguments, researching, listening, developing and implementing strategies, speaking, and responding. These skills in turn helps students to practice skills in civil discourse and civility.

Speaking, Vocabulary, Research and Compromise

Winkler (2010) remarks how participation in policy debate aided in the practice of reading, vocabulary, negotiation, and compromise resulting in more civility among students decreasing behavioral issues. One of this study's overarching finds concerns the development of political skills consistent with the PEP and Winkler's (2010) observations. While research, vocabulary, reading, and speaking skills were identified as universal benefits to debate, several debaters felt debate can sometimes create a stubbornness limiting effective compromise. While most debaters are constantly negotiating and re-negotiating arguments for competitive advantage, compromise seems to be a longer term benefit to participation in debate rather than immediately rewarded in each debate round.

Argumentation and Logic – A Lifelong Practice

Every single debater interviewed executed skills acquired through debate - speaking in a format reflecting their firm commitment to argumentation structure and logic. Almost every answer followed a format of claim and warrant. Moreover, internal to many answers was a thorough examination of multiple sides of an argument. This commitment to intellectual pluralism, civility, open-mindedness, in-depth understanding of issues, and rational discourse was evidenced by the careful consideration of each question and thoughtful responses. Each response demonstrated fair, authentic, and honest analysis. Whether conscious or not, each

individual carried out the specific behaviors indicative of political learning including political skills and political values advocated by PEP.

Working Together

Another skill identified as political concerns the ability to work with peers and authority figures. Debaters must work with and in opposition to numerous personalities. Team dynamics surrounding practices, research, tournaments, and managing partners requires interpersonal communication skills for success. Thus, working with a partner, working within a team, cooperating with opposition, and interacting with judges all demand skills to work with others. Students and coaches of diverse backgrounds converge at debate tournaments – opening many debaters’ eyes to the experiences of others. This study suggests debate may aid how effectively people work together. Limitations, however, reveal how diverse team and squad dynamics are. Students who are part of teams that supply evidence to debaters without requiring too much work from the debater tend to create a competitor motivated primarily by winning and losing. Teams that emphasize the collaborative process of research and argument creation tend to produce a student both intrinsically motivated by knowledge, truth-seeking, and finding themselves within the literature in addition to the game. Thus, the individual school and squad culture typically influences how a debater interacts with each other and the political world. This in turn impacts how debaters value each other.

Listening

Galloway’s (2007) observations of debate as a dialogue reveals another trend in the study. Regardless of the motivation, this study suggests debate may be a hyper-effective tool in developing listening skills – skills necessary for political understanding. Debaters must listen, out of competitive necessity, to the entirety of opposing arguments in order to respond. Debaters

must listen, out of desire for future debate success, to listen to judge's decisions and feedback, in order to learn how to adapt strategies for that particular judge in the future. Debaters must listen to and interact with their coaches in order to propose, understand, and execute debate strategy. This study suggests debate creates opportunities for listening practice which in turn opens debaters' minds to various arguments aiding the PEP's political values.

Civil Discourse and Civility

The skills listed above suggest policy debaters practice skills in civility and rational discourse. Winkler (2010) remarks how the face-to-face requirement to look at your opponent and your judge changes the nature by which students disagree with each other. This study suggests this is true in four additional ways. First, the structure of debate requires practicing skills in civility – debaters must listen (or at least look like you are listening), debaters must speak, and debaters must practice disagreement. Second, after intense disagreement in debate rounds, debaters usually go to stand in line for dinner or lunch together. Out of a desire to eat in relative peace and maintain friendships, debaters may try to separate argumentation from the debater in order to enjoy the social aspects of debate. Third, there is a competitive desire 'not to be a jerk'. Since judges award not only wins and losses but also speaker points, debaters have an incentive to practice skills in polite and productive disputation. Finally, debaters learn how to lose which can chip away at daunting egos.

Debate as its own Political World – Requiring Skills

This study suggests debate can translate into immediate practice of political skills. Reflection on how debaters interact within the debate community itself segues into an important finding. While not to be overstated, debate itself may be a sort of microcosm of the political world and is its own political world. As a result, many debaters practice political skills within

the debate community itself to achieve political goals, stimulate awareness, and make debate more accessible to more people (oftentimes including themselves). As many debaters acknowledged, there are problems within the debate community including creating access to debate for those disempowered by traditional education systems to obtaining healthier food options at tournaments. Discussed as a self-correcting community, debaters must use skills to discuss, develop, lobby, persuade, and sometimes implement strategies to resolve these issues. One example concerns a shared frustration regarding privilege within the debate community. Most debaters recognized how debate unintentionally rewards and requires social and economic privilege. Many debaters spoke to seeking change through both the style of argument and the opportunities to bring otherwise disadvantaged students into debate. These movements within the debate community demonstrate how core political values and political skills may be exercised.

On a similar note, almost every single debater mentioned how their own participation in debate was complicated in some way. Many debaters noted specific examples – from access to quality coaching/teaching, funding travel, family pressures, funding summer debate institute participation, central office travel restrictions, elimination of speech requirements from school curriculums, negotiating school absences, and individual schools and/or central office decisions regarding debate budgets – that limited their own participation. Thus, most debaters made a choice to actively lobby and advocate to make their debate experience competitive. The fight just to be able to debate parallels many of the political values and political skills required of a political education.

With those observations, not all debaters agreed that these skills translate into the political ‘real-world.’ The question of fiat as explored earlier does not require assessing how

realistic various strategies are. Debaters look past most grass-roots or otherwise local institutions and call upon the federal government for remedy. This study suggests debate does not require, must still often promotes, knowledge of real-world political implementation.

Relationships Between the Developmental Domains

This study set out to understand the relationship between the three developmental domains – political knowledge, identity, and skills – something not explicitly addressed by the PEP study. In effort to understand how debate ‘hooks’ students, I asked participants if any one of these domains took root first or if there was a sequencing between the three. This question inquired into the debaters’ meta-cognitive awareness – a practice highlighted by the PEP.

Many aspects of political knowledge and understanding shade over into intellectual skills that are central to democratic participation, such as reflective judgment and critical thinking. A whole range of political judgments, evaluations, and decisions are closely connected to what we know, or think we know, about politics and to what are sometimes called meta-cognitive skills related to how we reason about the relationship of our knowledge to the world and our goals (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007, p. 115).

Debaters seemed to be self-aware regarding their experience and took time to consider which developmental domain anchored their involvement. Most debaters felt they could most easily initially access the first developmental domain - understanding the political process. Then the door opened to researching and speaking thereby developing their political advocacy skills. What is interesting, is that while many said this knowledge was deeper than anything in a government/civics course and the skills were more useful than any public speaking high school

course, if it hadn't been for the opportunity for their own identity development, debate may not have had powerful resonance for them. Consider these two typical responses

The knowledge about the political process comes first. It is pretty easy to understand – it is one of the first conversations you start debate and talk about the debate. You learn what is fiat etc. Then skills and identity stem from that. You need the skills if you want to be successful at debate. So you try to figure out how it works then try to put that into practice. In that whole process it changes how you think about yourself as a political person over time.

Similarly,

I definitely learned a lot more about the political process before I formed a distinct identity for myself.... As I got into my later high school years I got to speak more to my own issues reflecting my political identity and goals.

An important point of reflection is that because students can initially access debate along the domains of knowledge, identity, and/or skills, it permits a multitude of personalities to find their niche in the activity. For those with a political ideology already established, they could develop arguments consistent with their personal advocacies. For those with strong speaking skills, they could find comfort in the process while learning and developing a sense of self. For those learning political knowledge, identity and skills were ways of testing their knowledge. As a result, many find passion in following political process (or the politics disadvantage) and others find passion in following philosophical questions of identity (or the critique). As one pointed out

I don't think one is predominant or it if it is - it is personality [based]. I think they are all symbiotic. I think they all work together in their own messy magic to make us more ultimately aware of and ultimately equipped to speak to these various issue.

This perhaps separates and elevates participation in policy debate as a unique right of entry into political learning. Since debaters can feel and be rewarded that their participation fits any of the developmental domains, this may be a long-term enduring motivating factor for sustained political learning.

Debate as Unique from Service Learning

It is important to connect and tie in where policy debate may fall relative to traditional political learning and service learning opportunities. Several characteristics separate debate from service learning (Colby, 2008), (Wiese, 2009), Delli Carpini and Keeter (2001). Debate has the intention of teaching for political understanding, the intention of teaching skills that train advocacy development, and the byproduct of teaching about political identity. Moreover, the opportunities must be sought and are very difficult to access without motivation to do so. The challenge to remain a debater exposes critical use of political skills in real-world action. Most debaters identified a combination of the political value and political skills as direct outcomes of their experience. Overall debate is more than field trips and talking, debate opens the journey to a political education unrivaled by traditional service learning opportunities.

Limitations of the Study

This study concludes how sustained participation in high school competitive policy debate may be an overwhelmingly positive political learning experience. With that being said, there are several limitations in this study. I isolate four limitations. First, I did not measure specific facts of political knowledge. While comfort levels and feelings of being qualified are important measures to assess, it does not directly interact with Galston (2001), Delli Carpini and Keeter (1991) and Colby, Beaumont, Ehrich, and Corngold's (2007) documentation of specific areas of diminished political knowledge. Second, this study may be biased in favor of students still connected to college debate. Given this convenience sample, there is room to consider the experience of more of those disconnected from policy debate programs or friends of the programs. Likewise, there is no indication how limited exposure to debate impacts political learning. Third, this sample size is relatively small and primarily reflects the experiences of those east of the Mississippi. Another study with a more national sample may purport more

diverse findings. Finally, a limitation of the study may be certain respondents' conflation of college, judging, and coaching experience. Many fused together ideas and concepts from coaching and college experiences which may not solely reflect high school experience.

Opportunities for Future Research

There is significant room for additional, broader based qualitative and quantitative studies. Here I suggest six areas for additional consideration based on observations from these study results. My first recommendation concerns qualifying the impact on political learning based on experience. Given that this study focused on students who had a minimum of two years of competitive high school experience, it would be interesting to know where the trajectory of political learning really begins. A future study could survey the different levels of knowledge or comfort with politics by explicitly comparing those with one, two, three, or four (or even more for those who begin in middle school) years of experience. Similarly, this study looked to people who had current debate connections. For those who quit debate at some point in their high school years, it may be telling to ask why and if there was still an impact on political knowledge. Following up on those that opted out of debate may reveal different characteristics within the debate experience – some that may expose extreme cynicism or those that felt debate occupied too much time or was too expensive at the cost of other activities or activism.

Comparisons across generations and across debating genres may also be telling regarding the political knowledge gained uniquely by policy debate. As referenced, many lament decreasing numbers of debaters due to a variety of constraints. Comparing this generation of policy debaters to previous generations where there were substantially more debaters may be informative in evaluating the impact of the decline of debating opportunities. Also, comparing

the experience of policy debaters to other forms of speaking and research activities may help situate where and how debate informs political learning.

Second, as this study is qualitative in design, measuring exactly what debaters know about political learning may add valuable insight into specific areas of comfort and knowledge. In turn, this analysis could be used to respond to the specific concerns about the hostile political environment, decline in social capital, and the fear of being caught on national television without basic knowledge.

A third area of study may fuse work from psychology with the policy debate experience. Psychology may provide astute observations regarding how the choice of argument and the creation of an identity around a style of argument impacts individual academic growth. As the study generally observed, there is benefit in creating arguments that appeal to the person. This may also illustrate why participation in policy debate may have on life-long decisions to follow news and political stories. Questions regarding motivation and choice may help discern policy debate from other, more traditional political learning opportunities.

Fourth, as inspired by the networking questions along with asking participants to self-identify their own perceived socio-economic status against that of their home, there are valid questions surrounding debate's potential to foster social and economic advancement. As observed by several debaters who made the transition out of the activity, there were several who identified themselves as a higher socio-economic class than their home environment. Exploring the universality of this trend may provide hope and a pathway to socio-economic advancement. Class mobility may be one outgrowth of networking, seeking advanced education, or another variable. A study along these lines could help explain if socializing among others who perceive themselves as academics may aid such shifts.

A fifth area of additional study may correlate to the observation regarding team culture and identity. Given the overwhelming tendency for debaters to discuss which arguments they prefer in debate and why, it would be telling to assess how squad culture informs their identities in and outside of debate. This insight may yield additional understanding as to why certain debaters choose certain argumentative identities and even career paths over time.

A final area of additional consideration circles back to the concern over the polarization within the debate community partly due to mutually preferred judging and other forms of technology. In the society at large, as noted before, there is an increasing tendency to self-select news sources and stories that confirm one's existing political perspectives. It would be informative to see if there is a correlation to this in debate or if these are functions of separate, unrelated forces. It may be telling if this trend fosters, inhibits, or causes some nuanced impact on intellectual autonomy. Discerning the impact of technology combined with an emerging ability to self-select one's judging audience may have the paradoxical effect of limiting intellectual autonomy.

Overall, this study sought to demonstrate how sustained commitment to competitive high school debate contributes to political learning. Without question, those interviewed demonstrated how debate uniquely cultivated access to traditional political knowledge but also a heightened ability to critique and situate themselves within the political sphere.

Conclusion

In extension of the Political Engagement Project's analysis, this study offers important connections to and departures from their findings. The PEP could benefit by adding policy debate as one of the activities they study as a possible positive contribution to political learning. This study suggests that participation in policy debate connects with high school students in

politically meaningful ways. Debate may offer a synergistic model of political learning – adding value to the relationship between the developmental domains of political knowledge, political motivation and identity, and political skills. The structure of debate itself, its competitive requirements, and the practice of skills offers unique experiences aiding political learning. Moreover, debate may broaden definitions and interpretations of being political offering a distinct learning opportunity from more common service learning projects.

This study highlights the value debate may offer to a world of diminishing political knowledge and social capital. As an ethical model for teaching, debate may remove the risk of teacher indoctrination as it allows students to explore multiple political issues on their own. As a direct gateway to political education, prioritizing opportunities for policy debate within secondary schools may be a way to answer the cry of fractured civic engagement, partisan polarization, declining social capital, and offer exciting opportunities to meet new curricular demands. Realizing how debate targets each political value and political domain should place a renewed urgency to sustain an enduring commitment to competitive high school policy debate.

Appendix A – List of Resolutions

A current undergraduate may have debated topics spanning back to the 1999-2000 debate topic. This list provides the exact wording established by the NFHSA.

2011-2012. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its exploration and/or development of space beyond the Earth's mesosphere.

2010-2011. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reduce its military and/or police presence in one or more of the following: South Korea, Japan, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Iraq, Turkey.

2009-2010 Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase social services for persons living in poverty in the United States

2008-2009. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase alternative energy incentives in the United States.

2007-2008. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its public health assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa.

2006-2007. Resolved: The United States federal government should establish a policy substantially increasing the number of persons serving in one or more of the following national service programs: AmeriCorps, Citizen Corps, Senior Corps, Peace Corps, Learn and Serve America, Armed Forces.

2005-2006. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially decrease its authority either to detain without charge or to search without probable cause.

2004-2005. Resolved: That the United States federal government should establish a foreign policy substantially increasing its support of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

2003-2004. Resolved: That the United States federal government should establish an ocean policy substantially increasing protection of marine natural resources.

2002–2003. Resolved: That the United States federal government should substantially increase public health services for mental health care in the United States.

2001–2002. Resolved: That the United States federal government should establish a foreign policy significantly limiting the use of weapons of mass destruction.

2000–2001. Resolved: That the United States federal government should significantly increase protection of privacy in the United States in one or more of the following areas: employment, medical records, consumer information, search and seizure.

1999–2000. Resolved: That the federal government should establish an education policy to significantly increase academic achievement in secondary schools in the United States.

Appendix B – The Political Engagement Project Survey

Retyped from *Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Responsible Political Engagement* (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, and Corngold, 2007, p. 315-320).

Survey Items

A. POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING	
Foundational Political Knowledge Scale	
<i>Q: Please rate your knowledge of the following topics:</i>	<i>(6-point Likert scale ranging from no knowledge to in depth knowledge)</i>
1. Organizations that work on social and political problems	
2. Theories about politics and democracy	
3. Political institutions and how they work	
Current Events Knowledge Scale	
1. Current national or international political issues, such as those on the front page of major newspapers	
2. Current local or state political issues, such as those dealt with by city councils or state agencies	
3. Political leaders and their roles	
4. Current economic issues	
B. POLITICAL INTEREST AND MEDIA ATTENTION	
Interest in Politics Items	
<i>Q: Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time. How often would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?</i>	<i>(6-point Likert scale ranging from never to most of the time)</i>
Media Interest (Newspaper Attention) Item	
<i>Q: Listed below are some ways that people get news and information. In a typical week, how often do you...</i>	<i>(7-point Likert scale ranging from 0 to 7 days per week)</i>
1. Read about public affairs and politics in a newspaper (print version or on-line)	
C. CIVIC AND POLITICAL SKILLS	
Skills of Political Influence and Action Scale	
<i>Q: Listed below are some skills that people use in various situations. Please rate how well you can do each.</i>	<i>(6-point Likert scale ranging from cannot do this to can do this very well)</i>
1. Know whom to contact to get something done about a social or political problem.	
2. Develop strategies for political action.	
3. Organize people for political action.	
Skills of Collaboration Scale	
1. Reach a compromise.	
2. Help diverse groups work together.	
3. Deal with conflict when it comes up.	
4. Talk about social barriers such as race.	
Skills of Political Analysis Scale	
1. Recognize conflicting political interest.	
2. Write well about political topics.	
3. Weigh the pros and cons of different political positions.	
Skills of Leadership and Communication Scale	

1. Articulate my ideas and beliefs to others.	
2. Assume the leadership of a group.	
3. Make a statement at a public meeting.	
D. POLITICAL IDENTITY AND VALUES	
Party Identification Item	
Q: <i>Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a...</i>	
Republican, Independent, Democrat or other (specified)	
Political Ideological Continuum Item	
Q: <i>We hear a lot of talk about conservatives and liberals these days. Here is a scale on which the political views that people hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place yourself on this scale?</i>	<i>(6-point Likert scale ranging from extremely liberal to extremely conservative)</i>
Politically Engaged Identity Scale	
Q: <i>How important to your sense of who you are is each of the following characteristics?</i>	<i>(6-point Likert scale ranging from not central to my sense of self to very central to my sense of self)</i>
1. Concerned about international issues	
2. Politically involved	
3. Concerned about government decisions and policies	
E. POLITICAL EFFICACY	
Internal Political Efficacy Scale	<i>(6-point Likert scale ranging from very strongly disagree to very strongly agree)</i>
Q: <i>Please use the following scale to respond to the statements.</i>	
1. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the issues facing my country.	
2. I believe I have a role to play in the political process.	
3. When policy issues are being discussed, I usually have something to say.	
4. I think I am better informed about politics and government than most people.	
5. I consider myself well qualified to participate in the political process.	
Efficacy in Political Institution Contexts Scale	<i>(6-point Likert scale ranging from impossible to get this done to easy to get this done)</i>
Q: <i>Working with others, how hard would it be for you to accomplish these goals?</i>	
1. Getting the town government to build an addition to the local senior center	
2. Influencing a state policy or budget decision	
3. Influencing the outcome of a local election	
Efficacy in Community Contexts Scale	
1. Organizing an event to benefit a charity	
2. Starting an after-school program for children whose parents work	
3. Organizing an annual cleanup program for a city park	
Efficacy in Campus Contexts Scale	
1. Solving problems on your campus	
2. Changing academic offerings or requirements on your campus	
3. Influencing decisions about who teaches on your campus	
F. CIVIC AND POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT	
Expected Conventional Electoral Activities Scale	<i>(6-point Likert scale ranging from certainly will not do this to will certainly do this)</i>
Q: <i>Following is a list of items. In the future, what do you expect that you will do?</i>	
1. Vote in future national and local elections.	

2. Work with a political group or for a campaign or political official.	
3. Wear a campaign button, put a sticker on your car, or place a sign in front of your house.	
4. Give money to a political candidate or cause.	
Expected Political Voice Activities Scale	
1. Contact or visit a public official—at any level of government—to ask for assistance or express your opinion.	
2. Contact a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on an issue.	
3. Call in to a radio or television talk show to express your opinion on a political issue, even if you didn't get on the air.	
4. Take part in a protest, march, or demonstration.	
5. Sign a written e-mail petition about a political or social issue.	
6. Buy a certain product or service because you like the company's social or political values or not buy something or boycott it because of the conditions under which it is made, or because you dislike the conduct of the company.	
7. Work as a canvasser going door to door for a political candidate or cause.	
Expected Political Discussion Item	
1. Discuss political problems with friends.	
Expected Community Involvement Item	
1. Work together with others to solve a problem in the community where you live.	

Appendix C – Adapted Structured Interview Questions

Debate and Political Learning Survey - Structured Interview Questions

Disclaimer: You are asked to voluntarily respond to questions regarding your participation in high school policy debate. You may skip any question and/or stop participating at any time. The information collected will be used for the stated purposes of this research project only and will not be provided to any other party for any other reason at any time except and only if required by law. Your personal identifying information will be kept confidential but select demographic information may not be. There is a remote chance that skilled, knowledgeable persons unaffiliated with this research project could track the information you provide. However, your personal identity cannot be determined.

THANK YOU for your assistance with this important research!

Randomly Generated Number _____

Part I. About You

Age _____

Gender/Sex _____

Socio-economic status? Self _____

Parent(s)/Guardians _____

Race/Ethnicity _____

Current educational status _____

If attending college, which generation ____

High School (not for disclosure) _____

Military service _____

Other _____

Debate Experience

Which topics have you debated?

Please estimate number of competitive tournaments participated in each year.

Tournament #:

11-12. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its exploration and/or development of space beyond the Earth's mesosphere.

10-11. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially reduce its military and/or police presence in one or more of the following: South Korea, Japan, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Iraq, Turkey.

09-10 Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase social services for persons living in poverty in the United States.

08-09. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase alternative energy incentives in the United States.

07-08. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially increase its public health assistance to Sub-Saharan Africa.

06-07. Resolved: The United States federal government should establish a policy substantially increasing the number of persons serving in one or more of the following national service programs: AmeriCorps, Citizen Corps, Senior Corps, Peace Corps, Learn and Serve America, Armed Forces.

05-06. Resolved: The United States federal government should substantially decrease its authority either to detain without charge or to search without probable cause.

04-05. Resolved: That the United States federal government should establish a foreign policy substantially increasing its support of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

High School. Please describe a little bit about your high school debate experience. Please include information on how it was taught, organized, financial concerns, what department the course/team was housed in, and anything else was important to your experience.

About you and what is important to you.

Take a few minutes and reflect on what is most important to you. What qualities or characteristics are central to your sense of who you are as a person. Please explain various characteristics identified.

Political Identity. Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Democrat, Independent, Republican, or something else? Did your political identity develop, change, or remain the same as a result of participation in debate?

Democrat Independent Republican Other ___ Don't know Don't care

If you identify yourself as liberal or conservative, where do you place yourself on continuum?

Extremely liberal--very lib--slightly lib---slightly conservative--very conserv--extremely conserv
None

Do you feel debate has changed, solidified, or in anyway altered your political identity? If so, how?

Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. How often would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs?

How do you stay informed?

Where do you go for information?

In a typical week, on how many days do you read or engage in each of the following? (please answer in number of days)

Newspaper

Magazines like Newsweek, Time, or U.S. News & World Report

News on television [consider cable news vs. broadcast news - or even specific channels]

Internet news sources

Discuss public affairs and politics with others

Part II. Your Reflection on Political Understanding and Debate

Reflecting on your debate experience, did debate in any way help you understand the political world. With these questions, please reflect and comment if and/or how high school policy debate helped to form your understanding.

How would you describe your understanding of political issues facing our country after your debate experience?

How would you describe your role in the political process after your debate experience?

When people are discussing policy issues, what is your role or experience in this conversation?

How would you compare your knowledge of politics and government compared to most people (esp. non-debaters)?

How qualified do you feel you are to participate in the political process?

If you needed to make a policy change (community, government, school, organizing a benefit or volunteer work), how hard or easy would it be for you to accomplish your goals? Please describe.

Reflecting on your debate experience, did debate in any way help you understand the political world. Please describe your comfort or knowledge level with the following.

Current national or international political issues, such as those on the front page of major newspapers

Current local or state political issues, such as those dealt with by city councils or state agencies

Political leaders and their roles

Current economic issues

Organizations that work on social and political problems

Theories about politics and democracy

Political institutions and how they work

Reflecting on your debate experience, how did debate help your interaction with the political world? With these questions, please reflect and comment if and/or how debate

helped to form your comfort or knowledge level with the following. In other words, how well can you ____? Please discuss and provide any examples that may demonstrate your position.

- Articulate my ideas and beliefs to other
- Reach a compromise
- Help diverse groups to work together
- Deal with conflict when it comes up
- Make a statement at a public meeting
- Talk about social barriers such as race or class
- Assume the leadership of a group
- Recognize or define conflicting political interests
- Write well about political topics
- Know whom to contact to get something done about a social or political problem
- Weigh the pros and cons of different political positions
- Develop strategies for political action
- Organize people for political action
- Learning how to engage in civil discourse

Reflecting on your debate experience, have you or how likely are you to get involved in community/social or political events. In the future, do you think you will be connected to social organizations or political activities? If this is related to debate, please explain how.

Debate Activities

For the next set of questions, please think back on your experiences in debate. How important were each of these activities in promoting your learning in this program? (If the program did not include the listed activity, please answer “does not apply.”)

- Assigned readings
- Class discussions about resolution content topics
- Current event discussions (including politics)
- Attending and/or interaction with outside lectures, talks, or institutes relating to debate or the resolution (including guest speakers)
- Research projects – creating evidence
- Speaking in class or at practice
- Written reflections about ideas or experiences
- Collaborating with and competing with other students / teammates
- Competing against other students
- Practice debates / debate simulations

Looking back, do you feel that your experience suggests that debate _____. (Please answer “does not apply” if you have no specific response or experience.)

- Encourage students to express their political opinions?
- Guide students to understand the connections between course material or debate competitions and current issues and problems in our society?
- Encourage students to be open to diverse political opinions?
- Help students consider political issues from a variety of perspectives?

Did debate contribute to your learning in the following areas?

- In-depth understanding of a particular issue or set of issues
- Understanding political institutions, processes, and policies
- Understanding the values and ethical dimensions involved in politics
- Learning skills and methods for addressing political problems

Knowing how to identify key players or factors involved in a political issue or problem
Listening to others' political ideas
Explaining a political issue or policy orally
Explaining a political issue or policy in writing
Defending a political view using reason and examples
Evaluating political information or arguments
Debating the strengths and weaknesses of different political views
Working effectively with others on political goals
Designing strategies to address political problems
Implementing political strategies or action plans

**In general terms, please discuss how debate may have impacted your understanding of:
(please indicate does not apply if it does not apply)**

Political Process Knowledge/Understanding
Political Identity
Political Skills

In general terms, please discuss if/how debate may have impacted your understanding of the following.

Intellectual Pluralism [understanding multiple perspectives of a singular issue]
Rational discourse
Intellectual autonomy
Open-mindedness
Civility

**In any way, did participation in policy debate reveal frustrations about the political world?
Were any negative aspects of politics exposed?**

**Please compare and contrast any benefits of political learning (using reference above)
against any disadvantages of participation.**

**In general terms, please discuss how debate may have impacted your understanding of your
political understanding and understanding the political world.**

**Finally, is there anything else you want to tell us about the issues raised in this interview or
feedback concerning the interview? We also welcome any feedback you have about the
survey. Please know that I will have no way of contacting you in the future.**

Thank you very much for your time.

Survey adapted from the Political Engagement Project. Survey appears in Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich and Corngold's *Educating for Democracy: Preparing Undergraduates for Responsible Political Engagement*, 2007.

Appendix D – Permission from University Director’s of Debate for Study

Dear Debate Institute Director:

My name is Ellen Zwarensteyn and I am conducting my Master’s research in the Department of Communications at Grand Valley State University. The focus of my studies concerns the connection between participation in high school policy debate and central tenets of political learning. The central question being addressed asks how competitive high school debate informs political learning. This study is based on research qualifying various components of political learning. According to the Carnegie Foundation’s Political Engagement Project (2007), political learning is currently understood as political knowledge of political facts, processes, and skills. The goal will be to add information to the field regarding how policy debate enhances political understanding through both these facts and processes. It will also address how the performance or engagement within debate brings political learning into practice.

I am writing to you to request your consent to interview current undergraduates during your institute as a part of this research study. I am asking to interview approximately 5 former high school debaters who may be employed as instructors or supervisors. I am also asking to secure a room to conduct the interviews within the institute.

If you allow these interviews, I will take your advice as to when would be appropriate to interview the participants. The structured interview will take approximately twenty minutes. The interview questions will be available for you to review in advance at your request. I assure you that the time taken by the interview will not interfere with the valuable time of your staff. I will make all efforts to ensure that the interviews will not interfere with your staffs’ duties of debate instruction or debater supervision.

Please know that I will take steps to maintain confidentiality of the participants’ records by keeping all data materials (taped interviews) secure. At no point, will individual names be used. Demographic information may be used as part of my research analysis. All efforts will be taken to assure confidentiality. In no way will specific names or results be used in the research results. Information regarding with institutes participated in the study may be used in explaining the research methodology.

Participation in this research is voluntary and will only occur with your permission. You are free to decline your institute’s participation in this study, or withdraw from it at any point.

Thank you for your consideration for consent and assistance with this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me by phone at (248) 321-4842 or by email at ezwarensteyn@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Ellen Zwarensteyn

Appendix E – Information Sheet

Grand Valley State University

School of Communications

Information Sheet (in lieu of informed consent) Regarding Interview Research

Purpose and Background

Ellen Zwarensteyn, Master's student in the School of Communication, is conducting a study to investigate the relationship between participation in competitive high school policy debate and political learning. The research question will ask former high school debaters to reflect on how does competitive high school policy debate informs central tenets of political learning.

I am being asked to participate in the study because of my previous invested involvement in high school policy debate and their continued involvement at high school debate summer institutes.

Procedures

If I agree to participant in the study, the following guidelines will be followed:

1. I will be interviewed by Ellen Zwarensteyn for at least twenty minutes regarding their involvement and reflections on policy debate and political learning.
2. This interview will take place when I am not otherwise involved in debate instruction, debater supervision, or other vital institute functions. The interview will occur during and at the summer debate institute.
3. The interview will be recorded for research purposes. While my name will not be used, basic demographic information may be used for analysis.
4. I understand that my involvement is voluntary and I may rescind my participation at any time. I also understand the questions being asked are available for review in advance upon request.

Risks and/or Discomforts

1. Time. A minimum of twenty minutes may be used for the interview. Throughout the process, you may choose to decline to answer any question or end the interview early if necessary.
2. Confidentiality. Participation in this research may mean a loss of confidentiality given the relatively small competitive debate community. Interview records will be kept confidential and materials will be locked when not in use for research. No individual identities will be used in any reports or publications resulting from the study. Study information use randomly generated numbers that cannot be traced to any individual.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to me for my participation in this study. Indirect benefits will include additional research regarding the potential benefits of competitive policy debate and political learning. This may be used to advocate for more policy debate within existing programs or to develop new programs to meet changing curricula needs.

Costs/Financial Considerations

There will be no financial costs to me as a result of taking part in this study. Ellen Zwarensteyn will travel to meet me face to face or arrange computerized time for the interview.

Payment/Reimbursement

There will be no payment for my participation in this study.

Study Results

Please know that the results of the study will be published as part of my Master's Thesis. This will be retrievable through various library systems throughout the United States. Copies can be requested directly from GVSU beginning September 2012.

Questions

I have talked to Ellen Zwarensteyn and/or Dr. Danielle Leek about this study and have had my questions answered and requests made. If I have further questions about the study, I may call her at (248) 321-4842 or e-mail her at ezwarensteyn@gmail.com. If I have questions or comments about my participation in this study, I should first talk with the researchers. If for some/any reason I wish to do not wish to do this, I may decline at any time. I may also contact the Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects (IRBPHS), which is concerned with protection of volunteers in research projects. I may reach the IRBPHS office by calling 616-331-3197 or by e-mailing hrrc@gvsu.edu, or by writing to the IRBPHS at Grand Valley State University; 301C DeVos Center; 401 Fulton Street; Grand Rapids, MI 49504.

Consent

I have been given a copy of the "Research Subject's Bill of Rights" and I have been given a copy of this consent form to keep.

PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY. I am free to decline to be in this study or to withdraw from it at any point. My decision as to whether or not participate in this study will have no influence on my debate education, institute employment, or competition. My decision will have no influence on my present or future status as a student or employee at Grand Valley State University.

(PLEASE KEEP THIS INFORMATION SHEET FOR YOUR RECORDS)

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