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# EVIDENCE IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE: THE PROMISE AND CHALLENGE OF COMPUTER-ASSISTED RESEARCH IN INTERCOLLEGIATE DEBATE

Pat J. Gehrke

## Abstract

The growing importance of research databases and the proliferation of evidence sources on the Internet have provoked responses from the debate community ranging from ecstatic hope to pronounced fear. The debate community should critically incorporate databases and the Internet into its research. The benefits of computer-assisted research are plentiful, if we can appropriately adjust as a community to the age of digitized research.

## Introduction

Debate heavily relies upon research. Hence, the advent of mega-databases and Internet research systems must receive our full attention. Unlike other areas of forensic scholarship, advancing technologies will overrun the activity at a pace which our writings can barely hope to match. As the debate community deals with these innovations we should take a broad perspective on our goals and try to predict where the information race will take its next turn. In an attempt to bring one small piece of our path into focus, this essay emphasizes how information technology affects our use and conception of evidence.

In the pre-digital world of moveable type, the definition of evidence seemed simple. Debaters could use anything that was printed and distributed. If it was ink on paper circulated to interested parties, then debaters could use it as evidence. Today, ink on paper is usually a printout of an originally digital text. The debate community should critically incorporate information technology into the use of evidence. To facilitate this move we need to first examine our definitions of evidence in relation to computer-assisted research. It may also be of assistance to investigate the promise of embracing electronic research and to discuss some of the challenges to be met as we incorporate technology into debate. Finally, we should consider how we could actively meet those challenges.

## Defining Evidence

Defining "evidence" is a necessary first step to this discussion. There is a substantial difference between a discussion of what makes for the highest quality evidence and what makes something acceptable to be presented as evidence. The former contains questions such as the relevancy of quali-

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fications, the rigor of the author's methodology, the ability of the author to qualify her or his conclusions, the author's personal connections to the subject, and opinions of other perceived experts of the author's work. Debaters should address these questions in their debates. Establishing any formal community standards for what makes good evidence would remove such discussion from the debate round and rob debaters of the opportunity to test the saliency of sources and literature. However, the latter question is an issue that requires community standards.

In discussing whether certain sources of evidence should be admissible in forensic, we may seek a more fundamental standard. The Cross-Examination Debate Association Bylaws and the American Forensic Association Code of Ethics provide some guidelines for defining "evidence." The bylaws of the Cross-Examination Debate Association (CEDA) state that "Debaters should use only evidence which is in the public domain and, hence, open to critical evaluation by others" (XIV.1.C). CEDA Bylaw XVII defines "evidence" as "material which is represented as published fact or opinion testimony and offered in support of a debater's claim" (XVII.B.1). The Code of Ethics of the American Forensic Association (AFA) defines "evidence" as "factual materials (statistics and examples) and/or opinion testimony offered as proof of a debater's or a speaker's contention, claim, position, argument, point, or case" (II.1.A). From the documents of these two debate organizations, we may take it that the definition of evidence is composed of four elements:

(1) In the public domain, (2) Represented as published, (3) Testimony of either fact or opinion, and (4) Offered in support of a debater's claim.

We can divide computer-assisted research into two general areas: fee-based services and free Internet sources. Fee-based services include databases such as Lexis-Nexis, ProQuest Direct, Westlaw, Dow Jones, and Electric Library. These databases provide access to varying quantities and types of publications, such as newspapers, magazines, law reviews, and scholarly journals. The power of these databases is their ability to perform very precise searches of their holdings and to return the full text of some articles instead of only a citation. Fee-based services also include news clipping services, such as Dow Jones's //CLIP, which will monitor news-wires and save stories that match criteria set by the subscriber. Free Internet sites are also an abundant source of research. National, state, and local governments operate thousands of Internet sites providing publications, press releases, reports, and official statements. Dozens of newspapers offer their text over the Internet at no cost. Corporations, foundations, universities, research facilities, and think tanks are also publishing journals, reports, press releases, studies, and other documents directly to the web. Together these free sources span the full spectrum of current issues and perspectives. Both fee-based services and free Internet sources usually meet the standards for evidence outlined by CEDA and the AFA.

### In the Public Domain

The first standard for evidence is that it must be in the public domain. Both a reasonable comparison to print sources and a glance at recent court rulings indicate that electronic evidence sources comply with this standard.

Though fee-based services (such as Lexis and Westlaw) charge subscribers to access information, these are indexing and distribution services not publishers. Lexis-Nexis does not write the documents that debaters use for evidence, but provides a means of accessing documents produced by others. The documents housed in databases are distributed in paper version by separate newspaper or journal publishers. The database service simply holds an electronic version of these documents. Given that this material differs only in medium from the printed version, there seems little reason to exclude database evidence from debate sources. If a Los Angeles Times article is currently considered in the public domain, then the digital version of that same article is likewise in the public domain. The fact that databases charge for access to information does not place it outside of the public domain. Very few paper publications are free.

While one may also need to pay to access the Internet, much of the material there is not being distributed privately but is open to anyone who can log on. If anything, Internet material is more public than most traditional evidence sources. The largest barrier to accessing most Internet information is a physical connection to the Internet itself. Since schools are rocketing onto the Internet, most debaters should have free access.

Additionally, the National Commission on Library and Information Science reported that over 60 percent of public libraries now have some form of Internet connection for patron use and more than 50 percent of public libraries provide graphical World-Wide Web interfaces for patron use. Even if one must purchase a private connection to the Internet this is hardly cost prohibitive. Unlimited usage of a dial-up connection averages between fifteen and twenty-five dollars a month. While a student budget and even a coach's budget may seem tightly squeezed, an Internet service subscription can replace subscriptions to national newspapers that freely distribute their daily editions on-line.

Courts have discussed the status of Internet information quite directly and hold that material on the Internet is in the public domain. Similar to previous rulings on print publication, the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia ruled in the highly publicized 1995 *Religious Technology Center v. Lerma* case that once material is posted to the Internet "it is effectively part of the public domain."

Naturally, not everything can meet the standard of public domain. Private mail is not public domain nor is electronic mail (*American Civil Liberties Union et. al. v. Janet Reno*). This may seem troublesome for listserves (also known as mail exploders). Listserves are services that distribute electronic mail to large groups of people who have identified themselves to the listserve as interested in certain subjects. An individual subscribes to a listserve the same way one might subscribe to a newsletter. From that point on, any messages sent to the listserve's electronic mail address are copied and distributed to everyone who has subscribed to that listserve. If the messages on the listserve blink into existence and then are gone, then we can fairly say that this violates the spirit, if not the letter, of the public

domain standard.

The CEDA bylaws include the public domain requirement so that evidence may be available for evaluation by others. The AFA Committee on Educational Development and Practices similarly stated in their proposal to amend the AFA Code of Ethics, "that evidence used in forensic activities should generally be accessible by all members of the community, be verifiable, and should be from authentic sources." This seems a necessary element for an activity seeking to promote open discussion and exploration of diverse topics. Internet materials meet this requirement if they are archived somewhere. Archiving is a relatively common practice of saving every message or document from a certain Internet site or listserv in a retrievable format. Material that is not archived somewhere is not available for critical analysis by others, and thus fails to meet the public domain standard.

The impermanence of evidence sources is an important concern. Mainstream books and periodicals can promise a relative durability to their existence. Copies will likely exist in at least a few university libraries for dozens of years past their original publication. Electronic resources may be less stable than paper evidence sources. A web site may change regularly or go out of existence completely. Even electronic databases will occasionally "die" and no longer be available to researchers (Quint). Debaters and coaches who use computer-assisted research must take this relative impermanence into account and should both seek to preserve originals and maximize the bibliographic information they record on their evidence. It should not take a repeat of the fire at Alexandria to remind us that paper documents are less than permanent. Newsletters, pamphlets, local papers, and alternative press publications are often not found in any university library or are only archived for one year. Thus, these questions of permanence should also be addressed to those paper publications and similar precautionary practices adopted.

#### Represented as Published

The courts make it clear that posting to the Internet or a commercial database is seen as publication. In the 1997 *Daniel v. Dow Jones & Co.* a New York court stated that the electronic nature of a news service is irrelevant to the transaction. The court further concluded that the relationship between a news content service provider and client is functionally identical to the relationship between a newspaper and subscriber (Counts and Martin). Additionally, in the court battle surrounding the Communications Decency Act of 1996 a Federal District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania held that material placed on the Internet is published (*American Civil Liberties Union et. al. v. Janet Reno*).

Simply put, publication is copying and distributing to an audience. To do so on paper only requires that one photocopy or otherwise reproduce a document and then distribute it. Alternatively, one might put a document on a computer diskette, make multiple copies, and distribute the disks.

Some computer and technical magazines have already switched to publishing on computer diskette or CD-ROM every month, instead of paper. Posting material to the Internet is not substantially different than this latter method. Instead of a disk, think of it as placing an infinite number of copies in a centralized location. Whenever someone desires, they can visit that location and take a copy of the document. On the Internet, when we access a web site or an archive, that information is copied from the computer where it is housed and saved onto the terminal we are viewing. This copy is temporary, since within a few days after we view the document it is automatically deleted from our computer. We can save or print the document, if we wish to retain a copy. However, the original will remain on the computer from which we retrieved it until its owner (the publisher) deletes it, independent of our access to that document.

Posting to the web lacks the peer review and editorial process of academic journals, but the review process determines the quality of a publication, not its status as published. Independent press publications, self-published books, certain private book publishers, and even a few periodicals have little or no editorial review. Publication is merely a matter of the will and the resources to publish. Quality academic publication is an entirely different issue. This difference is the gap between the baseline standard for what qualifies as evidence and the quality or credibility of the evidence in a given debate.

#### Testimony in Support of a Claim

The final two criteria for evidence are that it is offered as testimony and used to support a debater's claim. These have no relationship to the medium or status of the material. Rather, they are dependent on what the debaters do with that material. Electronic resources provide a great deal of testimony of fact and opinion. Debaters are already distilling this information into evidence and presenting it in debate rounds as support for their positions. The four criteria currently outlined by the Cross Examination Debate Association and the American Forensic Association clearly encompass evidence from the fee-based services and free Internet sources.

#### The Promise of Computer-Assisted Research

A few scholars have advocated the rejection or severe limitation of computer-assisted research (Elliot). Many of these arguments are based upon an opinion that electronic evidence is of poor quality. As with print evidence the quality of electronic evidence varies widely. If one is a discriminating researcher, fee-based services and free Internet resources can provide a cornucopia of strongly qualified sources and fantastically reasoned arguments. Integrating electronic research systems into debate holds a great deal of promise for expanding every debater's base of research.

#### The Move to Digital Publication

Robert Tucker noted the force that electronic research databases can have on debaters trying to finish research assignments. Easy access and

complex search capabilities cause debaters to flock to these systems. What he neglects to mention is the degree to which the Internet is becoming a haven for scholars, theorists, researchers, and publishers. Many publications are available only in full text for download from web sites. Journals such as *Critical Theory* and the *Journal of Postmodern Culture* are but two examples of material that existed on the Internet before it was published on paper. The *National Journal of Sexual Orientation Law* and *Queer* are two journals that received national attention when they recently published their inaugural issues on the Internet. There are also electronically published medical, science, and technology journals on the Internet that are much more current than their printed counterparts, due to reduced production time (Bates, "Database" 64-65).

Additionally, some scholars have decided to circumvent what they perceive as a biased and lengthy review process by publishing their materials directly to the web (Hibbits). The web is already providing many writers with an instantaneous and global reach difficult to acquire any other way (Valdes).

As more publishers and authors choose the relatively inexpensive option of Internet publication, and the ability to access the information on the Internet improves, the debate community will find that it can not ignore the whole schools of thought which are predominantly published electronically. Nor can it realistically prevent debaters from utilizing electronic resources.

#### The Internet as Alternative Press

Robert Tucker expressed concern that corporate databases (such as Lexis-Nexis and Westlaw) only provide homogenous uniform views of the world from a single ideological framework. While some services have improved the diversity of sources available and newspapers from dozens of countries are represented, there is still some merit to this argument. I would be greatly surprised to have *Anarchy: The Journal of Desire Armed* or similar publications pop up in a Lexis-Nexis search. Most databases are designed to serve law firms, investors, and advertising agencies.

However, one can improve the diversity, breadth, and depth of analysis of any research project by combining traditional research and paid services with Internet research. Radical argumentation is not only sparse in the databases, but the vast majority of the popular news media exclude material which could be considered offensive to their corporate owners or advertisers (Bagdikian; Lee and Solomon). We should also not delude ourselves into thinking that this only happens in the popular press. Similar exclusion of fringe theories and ideas can occur in the dominant scholarly journals of any discipline. Infighting between faculty and funding wars between departments, and the general factionalism of the Ramistic university model, can undermine the ideal of open academic discourse (Booth, chap. 19).

Faced with the likelihood that few departments and libraries might

subscribe to their publication or that publishers are uncomfortable with their subject, some journals and authors turn to the Internet (Valdes). Debate involves the power of ideas and their expression, but such is contingent on access to diverse viewpoints. As these marginalized voices raise their volume of distribution through the Internet our community should be paying special attention. The U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California recognized this unique virtue of the Internet, arguing that it provides the capacity for even relatively poor organizations and individuals to publish to millions of readers (*Religious Technology Ctr. v. Netcom On-Line Services*).

Additionally, many viewpoints are so far from the center of scholarship and media that it is extraordinarily difficult for debate teams to acquire copies of pertinent publications. Perhaps schools in New York City and San Francisco can find a great diversity of underground and truly radical press, but in more rural or suburban areas such publications are rare indeed. By providing a method to explore the most radical literature available we promote a truly open exploration of ideas and the development of independent critical thinking.

#### Better Debate Through Technology

Internet material may also provide other advantages for debate. Eugene Volokh identified six primary advantages to using material from the Internet:

They're (1) more accessible, (2) timelier, (3) cheaper, (4) easier to search, and (5) easier to copy into your own electronic documents; and because of the cost savings, (6) the web makes it possible to publish items which otherwise never would have been distributed publicly at all. (206)

Each of these can be of great benefit to debate. Improving our resource efficiency by finding faster, easier to access, and cheaper research can free up resources (both time and money) for things other than research. The increasing ease of searching will also make teaching Internet research easier. The fifth advantage Volokh lists has unique implications for intercollegiate debate. Unlike paper documents, your electronic evidence can be copied and pasted into a word processor, then processed and briefed right on the screen, allowing debaters to print out finished evidence briefs. This method dramatically reduces the amount of paper a debate program consumes in producing evidence. As a community, we should not ignore the implications that electronic resources might have on our consumption of natural resources.

#### The Internet and Debate Pedagogy

A number of pedagogical advantages should compel forensic educators to provide electronic facilities to their students. The planet is moving at a rapid pace toward a predominantly information-based economy (Drucker). Universities may have equipped their students and faculty with the physical technology they need, and perhaps even database accounts, but most universities are poor when it comes to effectively training the



students on how to make full use of the resources available to them.

Debate is a place where students can learn skills and knowledge that set them apart from the rest of the graduating class. In addition to their argumentation skills, the research and organization skills are extraordinarily valuable. Familiarity with computers and the Internet are critical contemporary survival skills. If a committee is looking for a person to hire, admit, or promote and they have two equally qualified candidates, except that only one is familiar with information technology, the computer literate applicant is the likely choice. In addition, in academia the use of databases is increasingly important. Law students, other graduate students, and active faculty are increasingly dependent on database systems, computerized indexes, and the Internet (Liestman).

Many students entering college (and sadly, some leaving it) are information poor. Not only are these students lacking in exposure to a deep and broad base of general education, but they lack the skills needed to effectively find, process, and apply information. Whether it be because of poor K-12 resources or a general lack of access to technology, university librarians are swamped with students who have no idea how to effectively phrase a search term, compile a search, or skim screens for useful information (Liestman). Debate has an opportunity to not only expose students to the basics of computerized research and Boolean logic, but through constant practice debaters can develop computer research and Internet skills far beyond the average graduate student.

Embracing Internet and electronic database research in academic debate is beneficial to all parties involved. The shift from print to web publication, especially by the alternative press, necessitates that we incorporate Internet research into debate. Further, the benefits of increased resource efficiency and increased exposure to radical information sources can make electronic resources superior to print publications. Finally, the forensic community cannot ignore the benefits of information technology education.

#### Suggestions for Charting a Course in the Electronic Age

There are challenges we need to consider as we move toward digitizing research. Three of the most critical issues are the quality of the evidence retrieved from electronic sources, the fairness of access to technologies, and the availability of paid databases or a reasonable alternative. While some have advocated that these issues create sufficient warrant to reject or severely limit the use of electronic sources of evidence this over-generalizes. Rather, what forensic educators might consider is adjusting the way debate is taught and coached.

#### Reviving the Source Debate

One of the largest criticisms levied against Internet and database research is that the sources are unqualified staff writers, or lay persons writing without qualification or reflection. Though some debaters have virtu-

ally made careers out of using two sentence conclusions from newspapers on Nexis, this is not the fault of the medium. The same debater would likely be producing two sentence conclusions from current periodicals in the library if they were not able to access a database. If a debater is predominantly cutting low-quality evidence, we can safely bet that there is more going on than just a dependence on electronic resources.

Avoiding poor sources and groundless evidence should be important to all of us. Coaches should promote deeper and more critical research and writing by their students. Encouraging debaters to wade through a scholarly book, or read law review articles, or scrounge through government documents, or incorporate scholarly journals, or decipher court decisions goes further toward the goal of promoting deep research than attempting to restrict the use of electronic resources.

In fact, electronic resources may facilitate this. Some journals and many legal resources are available through databases or the web. Additionally, a plethora of government documents and court decisions can be found on the web. Sources such as the Electronic NewsStand provide access to selected publications and articles for free. Expanded Academic Index provides full text of a few scholarly journals. Lexis-Nexis provides immense legal holdings and a select few journals on economics, foreign policy, and marketing. ProQuest Direct provides full text access to a variety of scholarly publications, including *Argumentation and Advocacy*, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *Foreign Affairs*, and *Urban Affairs Review*. If poor quality evidence is being cut from these electronic systems, it is the fault of debaters and coaches, not the systems that index the information.

#### Issues of Basic Access

Access is probably the most troublesome of all the issues related to the use of computer-assisted research in debate. We should be sympathetic to the plight of forensic programs with few computer facilities at their disposal. Up to this point this inequity has been regarded as an inevitable result of education within capitalism. However, the addition of computer research to a debate team's resources in many cases multiplies the available literature for that team a hundred-fold. Any school that suddenly gains access to the Internet will find (with appropriate effort) that the resources at their disposal substantially supplement their library.

Additionally, the ease and speed of accessing information through a moderate Internet connection (a 28.8 kbps or faster modem) makes conventional paper index and card catalog research look like some arcane academic torture device. Students who build their skills at searching the Internet and databases may find they can pinpoint their searches well enough to find evidence on any topic quickly. The biggest problem is that some schools still do not provide their students with web-browsing terminals. Not all colleges give their students electronic mail accounts. This means that while the rest of academia is zipping along the electronic Autobahn, many have been left to be pedestrians roaming in the under-

passes.

The gap between basic access to the net and no access is not just a small step, but rather is an enormous leap. Even a simple web connection opens vast worlds of information. Professional researchers are increasingly finding the web as an indispensable and irreplaceable source of diverse and abundant information (Bates, "Internet"). Students with more complex Internet access may find faster connections or fancier visual displays, but not necessarily any more useful information. A simple connection and a computer that can support Microsoft's or Netscape's free web-browser software is sufficient for most research. One of the critical challenges facing the forensic community is ensuring that every debater at least has access to this baseline standard of Internet use.

Actual physical technology can be a barrier for both students and forensic programs. The growing complexity of the Internet does increase the minimum acceptable configurations for a research computer. However, careful shopping and educating oneself about what is important can save a substantial amount of money. Computers that function well as research stations can be bought for well under a thousand dollars, including a monitor and a laser printer.

#### Corporate Databases

At this point it would be foolish for anyone to ignore the disparity in access to corporate databases. Though Westlaw and Lexis-Nexis are the most famous, they are not the only databases. Even so, many schools have no electronic database access and lack the financial resources needed to purchase an account. Lexis passwords were reasonably priced for mid- and high-budget forensic programs when they were sold at the original educational discount rates. However, Lexis has refused to open new educational accounts to most schools in the past few years, while phasing out existing educational accounts. This has left a growing portion of the forensic community without access to the best-known database for debate research. Complaints that a lack of access to Lexis has made competition in debate impossible for some schools have also received attention.

The advent of the new Lexis Universe system may mitigate some of these problems and disparities, but preliminary informal reports have been inconsistent and less than promising. Universe is a version of Lexis/Nexis that is accessible, for a fee, via the Internet. The Universe system is estimated to cost 70 to 80 per cent less than the comparable commercial service (Young A39). Because of how Universe security authenticates its users, Lexis subscribes whole universities at a time, rather than providing passwords. The minimum price quoted for a very small university to subscribe to the Lexis Universe system was \$9,000 per year (Miller 12). The Universe security system also generally precludes accessing the database while away from the subscriber's university. At least one coach has managed to negotiate a more reasonable arrangement with Lexis, but the company's history precludes taking that experience as an opening for other

coaches.

This researcher has yet to find a system as well organized or efficient as Lexis. However, there are web sources that might provide some similar information. The Library of Congress runs THOMAS, an on-line system to access documents from the Congressional Information Service. Here debaters may access, for no additional cost, the congressional record, pending and recent legislation, and indices to congressional material. Recent and landmark Supreme Court decisions are also available on the Internet from Case Western Reserve. Even given these and other resources on the net I must agree with database expert Don MacLeod that the web can not match systems like Westlaw and Lexis.

However, the Internet is much stronger in academic literature than Lexis. A number of journals have already been mentioned as web accessible, but academic papers published directly to the Internet are also widely available. For most research areas there are articles and books providing guidance for where to start looking for information on the Internet. On the 1996-97 CEDA/NDT topic, high quality evidence could be found from dozens of government and hundreds on non-governmental web pages (Alston). Internet sites can also provide access to daily newspapers around the world and direct news feeds. Direct access to Reuter's reports and dozens of newspapers means free access to news through the web. CNN's web page even accommodates complex searches of its news files (Notess). None of these services fully closes the gap between Internet access and a commercial database, but together they do a great deal to cut against the claims that without access to Lexis-Nexis there is no hope of competing in debate.

Additionally, a wide number of databases have begun to offer less expensive services since Westlaw and Lexis began. A regular perusal of *Database* magazine will reveal many companies advertising services similar to those most coveted by debaters. For example, CompuServe's Current News service provides access to magazines, wire services, and newspapers quickly and at a substantially lower price than Lexis-Nexis (Kassel). Some of this information receives hourly updates and the database can be searched with controlled vocabulary terms or keywords. This service was advertised at approximately \$25 per month for twenty hours and then \$2 per each additional hour. Electric Library provides access to their substantial database for as little as \$60 a year. America Online and NewsNet also have offerings similar to CompuServe's. These lower cost alternatives to Lexis-Nexis may be sufficient for the needs of many debate teams.

#### Navigating an Electronic Future

We should not approach computerized research as a digital version of traditional library research. In large part, students, librarians, and a small group of technologically savvy coaches have facilitated the integration of technology. The day is not far away when a coach's official responsibilities will also include computer-assistance and training. Many in our commu-

nity currently facilitate free research resources on the Internet for debaters. The challenge now is two-fold: first, we must adjust our coaching strategies to a world where information quantity is infinite; and, second, our national organizations need to proactively promote a baseline level of technological equity.

#### Proposals for Coaching Adjustments

Making changes in our behavior as coaches is the area where we can have the most immediate impact. As coaches and as critics we need to become more demanding on comparisons of evidence quality. Too often debaters and coaches are impressed by evidence quantity with little concern for the strategic and argumentative quality of the evidence. Debate machismo manifests itself as a comparison of the number of briefs or quotes on a given topic that debaters, teams, or even institutes can produce. Valuing evidence quantitatively and placing numerical minimums on research assignments reflect a school of thought that believes all evidence is qualitatively roughly equal.

Part of this problem may be a reactive method of doing research. Much of the research done in debate is a hasty skirmish to extract some evidence against an affirmative case. In general, teams work on well developed affirmative case strategies, but approach negative research as a disjointed set of brief forays into databases and the library. Rather than debaters focusing on answers to a single affirmative case for a few days or even two weeks, we may find that seeking out strategies with better warrant and deeper meaning is more pedagogically and competitively rewarding. Hence, a debater may seek out evidence which applies to a variety of cases and cuts more fundamentally, or holistically, against common affirmative arguments.

Debaters and coaches are also often dissatisfied with the current bibliographic information for electronic evidence. Rather than try to hide our evidence and sources from one another, we can demystify electronic evidence by providing more thorough citation of sources. The American Forensic Association Committee on Educational Development and Practices proposed a standard of five elements that each electronically retrieved piece of evidence should include:

(i) Name of author(s), source of information, full date, and author(s) credentials where available; (ii) The nature of the electronic site identified in the evidence citation [e.g., 'listserve,' 'Lexis/Nexis,' 'Homepage,' 'CD-ROM']; (iii) A full current Universal Resource Locator (URL) when applicable [e.g., <http://www.epa.gov>]; (iv) The date the information was retrieved [date of access]; (v) Unique and original page numbers where available, or an indication if not available [e.g., 'n.pag.,' 'p.Lexis']. (AFA Code of Ethics II.1.C.6)

Additionally, since some web pages have a tendency to relocate or restructure quite frequently, the electronic mail address of the person who maintains the web page might also help, such as [pjg154@psu.edu](mailto:pjg154@psu.edu). Since

the Internet and commercial databases are not as well organized as university libraries, we should not expect citations equivalent to a book title to be sufficient to meet our standards. A 1998 study reported that even the most thorough Internet search engines only manage to search about a third of the material on the Internet, and many popular search sites index substantially less (Weber). Full citation is essential to the spirit, if not the letter, of the public domain requirement. If evidence is not properly cited it may technically be in the public domain but elude critical examination by others in the community.

In addition to being aware of our own teams' evidence practices, we can also train our debaters to critically examine the sources and quality of evidence. Debaters should revive the practice of evidence and source comparison. The relevancy of authors' qualifications, the completeness of their arguments, the quality of their warrants, and similar arguments have been unfortunately characterized as mere evidence presses. As educators and as critics if we take these arguments seriously we can utilize the integration of electronic research as a springboard into expanding the quality of critical thinking in debate.

Learning how to use these resources is often a barrier for coaches and students. Many universities have seminars to train faculty on research systems and computers. The faculty training sessions are in general better than those that are available to students. Coaches who attend these training sessions can share that information with their students and others in the community who have questions about electronic resources. Coaches can also help develop research skills by setting up special training sessions with librarians who specialize in electronic resources. Many librarians are happy to train interested students in how to use the Internet or databases for specific types of research. Coaches and students can also take the time to read up on the various resources at their disposal and do some research on effective means of integrating computer-assisted research.

Internet research has also been facilitated by the development of web sites that compile connections to resources on the Internet that are pertinent to the current debate topic. Debaters and debate coaches around the country with a concern for the community have autonomously constructed these central clearinghouses. The preservation and proliferation of these resources should be supported and applauded.

#### Proposals for Organizational Adjustments

A national organization may need to facilitate access for technologically disadvantaged programs. Donations of computers and Internet connection services should be acquired by a national organization and disseminated to the most needy. While programs could conceivably seek sponsorship and donations independently, the likely result would be further concentration of resources in the hands of those who are already well enabled. Successful programs will have the resources and background to attract more donations of resources, thus undermining the capacity for do-

nations to offset resource inequity. By positioning a national organization as the solicitor and receiver of donations we might better ensure that the technology find its way into the hands of the most needy.

A registered non-profit organization with sufficient support and history to begin the project of soliciting donations, such as the Cross-Examination Debate Association or the American Forensic Association, would be ideal for such a project. Individuals and private cooperatives of debate coaches cannot accomplish this task without the support of an established non-profit organization. Without the recognized non-profit status and the organization's reputation to back up the request, the likelihood of receiving any assistance is slim indeed. Most corporations and foundations will not even accept requests for support from individuals that cannot present themselves as a part of a larger institution.

To facilitate these projects national organizations need to establish an elected committee to oversee the acquisition and distribution of technology donations. A Technology Coordinator would coordinate these donation requests and chair the Technology Resource Committee, which might eventually find a broader purpose. A blind review process for applications combined with electing community members with a record of outstanding professional integrity could help to ensure against favoritism or discriminatory practices by the Technology Resource Committee. The qualifications required for this post are obvious, and the duties quite substantial. However, the alternative is for debate to be tossed about by the fourth wave, rudderless.

Previous experiences of organizations attempting to negotiate with database providers, such as the AFA Policy Debate Caucus' interaction with Lexis-Nexis, have been less than promising. We should not expect rapid or complete solutions from such a committee or from our national organizations. Yet, to hope for steady movement forward in providing a baseline standard of technological equity for all debate programs seems a reasonable vision. Resource disparity is a simple fact of the way schools and debate programs are funded. Different travel budgets, coaching resources, libraries, and technology will inevitably maintain resource inequity between programs. What we might be able to do is mitigate the impact of those disparities on basic access to information.

For programs looking to purchase computer technology the same individuals responsible for the donations program could assist in selecting computers that meet the needs and budget constraints of specific programs. National organizations would do well to help these programs set up their connections and provide information on what types of service might be available to them.

#### Concluding Remarks

Advances in technology often bring turmoil and fear. Integrating new technologies into debate is no different. It is plain that electronic research meets the formal criteria for evidence established by the community. Com-

puter-assisted research also holds great promise for the future of research in debate. We must thoughtfully and critically integrate the new information technologies, fully aware of the challenges they pose and the issues that arise from their use. With conscience and self-awareness we can each help our own programs and the community as a whole adjust to new technologies. With institutional support we may even be able to help programs with fewer resources access the evidence shared in the global village.

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