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Remembering Arkansas Debate: The Use of Collective Memory in Analyzing the Role of Intercollegiate Debate at the University of Arkansas

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Remembering Arkansas Debate: The Use of Collective Memory in Analyzing the Role of
Intercollegiate Debate at the University of Arkansas

Remembering Arkansas Debate: The Use of Collective Memory in Analyzing the Role of
Intercollegiate Debate at the University of Arkansas

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Communication

By

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Bachelor of Arts in Communication, 2010

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University of Arkansas

Abstract

As one of the most successful organizations on campus for nearly a century, the University of Arkansas debate team created many memories and stories from their time in competition. According to the framework of collective memory, the production and dissemination of these stories is what connects the past, present, and future of a debate team together.

I first reconstruct the history of debate at universities, beginning with development of debate at the University of Cambridge and University of Oxford. I then detail the history of debate and argumentation at American universities, including the first intercollegiate debate in 1881. I then turn to the expansion of debate into the University of Arkansas and its rapid growth from 1896 to the early parts of the 20th century. After a period of “doldrums,” I then examine the successful tenures of Dr. Jack Gregory and Mary Ingalls. After the termination of the team in 1986, I outline how the team came back in 1999 with the creation of the Arkansas Union Society (AUS). The AUS and its intercollegiate debate team experienced great success until the team’s termination in 2009. I finish the historical reconstruction by articulating how I helped restart the team in 2011.

Next I provide a review of the literature that examines the way in which students, professors, administrators, and the campus community benefit from a debate team’s existence. Additionally, I provide a narrative perspective from a bevy of Arkansas debate alumni who attest to the wide range of academic and professional benefits they gained from participating with the team.

I then turn to the main argument by examining the role of the Arkansas debate team in the context of the collective memory framework. In analyzing the role of the debate team at the

University of Arkansas, I argue that the fragmentation of these stories from the multiple cancellations of the team irreparably harms the University as a whole.

I conclude by asserting that the Arkansas debate team should move beyond the nostalgia of the past and seek to create new stories and memories for the future.

This thesis is approved for recommendation
to the Graduate Council

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

“By engaging students in real, complex public policy questions, competitive debate is nurturing a new generation of engaged, committed citizens.”¹

As the current U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan indicates, competitive debate provides current students with the critical thinking skills and intellectual tools necessary to flourish in modern society. Debate, despite its great impact, is often considered a niche activity because its technical intricacies and insulated culture render the activity “remarkably isolated and esoteric.”² Yet, for those who participate, debate teaches a wide array of skills and is proven to increase civic engagement and cultural awareness.³ In addition, as an intercollegiate activity, debate and forensics are one of a select few student organizations that can both carry the rich history of a university and prepare it for the future.⁴

Debate derives its ability to do this from the social interactions and intellectual stimulation that students experience while competing, which spans across all academic areas.⁵ Universities who support debate programs are eager to articulate these realities to potential competitors because of debate’s excellent track record of recruiting and retaining high-achieving students.⁶ An integral part of this recruiting process that helps to secure and retain desirable students is to document the successes of the team in a multitude of ways. Whether it be through prominently displayed trophy cases, tournament write-ups in the local newspaper, or providing a list of accomplishments on the university (or department’s) webpage, debate programs place a high priority on exhibiting their accolades.⁷

However, like most intercollegiate competitions, the context and meaning of each award progressively deteriorates as time passes. One way that a debate's past achievements remain relevant in the present is through the revival and recollection of its importance through stories. As an activity that is predicated upon oratory, the timeless nature of debate resides in its competitive banter, and the ability to articulate those stories years after they took place. Collecting material forms of accomplishment such as trophies and plaques make for great recruiting and marketing tools, but they do not encapsulate the essence of debate. In a presentation at the 2004 essay titled *Evaluating Scarcity Beyond the Forensics Experience: Alumni Perspectives* Shannon Dyer argues for a comprehensive re-evaluation of how debaters' accomplishments are framed once they are alumni of the program.⁸ Dyer argues that too much emphasis is placed on those who won considerable amounts of trophies, and not enough on the success that other debaters achieve once they graduate from the university. Instead, she contends that Universities are best served through integrating the experiences of alumni into the program.⁹ Similarly, the recollection of these memories by team alumni cultivate a team identity that permeates throughout the entire university.¹⁰ In a universal sense, participating in intercollegiate debate both commemorates the history of debate itself and contributes to the university's perceived prestige.

In no place is this dual purpose more reinforced than at the University of Arkansas. In a university that traveled to their first intercollegiate debate tournament in 1896 and sent a delegation to the Arkansas Oratorical Contest in 1900, the development of the debate program at Arkansas is largely intertwined with the development of the university as a whole.¹¹ The emergence of the debate program was aided in part by a departmental name change "in 1913 from Elocution and Physical Culture to the Expression Department."¹² Although housed in the

department of English, the department still maintained a class titled “Intercollegiate Debate” where debate was “studied and briefed” and many practice debates were held.¹³ With such a high emphasis placed upon intercollegiate debate, there should be little surprise that during the this time period, debate “was second only to football in the publicity that it received.”¹⁴ This celebrated history coincided with a change in philosophy in 1929 when the newly minted Department of Public Speaking welcomed Assistant Professor Virgil L. Baker.¹⁵ Dr. Baker instituted substantial changes in the department that included stressing “originality on the part of the student speaker in both subject matter and word choice.”¹⁶ This progressive, ideological shift was representative of a heightened stature of the University of Arkansas as a whole, as the university saw its enrollment reach unforeseen levels by 1946.¹⁷

The University of Arkansas’ debate program reached its pinnacle during the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, where the team “enjoyed a great deal of national renown” that culminated in a State Championship in 1975.¹⁸ This unparalleled rise of success continued through the 1980’s as the team “placed well in the South Central Region and in the top 30% nationally until 1985.”¹⁹

The accumulation of such awards by the Arkansas debate team, albeit quite impressive if viewed from the trophy case, garners greater meaning when recollected and retold by the debaters who procured them. A first place trophy, in and of itself, means very little until context and significance are provided that quantifies how notable the achievement is. The history, stories, and memories surrounding the winning of that trophy are what provides that context. In short, what gives debate at Arkansas its true merit is not the accumulation of accolades, but the accrual of memories from past tournaments and its connection to the present. Debate, like any intellectual endeavor, is firmly rooted in historical precedent, but also continually evolves over time due to the changing nature of educational practices and

application. An analysis of the past, present, and future of the Arkansas debate program provides the most succinct way in understanding where debate came from, and where it is going; thus providing a huge educational benefit in understanding the activity as a whole.

Thus, when situating the role of the debate team in the broader context of the University of Arkansas as a whole, it is most useful to analyze the comprehensive history of the team through a framework which not only provides proper framing of revived memories, but also connects these stories to the present. To best accomplish this, it is necessary to make sense of the revived memories and situating past accomplishments through a collective memory theoretical foundation.

Literature Review

Scholarship focusing on the collective memory framework begins with John Bodnar's book *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* where he constructs collective memory as "a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication its future."²⁰ Bodnar's book is effective in providing a basic understanding of what collective memory is, and how it can be understood on a broad level. In addition, public memory scholar Jill Edy posits that collective memory works as "a narrative about the past that is conveyed and negotiated in public spaces." Edy's work illustrates the notion that collective memory is not a static representation of the past, but both malleable and fluid. Edy then provides what is arguably the most concise definition of collective memory when she states "collective memory is a metaphor that formulates society's retention and loss of information about its past in the familiar terms of

individual remembering and forgetting.”²¹ This definition emphasizes that “collective memory” is not infallible or inherently objective. This is an important claim to make because it illuminates an important aspect of human communication. Noted communication scholar Walter Fisher declared that “humans are rhetorical beings” who are “as much valuing as they are reasoning animals.”²² The implication of Fisher’s argument is that human rhetoric places equal importance on subjective narratives and tropes (“values”) as they do on logical statements of fact (“reasoning”). This assertion reinforces the value of subjectivity in collective memory in that it mirrors the normative ways in which people communicate. In addition, collective memory accounts for the passing of time and other factors that alter and distort the memory. This fact can be viewed as both a flaw and a limitation to collective memory, but is vital in maintaining the real-world applicability of the concept as a whole.

In essence “collective memory is a story about the the past.”²³ The operative word here is “collective.” This word “denotes that the story is shared and negotiated by a group or society.”²⁴ So, when individual narratives are told about a specific debate or tournament, they combine with other specific narratives to provide a broader, more universal understanding of the team as a whole. To gain a truly comprehensive understanding of how collective memory can embody a team, collective memory and forensics scholar Joshua Compton notes that “collective memory, then, serves as a narrative reconstruction of where a collective has come from and often serves as a guide for where a collective is going.”²⁵ As such, collective memory does not operate as a form of nostalgia, but instead contextualizes recollected memories and narratives into its proper present and future framework.

Little literature exists on the role of collective memory in intercollegiate debate, which further creates the need for using this theoretical framework in making sense of a thorough, one-hundred year history of an intercollegiate debate program.

However scarce the literature on collective memory and forensics, there is one essay that provides the fundamental building block for this thesis project. In his article *Remembering, Forgetting, and Memorializing Forensics' Past: Considering Forensics from a Collective Memory Theoretical Perspective*, Compton advocates that intercollegiate forensics as an entity take further steps in commemorating its past and “explore forensics from the theoretical launching point of collective memory.”²⁶ Compton spends considerable time arguing that “forensics is a fertile area for collective memory analysis” and that “the past plays a pivotal role in the way forensics is viewed and done.”²⁷ In essence, Compton’s argument “is that collective memory serves as a useful theoretical perspective for analyzing, discussing, and evaluating intercollegiate forensics.”²⁸ This thesis supports such an endeavor and seeks to provide the theoretical framework and results necessary to solidify Compton’s claim.

One other piece that deals with the recollection of memories in debate and forensics was the aforementioned presentation by Shannon Dyer. In her call for a comprehensive re-evaluation of how debaters’ accomplishments are framed, she notes that communicating cogent and simplistic analysis of tournament activities to broader audiences will make the accolades much more significant.

Similarly, In a 1997 presentation to the N.C.A. Convention titled *Forensics as a Cooperative Agent: Building a Tradition within an Academic Community*, Bob Derryberry posits that “forensics programs need to communicate their messages” and “sell their educational features.”²⁹ Although not specifically utilizing collective memory, Derryberry reinforces the

concept that eloquating “public presentation” (“audience debates, demonstration debates and/or the presentation of individual speaking and interpretation events for specific campus-community groups”)³⁰ is “an integral part of a forensic tradition.”³¹ Derryberry’s argument helps in furthering the need for conceptualizing the history and tradition of a debate team.

In sum, the existing literature in collective memory largely calls for programs to utilize this framework to improve the understanding and appreciation of debate team’s success and its role on college campuses. This project seeks to demonstrate this in the context of the University of Arkansas debate team.

Statement of the Problem, Scope of the Study, and Methodology

This thesis is an evaluation of the recollected memories and conceptualization of the history of the University of Arkansas intercollegiate debate team. Examination of this past will be viewed through the lens of the collective memory framework. After providing a thorough analysis of the history of the debate program, this thesis will then utilize the collective memory framework to make the argument that the Arkansas debate team’s legacy and accomplishments positively contributed to the growth and development of the University as a whole.

Plan of the Study

The project will begin by reliving and recontextualizing the history of the University of Arkansas intercollegiate debate program. I will start with an examination of the history of oratory and argumentation at the University of Oxford and the University of Cambridge. This

history provides the foundation for of intercollegiate debate. Next, I will connect this history to the beginning of oratory and argumentation in American universities to illustrate the progression from novel discussions of literature at Harvard in the 17th century to the first American intercollegiate debate in the middle parts of the 19th century.

After a global and national perspective on debate, I will narrow the focus of analysis to provide a historical context on the existence of public debates in the state of Arkansas before the University was founded.³² I will continue the process by discussing the literary societies that were founded after the University was established in 1871.³³ With that foundation set, I will turn to the beginning of competitive debate and oratory at the University of Arkansas, starting with its first intercollegiate debate in 1896 and Arkansas State Oratorical Contest in 1900.³⁴ Subsequently, I will shed light on the groundbreaking events and tournaments the early debate teams competed in and its impact on the development of the program.

To further illustrate this development, I will interject into the project how the growth of the debate team played a significant role in the changes made to the department that housed the team. I will continue by examining the “dead period” of debate in the post-World War II era, and the subsequent “renaissance” of the program in the 1960’s and 1970’s.³⁵ I will then detail how the termination of the program in 1985 and its later rebirth were important in giving the University a reconnection to the ever-changing world of debate in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s.³⁶ I will continue by illustrating how the program’s discontinuation in 2009 overshadowed the high level of achievement the program sustained while in existence.³⁷ This chapter will conclude by examining the resurgence of student congress and debate in 2011, and shed light on the efforts of current students’ to bring back the tradition of Arkansas debate.

With the thorough history of the team now demonstrated, the purpose of the next chapter of this project will be broken down into three parts.

First, I will provide a review of the literature concerning the benefits of debate as an intercollegiate activity. Specifically, in conjunction with the literature, I will illustrate the ways in which debate benefits all members of a university, including students, faculty, and administrators. It will be further exemplified how debate is a useful activity in the classroom (across all academic areas) and as a tool for “experiential learning” outside the classroom.

Second, I will take interviews I conducted with alumni from the team and demonstrate how their participation in debate proved to be useful in their careers after college. In addition, the common narratives and themes will be supported by the reviewed literature to provide a comprehensive argument in support of the value and utility of the University of Arkansas debate team.

Third and finally, this project will conclude by asserting that the termination of the Arkansas debate team resulted in clear, tangible harms to the University. Most notably, the final section will demonstrate how the the stories and memories of team alumni are now disconnected from the current University community. The impact of these lost connections will be quantified through the collective memory framework. Finally, I will provide a budgetary solution that will seek to properly compensate the debate team not only for its professional and pedagogical value, but its role in shaping the University of Arkansas in the past, present, and future.

In the concluding chapter, I will provide a summary of this project and outline the ways in which this thesis contributes to and adds to the value of utilizing collective memory in debate research. Finally, I will turn the focus away from the past and present by examining the future climate for debate at Arkansas. With the resurfacing of the team in 2011, this project will

advocate for creation achievements, stories, and memories in the future to ensure that the team does not get stuck in its nostalgic past. In doing so, this project will fulfill the three tenets of collective memory, by attempting to link the Arkansas debate team's storied past to the present and future at the University of Arkansas.

Chapter Two

History of Debate From Early Cambridge To 21ST Century Arkansas

Cambridge and Oxford

The modern conception of “debate” finds its origins in the earliest recorded history of Western society’s two pillars of intellectual thought: the University of Cambridge and the University of Oxford.

Before internationally renowned professors controlled the classrooms, teaching during medieval times at the University of Cambridge “took the form of reading and explaining texts.”³⁸ This teaching method produced examinations that were “oral disputations in which the candidates advanced a series of questions or theses in which they disputed or argued with opponents a little senior to themselves, and...masters who taught them.”³⁹ This form of pedagogy is similar to the modern day “graduate teaching assistant,” where even recent graduates of the program led the instruction and explanation of texts. Because it cultivated a climate where public discussion was instrumental to learning, Cambridge created an elected representative position called “Proctors.” These proctors were “elected annually to negotiate on behalf [of the teaching body] with the town and other lay authorities, to keep the accounts, safeguard their treasures and books, to moderate in examinations, and to supervise all other ceremonies.”⁴⁰ Though much of this work proved to be administrative in nature, the Proctors were key figures in creating and maintaining the oral and written history of Cambridge through their experiences in oral argumentation.

Though less pronounced than their counterparts in the formative years, certain faculty members at the University of Oxford promoted a stirring of “intellectual curiosity” in the latter stages of the 18th century as a means to train “promising pupils for...success in public life.”⁴¹ In 1783, Dean Jackson, of Christ Church, took a few of his “intellectual, politically-minded” pupils and temporarily formed “a little debating society, known as the Speaking Society.”⁴² As the Speaking Society began taking in more members, “dangerous revolutionary toasts” and speeches became the norm, which put the Society at tenuous odds with an Oxford administration that did not support an open forum of ideas on campus.⁴³ Internal conflict caused the dissolution of the Speaking Society in 1793, but the Society’s decade-long existence proved to be an important stride in allowing Oxford to compete with Cambridge as Britain’s symbolic protector of free speech.⁴⁴

Much like the preceding century, students attending Cambridge and Oxford during the early parts of the 19th century encountered an academic setting where “free exchange of ideas was a notion foreign to the restrictive university authorities.”⁴⁵ Although this phenomenon can be attributed in large part to British government repealing the Habeas Corpus Act, Cambridge and Oxford students clamored for an outlet for public discourse. Born out of this period of intellectual confinement were the famed Cambridge Union Society and the Oxford Union.

Since its inception in 1815, the Cambridge Union Society fostered open, free debate on social, cultural, and political issues pertinent to the time period. More specifically, Cambridge Union Society possessed many “aesthetes,” which gave the team a distinct “art and humanities” focus not usually found in debating societies at the time.⁴⁶ Up to this point, public discussions at universities like Cambridge focused on cultural and political issues. This pronounced focus on

art and humanities is an important historical launching point for the development of literary societies in British and American universities.

Influenced by the founding of the Cambridge Union Society eight years prior, the Oxford Union served as “the only place for students to discuss political topics whilst at Oxford” when it was established in 1823.⁴⁷ The Oxford Union quickly gained credibility as a debating society through the seemingly instantaneous success of its elected President, future British Prime Minister W.E. Gladstone.⁴⁸ Even as it achieved notoriety as a breeding ground for future politicians, the Oxford Union successfully fostered an open forum that “holds no political views” and encourages “debate and discussion of controversial issues.”⁴⁹

From the creation of the “proctors” to the development of the Cambridge Union Society and Oxford Union, debate at college campuses quickly progressed from classroom discussions to full-fledged student societies. This development laid the foundation for newly created American universities to bring student discussion of ideas into the academic fold. As American universities began incorporating argumentation and debate into the classroom, it began mirroring the arts and humanities focus of the Cambridge Union Society. This focus would give rise to “literary societies,” the first step taken by American schools in fostering intercollegiate debate.

American Literary Societies and the Beginning of Intercollegiate Debate

Well before the War of Independence in the late 18th century, a select few American universities were using an assortment of methods to engage students in open forum discussions and debates. The first documented practice of debating in American colleges took place at Harvard University in 1642 in what was called the “New England’s First Fruits.”⁵⁰ These

debates were known more formally as “syllogistic disputations—debates conducted in Latin and strictly adhering to the rules of syllogistic logic.”⁵¹ In a typical syllogistic disputation, a teacher would pose a question “in the sciences or arts” that would require students to join the side of either “affirming” or “denying” the question.⁵²

As more American universities emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries (while separating more from British cultural influences over time), syllogistic disputations began losing relevance. The reason behind this (more than likely) was two-fold. First, there was little practicality in using Latin in American universities because English became so widespread. Second, deductive reasoning (the basis of syllogistic disputations) lost its utility when debate began moving towards more subjective claims of “little t” truth—as opposed to the “capital T” truth that deductive reasoning is predicated upon. However, this primitive system provided the basic framework for other universities to create debate formats that could be useful for broader public discussion.

Modeled after the speaking societies and debating unions at Oxford and Cambridge, American literary and oratory societies began to materialize in the 19th century at Columbia University (Philolexian Society), the University of Pennsylvania (Philomathean Society), and the University of Virginia (Jefferson Literary and Debating Society).⁵³ With an exponential rise of these societies in diverse areas of the country, it did not take long before societies from different universities decided to make it an intercollegiate competition. The first of these took place “on May 5, 1881 when the Phi Alpha Society of Illinois College played host to the Adelphi Society of Knox College.”⁵⁴ Only one day later, on May 6, 1881, the Philomathean Society of New York University took the affirmative side of the resolution, “Resolved: The only limitations on suffrage in the United States should be those of age and sex,” opposite a Rutgers University society, which took the negative.⁵⁵ Little did those competitors know that in a span of two days,

four schools representing the Midwestern and Eastern regions of the country would be the pioneers in laying the groundwork for an intercollegiate event that now counts among its participants over 250 schools in all 50 states.

One university that spent this late 19th century period building a vibrant campus community also took advantage of the growing influence literary and oratory societies. After its founding in 1871, the state of Arkansas' flagship campus, the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, proposed that its goal is to become the "academic and cultural mainstay of Arkansas."⁵⁶ To achieve this goal, the University first needed to develop student organizations that fostered critical thinking and informed public discussion. With the exponential growth of oratory and literary societies at universities on the east coast, it was only logical that the University of Arkansas achieved this by bringing similar literary societies to Fayetteville.

The Spawning of Intercollegiate Debate at Arkansas: Garland and Periclean Societies

Even before the University of Arkansas was founded, debate as an organized activity played an important role in the state of Arkansas. The Little Rock Debating Society was established in 1822, and continued to gain members throughout the 19th century. In 1834 one of the well-known members of the society, Albert Pike, delivered a famous speech to a meeting of the Society titled "Independence Day Address."⁵⁷ This address was just a microcosm for the influence the Little Rock Debating Society had in discussing issues pertinent to the state of Arkansas. Another public debate that the Little Rock Debating Society hosted took place on April 21, 1899, when J.S. McKnight and A.K. Collins took the affirmative against W.W. McLaughlin and Marion Buckley on "Resolved: That the Human Race is Degenerating."⁵⁸ Even

after the University was founded in 1871, other college students in Arkansas were debating intriguing socio-cultural and socio-political issues during the early parts of the 20th century. In 1903, two debate teams from the black-established Southland College in Helena, Arkansas debated the topic “Lincoln’s desire to preserve the union exceeded his desire to free slaves.”⁵⁹ This was followed the next year in 1904 when Ernest C. Newsome and Moses G. Weaver of Southland debated whether “the Indian has received worse treatment from the hand of the white man than the Negro has.”⁶⁰

When the University of Arkansas came into being, it sought to establish the rural Northwest Arkansas community as a pre-eminent educational region. As with any university attempting to root itself in the local community, the University of Arkansas was quick to provide students with extracurricular academic forums that allowed for intellectual expansion and social bonding. The first of these to give students with an interest in “oratory and argumentation” an environment in which to grow was the Garland Literary Society, founded in 1886.⁶¹ The goal of the Garland Literary society was to provide students an outlet to discuss and partake in “readings, essays, original stories, impromptu speeches, orations, discussions on current topics, and formal and informal debates.”⁶² The Garland Society always maintained a “large membership” and claimed that “many of the prominent men of the State, while in the University, were members of the Garland.”⁶³

One other prominent society on campus, the Lee Society, became known for the great careers its alumni and guest speakers would go on to have. The most prominent individual to speak at the Lee Society was undoubtedly Professor Charles Brough (who went on to serve as the 25th Governor of Arkansas from 1917-1921).⁶⁴ Brough presented a speech discussing the life of the Society’s namesake, Confederate General Robert E. Lee.⁶⁵ Other notable presentations

came from individuals such as J.P. Woods, Lee Cazort and J.L. Bledsoe, all who “went onto become successful and leading figures in Arkansas’ legal and political world.”⁶⁶ The Garland and Lee Societies were not only instrumental in providing future Arkansas leaders a platform to improve their public speaking and argumentation skills, they served as a launching point for intercollegiate debate at Arkansas.

After ten years of continually honing their debating skills in club meetings, a team of Garland Society members invited representatives from the University of Missouri in 1896 to debate the topic “Resolved: that the United States should adopt the free coinage of silver at the ratio of sixteen to one, regardless of the action of any other nation.”⁶⁷ This debate, although won by Missouri, marked the first intercollegiate debate for the University of Arkansas.⁶⁸ In addition, this debate marks the beginning of a 90-year history in which the team competed in policy debate (now known as NDT/CEDA debate), making Arkansas one of the first universities from the South to adopt this form of debate. An account of the debate stated that “Arkansas had better orators, but Missouri had better reasoners.”⁶⁹ Three years later, Arkansas hosted another Missouri debate team—Drury University in Springfield—losing that debate as well.⁷⁰

Looking to compete and expand its influence statewide “the literary societies then reached out to those on other campuses, and the University of Arkansas’ first participation in the State Oratorical Contest was held in early nineteen hundred at the Capitol Theater in Little Rock.”⁷¹ The competitors from Arkansas were accompanied to Little Rock by “three...trainloads of students, the band, and what amounted to pompon girls.”⁷² The contest proved to be an invaluable one for the squad as the top speaker for Arkansas “had impeccable enunciation on his topic ‘The Victories of Peace’ [and] finished second to the speaker from Hendrix in Conway.”⁷³

The year 1900 held additional significance for intercollegiate debate at Arkansas as the first “debating club” was formed, the Periclean Society. The Periclean Society “sprung as a band of four young men” who trained their members for “debate excellence.”⁷⁴ With the emergence of two serious debating clubs, two debates, and an oratorical contest, the University of Arkansas began experiencing success in a series of intercollegiate debates scheduled from 1906 to 1908. After losing to a team of representatives from Southwestern University in 1906, the team won four straight matches against Southwestern (1907), Drury (1907), Oklahoma (1908), and Drury again in 1908.⁷⁵

Emboldened by success against regional competitors, change and experimentation spawned what was then termed the “Golden Age of Debate” in 1910 where “a debating council of faculty members chose the debaters and acted as judges, and the period saw the beginning of debating leagues, such as the Triangle, the Pentagonal, and the Missouri Valley.”⁷⁶ The “Golden Age” was further validated when Arkansas scored a well-publicized victory over the University of Tennessee at Knoxville on the topic “Resolved: That the System of Direct Legislation Known as Initiative and Referendum Should Be Adopted By Several States.”⁷⁷ Additionally, the University took an important step in legitimizing a debate focused society when they created a chapter of the national intercollegiate debating organization Tau Kappa Alpha in 1914. Principal qualification for membership in Tau Kappa Alpha included “participation in an intercollegiate oratorical contest or debate.”⁷⁸ Up to this point, the University’s debate program flourished without an official coach; however a post finally created and filled by “Julian Cecil Waterman, an instructor in public speaking, who in 1917 instituted a bona fide course in debate worth four credits.”⁷⁹

It was during this time period that the debate received its greatest amount of attention from both the university community and local media. During the first quarter of the twentieth century debate “was second only to football in the publicity in received, and successful debaters were lionized on the campus almost as much as football heroes.”⁸⁰ The team’s successes were well documented by “streamer headlines across the front page of the *University Weekly*.”⁸¹ The team’s stature rose significantly when Charles Brough wrote in the *Arkansas Sentinel* that “there is plenty of University spirit...and enthusiastic interest taken in the debates of the Garland, Mathetian and Periclean Literary Societies by the students.”⁸² The support the team received mirrored that of football even more so in that “losses were likely to be analyzed in the editorial column in terms of the prejudices and relationships of the judges, just as unfair officiating was sometimes blamed for athletic losses.”⁸³

However, even with increased visibility and media recognition, a new level of accountability and innovation became infused into the debate program with the 1919 hiring of new coach John Clark Jordan.⁸⁴ Formerly the coach at Trinity College, Jordan became infamous for cancelling credit for the debate course, saying that “this led to the debaters being loyal to themselves rather than to the school.”⁸⁵ As a result, Jordan began forming with debaters from Oklahoma State University what are now known as “hybrid” debate teams. In this new arrangement, “an Arkansas debater joined an Oklahoma debater in a split-team type of format,” to debate an opposing team.⁸⁶ This style gave debaters greater perspective and appreciation for debate.⁸⁷

From the first debate in 1896 to the rise of the Garland and Periclean Societies to the arrival of “stardom” twenty years later, the University of Arkansas debate team experienced both bitter defeats and triumphant successes. But, the landscapes of universities were changing

drastically across post-World War I America. The University of Arkansas, and its burgeoning debate team, was a perfect case study in this transformation.

Arkansas Debate in the “Inter-War” and World War II Years: The Decline of Societies

As University of Arkansas historian and former law school dean Robert Leflar noted “the death of the literary societies was an inevitable part of the development of the modern American university.”⁸⁸ This was due, in large part, to the rise of Greek organizations and expansion of student government, which gave “budding politicians an opportunity to do in somewhat realistic fashion what in the literary societies they could only do in make-believe.”⁸⁹

These same realities faced the ever-decreasing membership of the Garland and Periclean societies. By the early 1920’s, with the rise of Tau Kappa Alpha and the increased importance placed on competitive oratory by the newly minted Department of Public Speaking, the Garland and Pericleans societies understood that substantive change was in order.⁹⁰ This is why, in 1923, the “Garland and the Periclean consolidated” to form the “Student Forum” as a means to carry on the proud traditions of both societies in oratory and debate. Such a change took place in intercollegiate debate due to a de-emphasis on theoretical oratory in favor of practicality. This shift was a national phenomenon due in large part to the rising influence of British style parliamentary debate.⁹¹ The tangible result of this transformation was that debate became less “an intercollegiate sport and turned into something more nearly resembling parliamentary debate.”⁹²

This change coincided with the hiring of new coach James Fred Magrew, who believed in providing “the greatest amount of debate for the greatest number of debaters.”⁹³ He

accomplished this through joining the Missouri Valley Conference in 1927 and “began a full season of debate with a thirteen school schedule.”⁹⁴ By 1929 Orville C. Miller took over control of the team, bringing in different universities from across the country to debate Arkansas. One prominent example of this took place on March 8, 1929, when Arkansas debated Ohio Wesleyan University on the topic “Resolved, that a substitute for trial by jury should be adopted in the United States.”⁹⁵ As more debates were scheduled, in 1929 the Department of Public Speaking “began to take up the business of training students in forensic oratory” and offered “a course titled Intercollegiate Debate, and supportive courses like Argumentation and Extemporaneous Speaking.”⁹⁶

Starting in the 1930’s, the Department of Public Speaking merged with Department of Drama to form the Department of Speech and Dramatic Art.⁹⁷ This change coincided with the change of leadership from Magrew to the newly named department chair and debate coach Dr. Virgil Baker. Up to this period in time, no other individual had done more to enhance the name recognition and competitiveness of the department and the debate team than Dr. Baker. One of the first reforms that Baker made was to turn the University of Arkansas into the premier host for the High School Speech Meet. In the High School Speech Meet of 1930, Baker began the tournament with performances by high school bands and theatre groups, which helped foster a formal environment conducive to great performances.⁹⁸

Baker’s intent to spread Arkansas debate went far beyond just the conventional campus community. Beginning in the fall of 1929, Virgil Baker scheduled four debates to be broadcasted via the KUOA radio station in Fayetteville.⁹⁹ The first of these debates was held in December, where two teams debated the resolution “Resolved: That the further development of chain stores in the United States is to be deplored.”¹⁰⁰ The fourth and final radio debate took place in March,

and the resolution for this debate was “Resolved: That national commercial advertising is more harmful.”¹⁰¹

Also under Baker, the debate team “instituted the tournament system as we know it today and engaged in international debates.”¹⁰² The first of these “international” style debates took place on December 1, 1930, when two debaters from the Cambridge Union Society took on two debaters from the University of Arkansas.¹⁰³ The two debaters from Cambridge, N.C. Outridge and Albert E. Holdsworth were affirming the resolution “Resolved, That Great Britain Immediately Should Grant Dominion Status to India.”¹⁰⁴ This debate is memorable not only because it was held in the Old Main auditorium, but also because the team hosted a dinner for the guests at the Mountain Inn the previous evening.¹⁰⁵ Exactly one year later, on December 1, 1931, two debaters from the Oxford Union took on two debaters from the University of Arkansas.¹⁰⁶ The two Oxford Union debaters (John Foot and John Archibald Boyd-Carpenter) were sons of famous English politicians, and took the affirmative side of the resolution “Resolved, That American Civilization Is a Greater Danger to the World Than That of Russia.” These two debates, which pitted Arkansas debaters against members of the two premier debating societies in the world, illustrates the enormous impact that Dr. Virgil Baker had in changing the face of Arkansas debate from a regionally-based extracurricular activity to an internationally competitive team.

The rising profile of the Arkansas debate team on an international scale was not lost at home, as the local Fayetteville newspapers covered the team extensively during this time period. Newspaper articles were written when the team held practices, and extensive stories were penned when members were chosen for the team after going through try-outs.¹⁰⁷ In addition, local newspapers such as the Fayetteville Daily Democrat sent a beat writer to cover the team as it

traveled across the country to debate other universities from Kansas to Puerto Rico.¹⁰⁸ The combination of international competition and widespread local media coverage allowed for the University of Arkansas debate team to flourish at a level unmatched in its 50 year history.

If the 1930's were a time for exponential growth and development, the 1940's and the onset of World War II quickly reversed this success. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 and the subsequent draft, a large percentage of the male population at the University of Arkansas (which also made up the clear majority of debaters) were drafted into the armed services and sent off to war. These quick-moving, monumental events radically shifted the debate team's operations.

After World War II concluded in 1945, it took the team a few years to regain its pre-war stature. The team's growth was stunted by the arrival and quick departure of several coaches as Ralph Weidner, Ralph Eubanks, and Robert Deutsch each took turns leading the program from 1945 to 1960. One of the bright spots for the team during this time period was the 1948-1949 season in which the team was able to conjure up enough money to provide four scholarships for "outstanding high school debaters and extemporaneous speakers."¹⁰⁹ The four scholarships were given to debaters and speakers who performed well at the State High School Speech Meet held at the University of Arkansas which, during the 1948-1949 season, was held from April 29-30, 1949.¹¹⁰ Unfortunately for the team's future prospects, the budget for the team was severely cut, and it is unknown how much longer these scholarships were given out. This reality became especially damaging in the 1950's. By this time the debate team's travel budget was severely cut to the point where attending three tournaments a year (compared to the norm of 10-13 during the 1920's and 30's) was standard.¹¹¹

However, during this time period, there were a few successes and events worth noting. The University of Arkansas held their first ever debate and forensics tournament on December 18, 1951.¹¹² Competitors from the University of Kansas and Kansas State University dominated the tournament, but members of the Arkansas team were able to win first place in original oratory, and third place overall in debate sweepstakes.¹¹³ Also In 1951, director of forensics Ralph Eubanks was appointed to National University Extension Committee on Debate Materials and Interstate Cooperation, which gave the University of Arkansas a member on an important committee that helped shape the curriculum and instruction of debate.¹¹⁴ In 1952, the debate team of Sam Sexton Jr. and Tony Boyett attended three tournaments and won fourteen out of eighteen debates.¹¹⁵

Unfortunately for these debaters, this small revival could not be sustained, as the team continued to stagnate through the rest of the 1950's. Yet, as the University of Arkansas debate team moved into the 1960's, two professors named Jack (Dr. Jack Murphy and Dr. Jack Gregory) would lead the team into an era of sustained rebirth not seen since the 1930's.

Jack Gregory and Mary Ingalls: The Renaissance of Arkansas Debate

If one year were to be attributed as the “turning point” for the University of Arkansas debate team, 1962 would be given that special distinction. That year Arkansas began asserting itself on the national stage, starting with the performance of junior competitor Loren Walla. In the 1962 Tau Kappa Alpha National Forensics Conference, Walla finished second in original oratory, and helped lead the Arkansas debate team to a 10th place finish overall out of 40 schools.¹¹⁶ This 10th place finish was Arkansas' highest finish in a national championship

tournament in its recorded history, an accomplishment that helped propel the team to further success. In addition, the success of the team on the national level gave Dr. Jack Murphy more leverage with the University administration in increasing the budget for the team. These developments paid off starting off the very next season, as the University of Arkansas debate team took third overall at the 1963 Southwest Conference Tournament, behind only established debate powerhouses Baylor and Texas.¹¹⁷ In addition, the team won eight out of fourteen contests at the tournament, which helped solidify Arkansas as an institution cultivating a strong debate program, not just a team with a few strong competitors.¹¹⁸

Dr. Jack Murphy left in 1965 and Dr. Jack Gregory took over control of the team. Dr. Gregory's impact was immediately felt as he pushed for the Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts to emphasize debate and forensics in the classroom. Dr. Gregory's efforts were successful as the department held a summer forensics workshop from June 7, 1965 through July 16, 1965 that offered "up to six hours of graduate and undergraduate credit."¹¹⁹ The goal of the workshop, staffed by the current head coach Dr. Jack Gregory and former head coach Dr. Ralph Eubanks, was to "prepare speech teachers to direct extracurricular forensics programs."¹²⁰ In addition to the inception of summer workshops, Dr. Gregory sought to mirror actions taken by Arkansas coaches in the aforementioned "Golden Era" of Arkansas debate and hold chamber debates against some of the top debaters in the world. This was finally achieved on April 10, 1967 when two debaters from Arkansas took the Affirmative on the resolution "Resolved, the Warren Report Was Wrong" against a debate team from Harvard University.¹²¹ One member of the team representing Arkansas, Terry Jones, would later become a graduate assistant coach for the team and prosecuting attorney for Washington County (including the city of Fayetteville).¹²² After the Harvard debate, Dr. Gregory was able to schedule the first debate against international

competitors since before World War II. This took place on December 7, 1967 when two Arkansas debaters took the affirmative on the resolution “Resolved, That the Opinions of Small Nations Are Irrelevant” against a hybrid team from the University of Dublin and the University of Cambridge.¹²³

These two debates were critical in giving the Arkansas debate team opportunities to sharpen their skills against some of the premier debaters in the world in a high-pressure, public arena. The confluence of these two factors proved to be essential in setting up a remarkably successful 1969 campaign for the team. The debate team dominated the Southwest Conference throughout the year, but took home its biggest award in New York City. It was there, in the Iona College Debate Tournament, that a squad of four Arkansas debaters garnered five first place trophies en route to compiling an overall record of eleven wins and one loss.¹²⁴ Not only did Arkansas collect the most first place trophies and best record, but captured the overall sweepstakes award, beating 34 other schools in the process. This victory was a culmination of hard work by both the Arkansas debate team and its coach Dr. Jack Gregory, who called the team’s performance “one of our most important victories of the year, since we were debating teams from Cornell, Columbia, and other Eastern and Northern schools.”¹²⁵ In all, the 1968-1969 season will go down as one of the most successful in the history of the Arkansas debate team. Razorback debaters achieved at least one individual first place trophy from tournaments “at Eastern Illinois University, Central State College, and Wake Forest College.”¹²⁶ The Wake Forest College Tournament, one of the top tournaments in the nation, was especially memorable for Arkansas debater Steve Millin, who won best overall speaker in the varsity division.¹²⁷

Despite the overall success of the team in 1968-1969, debate at the University of Arkansas hit “a period of doldrums” due to “the decline and disrepute of debate in the world of

academe.”¹²⁸ This period of “doldrums” saw not only the departure of Dr. Jack Gregory in spring of 1970, but the total revamping of the program as a whole.¹²⁹ The overhaul of the team was led by former Fayetteville High School forensics coach Mrs. Mary Ingalls, who was appointed in the fall of 1972.¹³⁰ Mrs. Ingalls, who held significant coaching experience in debate and forensics, implemented a new concept that “included not only debate but all activities in public address, interpretation, radio, television, and student forums and congresses.”¹³¹ The change in direction for the team was complemented by Mrs. Ingalls’ new approach in allowing for the actual instruction of debate to be “student led,” while she “facilitated the team’s administrative and logistical components.”¹³² Mrs. Ingalls was known to be “old-fashioned” and “enforced strict dress code,” but was invaluable to maintaining debate in Arkansas because “she believed strongly in competing in Arkansas tournaments” and worked to ensure that the University of Arkansas would provide at least two tournaments a year for both high school and college teams.¹³³

In terms of competitions, Mary Ingalls was instrumental in breaking down her teams by experience level and entering them in tournaments where they would gain valuable understanding of debate, without being overmatched. This was on display early on in 1973 when Mrs. Ingalls took only “junior division” debaters to the Mid-Continental Debate Tournament in Kansas City, MO, where young team members such as Rita Kirk and Russell Harper won five out of eight debates against “Missouri Southern, Rockhurst, Creighton, Centrals State, and Texas A&M.”¹³⁴ Although Mrs. Ingalls’ decision to travel with junior varsity competitors does not seem revolutionary, most debate coaches focused their time and attention on higher level varsity debaters. The fact that the head coach of a large debate team dedicated a significant portion of

her team's budget to junior varsity debaters illustrated the care in which Mrs. Ingalls wanted to develop all aspects of her program, not just the "star" debaters.

This was reinforced on February 20, 1974, when the University of Arkansas held an "All-Arkansas Novice Debate Meet."¹³⁵ In addition, the topic for the tournament was pertinent to the time period, with the first and second year competitors debating the resolution "Resolved: That the Federal Government Should Control the Supply and Utilization of Energy in the United States."¹³⁶ This topic was chosen, as Mrs. Ingalls explained, because "of the great interest in this area of the energy crisis" taking place in 1974.¹³⁷

In addition, following the foundation set by Dr. Jack Gregory, Mrs. Ingalls, worked to provide a summer speech institute similar to the one held in the late 1960's. However, due to the lack of similar institutes in surrounding areas, Mrs. Ingalls expanded the reach of the summer institute, inviting debaters from Oklahoma and Missouri.¹³⁸ This first institute, called the "Summer Forensics Institute," was held in the University of Arkansas Communications Building from July 23-August 4, 1974.¹³⁹ This summer institute dwarfed any held by the University in the past due to the fact that students attended "lecture demonstrations and work-study group sessions" and were "individually assigned a graduate student, or teacher as a coach."¹⁴⁰ The individualized attention that each high school student received was important in not only growing debate in the state of Arkansas, but provided Mrs. Ingalls the opportunity to evaluate and persuade exceptional debaters to compete for the University of Arkansas.¹⁴¹

This process proved to be a contributing factor to the high level of achievement the team experienced throughout the 1970's. At the Louisiana Tech University Tournament in November of 1973, the Arkansas debate team compiled its best overall record at a tournament since its historic performance at the Iona College Tournament in January of 1969.¹⁴² At this tournament,

the team of Mike Nave and William Riggs went undefeated in preliminary rounds (six wins and zero losses), and made it to the semifinals before dropping the round to North Texas State University.¹⁴³ This strong overall performance carried over into the 1974 season, when the team began experiencing significant success in both debate and forensics. This was encapsulated by the team's performance at the Oklahoma Christian College Tournament in October of 1974. At this tournament, the team of Rita Kirk and Jay Melekian won four out of six debates, while Melekian also finished second in impromptu speaking, losing out to former Arkansas debater Russell Harper.¹⁴⁴ In addition, Rita Kirk competed in poetry, prose, and oratory, and received superior and excellent ratings in every round of all events.

Although these performances in 1973 and 1974 did not produce first place trophies and national recognition, they laid the groundwork for what would be the most successful year of the Mary Ingalls era in 1975. Much like 1972-1973, the Arkansas debate team achieved its first, substantial success of the 1974-1975 season at the Louisiana Tech Speech and Debate Tournament. However, unlike its last time competing at Louisiana Tech, the team won an overall sweepstakes award, placing third overall.¹⁴⁵ This placing was due in large part to the record of the three debate teams, all of whom compiled a combined sixteen wins and only two losses¹⁴⁶ The most impressive performance belonged to the team of Candy Clark and Phil Royce, who went undefeated in preliminary rounds and made it all the way to the semi-finals before losing to Mississippi College.¹⁴⁷

Even with an immensely successful showing at Louisiana Tech, the Arkansas debate team had not yet produced a landmark victory for the program. However, this would be achieved in March of 1975 when the debate team of Rita Kirk and Jay Melekian "won the state championship by defeating Henderson at the Arkansas Speech Communication Association State

Festival in Little Rock.”¹⁴⁸ This victory marked the first time Arkansas had ever won the state championship in debate, a victory that solidified the team’s place as the pre-eminent debate and forensics program in the state of Arkansas. The 1975 state championship also allowed Mary Ingalls to recruit top debaters from all over the country, and even played a large role in securing students from Canada.¹⁴⁹

Now that the Arkansas debate team had established itself as a top-tier program regionally, Mary Ingalls then focused her efforts on getting the team recognized on a national level.

Although Tau Kappa Alpha was a distinguished debate honor society, its national influence began waning in the 1950’s. Starting around that time period, Pi Kappa Delta took its place as the premier honor society for debate. As such, for the University of Arkansas to be recognized and competitive on a national level, Mrs. Ingalls knew she needed to get Arkansas initiated into Pi Kappa Delta. After two more years of competitive success, the University of Arkansas received the Iota chapter of Pi Kappa Delta in May of 1977.¹⁵⁰ The recognition of Arkansas as a member of Pi Kappa Delta almost did not happen as the team suffered “two bus breakdowns, blizzards, dust storms, and a lack of heat” as they made their way from Arkansas to Seattle, Washington to the Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament and Convention.¹⁵¹ Despite their hazardous journey, members of the team recall that this trip symbolized the greatest cohesion among intercollegiate debate programs in Arkansas the state had ever seen.¹⁵² The trip began in Little Rock, where three buses picked up debaters from Henderson State University, the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, and Arkansas State University.¹⁵³ From there, the buses traveled to Fayetteville to pick up the University of Arkansas, where the four universities traveled across the country to the Pacific Northwest. This three-bus, four-team excursion was

organized at the behest of Mrs. Ingalls, who wanted to give debate across the state, not just in Fayetteville, national exposure.¹⁵⁴

Decline and Termination: The “Lost Years” of Debate During the 1980’s and 90’s

After reaching a seminal moment of national exposure in 1977, the University of Arkansas debate team’s participation and level of success quickly began to decline. The key factor that led to this decline was shrinking budgets and reduction in funding for travel. It was documented that “as early as 1978, Mary Ingalls was appealing for additional funds from the university pay for travel to 14 tournaments that season.” This effort by Mrs. Ingalls did not prove successful, as the competing forces in the Drama department took precedent over debate in the eyes of the Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts.¹⁵⁵ Unfortunately for the future of the University of Arkansas debate team, this would be one of Mary Ingalls’ final acts as the head coach of the debate team. After a long career as the director of forensics and debate at both Fayetteville High School and the University of Arkansas, Mary Ingalls retired at the end of the 1978 school year. The departure of Mary Ingalls can be considered a symbolic turning point for the Arkansas debate team, as it lost the leader of a program that had won a state championship and facilitated so much success throughout the 1970’s.

Although not nearly at the level achieved under Mrs. Ingalls, the Arkansas debate team maintained competitiveness, placing in “in the top 30% nationally until 1985.”¹⁵⁶ The team was led in competition by Carol Goforth and facilitated by graduate assistant Bill Putnam.¹⁵⁷ The main coach during this time period was former Arkansas debater Candy Clark, who coached the team as a graduate student from 1979-1980, and then as a faculty member from 1980-1983.¹⁵⁸ In

a departure from Mary Ingalls, the team under Clark's direction traveled to many more tournaments outside of Arkansas.¹⁵⁹ Yet, Clark did not change the team precedent of hosting two tournaments a year, one for high school teams from across the Southwest and Midwest and one for college teams from all over the country.¹⁶⁰

Yet, despite the team's capable display in tournaments, the future of debate at the University of Arkansas was a hotly debated topic. After several decades of cohesion, on "July 1, 1980, the Department of Speech and Dramatic Arts was divided into two separate departments—the Department of Communication and the Department of Drama."¹⁶¹ When the departments split, the newly minted Department of Communication was forced to now be the main benefactor of the debate team. According to Dr. Jimmie Rogers, former chair of the Department of Communication, the limited budget the department possessed could not grant the debate team "the necessary funding required for travel."¹⁶² Additionally, very few communication majors were members of the debate team, which made it hard for the Department of Communication to justify funding a team that mostly involved and benefitted students from outside the department.¹⁶³ Exacerbating each of these problems was the decline of campus support, media coverage, and participation of the debate team as a whole. Long gone were the days where debaters were "lionized on campus" and received constant support among the Northwest Arkansas media. Instead debate at Arkansas was characterized by "a downward trend of participation" and relative obscurity on campus by the early 1980's.¹⁶⁴

The convergence of these factors led the Department of Communication to argue, in their 1980-1981 annual report, that "the department should withdraw its support unless additional funds are secured elsewhere."¹⁶⁵ During this time period, the University of Arkansas debate team was receiving approximately \$12,000 a year in total funding, \$2,000 of which came from the

Department of Communication and the other \$10,000 coming from funds appropriated by Associated Student Government.¹⁶⁶ By the year 1984, this reality caused a rift among other on campus organizations, which raised the “greatest objections to the proposed budget...to Pi Kappa Delta, the UA debate team.”¹⁶⁷ The objections raised were successful in eventually cutting \$950 of the travel budget from the original allocation of \$10,000 from the Arkansas debate team.¹⁶⁸ With the cut in budget from Associated Student Government combined with the withdrawal of support from the Department of Communication, debate at Arkansas was dealt two fatal blows. Yet, even with the team’s future in doubt, University of Arkansas received the distinction of hosting the Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament and Convention in 1986.¹⁶⁹ There was hope that being given such a special honor would help restore confidence in the team’s ability going forward. However, this proved to be little more than a pipe dream. With the declining participation combined with the continual cutting of the budget, hosting the Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament proved to be the team’s farewell action. In the spring of 1986, the University of Arkansas shut down all aspects of its debate and forensics program.¹⁷⁰

Filling the Void of Debate: Argumentation and Student Congress

With forensics and debate no longer existing at the University of Arkansas, the Department of Communication still needed to offer an outlet in the theory and application of argumentation. This void was filled by Dr. Dennis Bailey, former chair of the Department of Communication. Dr. Bailey offered a class titled “Argumentation” in which he taught students how to critically evaluate the arguments they would hear in everyday scenarios, such as buying a car or going to a military recruiter’s office.¹⁷¹ Although the theoretical foundations and material

covered differ greatly than a similarly titled course focusing on intercollegiate debate, Dr. Bailey's course offered students with a debate background an outlet to further their knowledge in the subject area.

As the University of Arkansas moved into its second decade without debate, attempts were made by students to revive the team. A proposal was furnished that focused on the resolution "Resolved: That the University of Arkansas sponsor an intercollegiate competitive debate program beginning in the Fall semester of 1994."¹⁷² The proposal offered a solution to the biggest roadblock standing in the way of the team's reconstruction: funding. The proposal states "most (27 of 50 surveyed) programs receive their funding through administrative channels rather than departmental budgets or student governments," which the University of Arkansas debate team drew the majority of its funding.¹⁷³ This attempt, though impassioned and well-reasoned, proved to be unsuccessful.

While the attempts to bring back intercollegiate debate were unsuccessful, another format for competitive public speaking was revived in 1997. It was in this year that the Department of Political Science helped fund a competitive student congress team that competed in the 1997 Arkansas Communication and Theatre Arts Association (ACTAA) Student Congress Tournament.¹⁷⁴ Despite forming a team that had no experience competing in student congress at the collegiate level, the Arkansas student congress team came in second in 1997.¹⁷⁵ This great showing laid the foundation for the success the team would have in subsequent years. From 1998 to 2003 the Arkansas student congress team won the ACTAA Student Congress Tournament every year, highlighted by the 2002 and 2003 tournaments where the team posted the highest combined team scores in tournament history.¹⁷⁶

Yet, despite the great success achieved in student congress, the University of Arkansas still had no debate team to speak of. At this juncture, one professor in the Department of Communication who had been a part of the department when the debate team was bringing back substantial trophies saw a need for action. Luckily for potential debaters who attended the University of Arkansas, this professor succeeded.

Revival of Arkansas Debate: IPDA and the Return of Chamber Debates

Dr. Stephen Smith, who attended the University of Arkansas for both his undergraduate and master's degrees, knew the tradition that existed at the school when it came to chamber debates. Debaters from the two most famous debating societies in the world (the Oxford Union and Cambridge Union Society) had come to Fayetteville to square off against debaters from Arkansas. With that in mind, Dr. Smith began the process of restarting the University of Arkansas debate team in 1999 by founding the "Arkansas Union Society," a public debating society modeled after the Oxford Union and Cambridge Union Society.¹⁷⁷ The goal of these chamber debates was not only to hold discussions about pertinent campus, state, and national issues, but to regain some attention for debate in the team's thirteen year absence. The first debate was held on November 3, 1999, and created instant buzz on campus due to the contentious nature of the resolution.¹⁷⁸ The topic for the debate "Resolved: This House Has No Confidence in Chancellor White" was hotly contested, and eventually carried by an enormous 106-16 margin.¹⁷⁹ To capitalize on this early success, the Arkansas Union Society traveled to Harvard in 1999, which proved to be an important step of progression as the team looked to sharpen its skills against some of the most recognizable debate teams in the nation.¹⁸⁰

Despite not having had chamber debates in over 15 years, the debates were highly successful affairs that attracted anywhere between 150 and 350 people per an event.¹⁸¹ And, much like the first debate regarding the vote of confidence in Chancellor White, the Arkansas Union Society did not shy away from controversial topics. From ending the Iraq War to legalizing gay marriage, the Arkansas Union Society tackled several contentious issues that made for great public discussion.¹⁸²

One defining characteristic of these chamber debates were the way in which the audience voted for the side they believed won. Originally introduced to the University of Arkansas by Dr. Dennis Bailey in the early 1970's, attendees of the debate would cast their vote by "walking out the door labeled with the corresponding opinion."¹⁸³ This gave the chamber debates an intriguing, interactive quality that allowed audience members to contribute to the overall experience of the event.¹⁸⁴ Another significant feature of the debates held by the Arkansas Union Society is the inclusion of a guest debater on each side of the debate. This was on display in a chamber debate held on November 22, 2002 when the Arkansas Union Society held a debate that debated the merits of keeping the phrase "under God" in the U.S. Pledge of Allegiance.¹⁸⁵ The affirmative, which argued to keep "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance, was taken up by president of the Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship, Zac Lindsey, and guest debater Jim Holt, an Arkansas State Senator from Springdale.¹⁸⁶ Debating for the opposition were Arkansas Union Society debaters Carlton Saffa and Jenn James, with Dr. Smith as the guest debater.¹⁸⁷ Having a state senator and university professor participate in the debate not only provided both teams strong credibility in making their arguments, but gave the Arkansas Union Society members a chance to debate with their "advisers and mentors."¹⁸⁸

As a lifetime member of the Oxford Union and Cambridge Union Society, Dr. Smith worked to bring debaters from the United Kingdom and Ireland to Fayetteville to provide Arkansas debaters with the experience of debating pertinent issues in the British parliamentary tradition. A great example of this took place on April 16, 2004 when the University of Arkansas hosted the Irish National Debate Team.¹⁸⁹ The topic for the debate focused on “whether to name President George W. Bush a war criminal.”¹⁹⁰ The debate proved to be an empowering and eye-opening experience for the three members of the Arkansas debate team who took part in the debate (Price Feland, Andy Long and Aaron Randall).¹⁹¹ Long noted that international debates “provided a good opportunity for students to see other cultures” while “bring[ing] together so many people from so many backgrounds.”¹⁹² This debate is a microcosm of the type of informed, global discussions that took place on a consistent basis with the Arkansas Union Society.

While the chamber debates were flourishing, the Arkansas Union Society also took up competitive, intercollegiate debate. The first traveling team was formed the same semester as the first chamber debate (fall of 1999) and began competition in a new form of debate.¹⁹³ The Arkansas Union Society competed in the International Public Debate Association (IPDA), which was formed in 1997, and rejects the printed evidence-laden, rapid fire nature of policy debate (which, due to being the only debate format in existence during this time period, is the type of debate Arkansas competed in prior to 1986) in favor of “a forum that promotes appropriate and effective communication.”¹⁹⁴ The Arkansas Union Society experienced immediate success in its first season, garnering the second place award for novice IPDA season-long sweepstakes.¹⁹⁵

To make certain the team’s viability for the long-term future, the Arkansas Union Society created a junior high outreach program in 1999 where members of the team traveled to junior high schools in Fayetteville (mostly Ramay Junior High) and taught them the basic principles of

debate.¹⁹⁶ Among the topics discussed during these sessions were distinguishing between American and British forms of debate, how to make sound arguments, and even a practice debate with the resolution “Resolved: This House would allow an open campus.”¹⁹⁷ Although this program did not last for the entirety of the debate team’s existence, it laid a foundation for debate at earlier levels, ensuring the existence of debate in Fayetteville.

The next season, 2000-2001, proved to be one of significant achievement for the Arkansas Union Society. In only its second year of existence, the Society dominated at the 2001 IPDA National Tournament, taking home first place trophies in novice program season-long sweepstakes, novice individual season long sweepstakes, top speaker in the professional division, and top overall team at the National Tournament.¹⁹⁸ The 2001-2002 competitive season saw Dr. Smith step down from the director position, and his replacement was Leah Acoach.¹⁹⁹ The 2001-2002 season also marked the time when the traveling debate team dropped the “Arkansas Union Society” from its title, but still experienced great success throughout the year. The newly re-named University of Arkansas debate team received the special distinction of hosting the 2002 IPDA National Tournament, and followed up their performance the year before in the National Tournament with an equally impressive encore. The team became the first in IPDA history to win the award for first place team at the National Tournament two years in a row with its victory in 2002.²⁰⁰

During this period of great achievement for the Arkansas debate, individuals from outside the program began to take notice. The most heartwarming and poignant example of outside support contributing to the team’s success happened during the summer between the 2002 and the 2003 seasons. Each summer, one of the founding members of the National Parliamentary Debate Association (NPDA) and head debate coach at Willamette University, Dr. Robert Trapp,

holds the premiere summer camp in parliamentary debate. One of the top debaters on the team during this time, Dave Morris, wanted to attend the camp, but did not have the resources to do so.²⁰¹ After hearing about this predicament, the chair of the Arkansas Democratic Party, Bill Gwatney, personally paid for Morris' ticket to attend the camp.²⁰² Morris credits this altruistic move as an integral part of the success he would later achieve.²⁰³

This time period is memorable not only for the awards won, but the controversy certain members of the team became involved in. An example of this took place in 2002 when a member of the Arkansas Union Society and president of the student senate, Skinner Layne, helped pass “a constitutional reform bill to change the way” in which the Associated Student Government at Arkansas worked.²⁰⁴ The University administration did not approve of this new reform, and appointed a task force to take charge of the situation.²⁰⁵ The gathering of the University administration and the appointed task force took place behind closed doors, which violated a rule of “public access” to meetings concerning Associated Student Government.²⁰⁶ Layne, who tried to attend the meeting but was turned away, ended up suing the University administration for violating his right to be present at the time of the meeting. Although the University administration ended up winning the case without an appeal by Layne, the controversial nature of the incident proved to be symbolic of events to come.

Beginning in 2002-2003 season, the director of the team changed again from Acoach to former Arkansas State University debate coach Keith Peterson. It was in this season that saw the Arkansas debate team of Dave Morris and Carlton Saffa win the open division of NPDA at the 2003 Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament; the first time a team from Arkansas won a PKD National Championship.²⁰⁷ The team continued its high level of success in 2003-2004, where they began the season by winning the first place sweepstakes trophy at the Last Call Classic

hosted by the University of Arkansas at Monticello.²⁰⁸ The debate team continued its strong performances by winning the first place in debate sweepstakes at the 2004 Arkansas Collegiate Championships, the first time the team had won the tournament since its reformation.²⁰⁹ The team finished the year strong, led by novice debater Adam Ward, who took home the top speaker award in the 2004 IPDA National Tournament.²¹⁰ In addition to the top speaker award, the team won the Winston Churchill Award for top professional division season-long sweepstakes.²¹¹

The 2004-2005 season was not only the year in which Dr. Smith took over the team again, but also proved to be the last year in which the Arkansas debate team attained much success, competing in and winning multiple tournaments.²¹² The team successfully defended its victory in the Arkansas Collegiate Championships by again winning the first place award in debate sweepstakes at the 2005 tournament.²¹³ In addition, the team again captured the Winston Churchill Award at the 2005 IPDA National Tournament.²¹⁴

During the 2005-2006 debate season, Dr. Smith and newly appointed graduate assistant Dave Morris began transitioning the team away from IPDA and instead focused on competing in NPDA. Ironically enough, even though debate team traveled to fewer tournaments than in past years, the budget of the team was at its highest.²¹⁵ Despite not capturing as many national awards as in prior years, the team was able to capture an “Excellent” rating in the debate sweepstakes at the Tournament of the Great West hosted by Mt. Hood College in Portland, Oregon in March of 2006.²¹⁶

Unfortunately for the debate team, this would be the last recorded tournament they would compete in while housed in the Department of Communication. The signs of trouble for the team’s existence became apparent in late spring of 2006. During this time, the debate team received two sources for funding. The first was a “cultural activity fee” that enrolled students

paid, as well as a Registered Student Organization (RSO) account for the Arkansas Union Society. The University administration, unhappy with how the debate team was being run, called in auditors to perform an audit of the RSO account and the Department of Communication.²¹⁷ While auditing the RSO account, a charge made by debater Carlton Saffa for a memory card for a digital camera was found. Even though Saffa repaid the charge for this item, the continued lack of support from all levels of the University led Dr. Smith to retire as the debate coach.²¹⁸ In addition, the Department of Communication no longer supported debate, which greatly hampered the team's efforts (especially its funding). The supposed fix to the problems was introduced in the form of a \$50,000 appropriation from the state legislature.²¹⁹ The appropriation was supposed to complement the funding already being given to the team, but instead took the place of it.²²⁰ The combination of these factors forced the team out of the Department of Communication, ending a nearly century long relationship in the process.

After an e-mail was sent out asking if any faculty was interested in becoming the head coach of the team in the beginning of the 2007-2008 school year, associate professor of philosophy Eric Funkhouser agreed to take over.²²¹ The team remained competitive while Funkhouser led the team, winning a sweepstakes trophy from a tournament at Loyola University in Chicago, Illinois.²²² The team, however, was at a competitive disadvantage due to the fact that Funkhouser did not receive course relief from his duties as a philosophy professor, meaning that he did not possess the ability to spend as much time preparing his team as other coaches did.²²³ Instead, Funkhouser was compensated through part of the \$50,000 appropriation the team was given before the team left the Department of Communication.²²⁴ The team also suffered from not having a course dedicated to debate, which meant that Arkansas debaters did not receive the formal training in debate and argumentation that most competitors did at other schools.²²⁵ After

the 2008-2009 season, Funkhouser did not reapply for funding for the team, which led to the termination of the team in spring of 2009.²²⁶

The Resurgence of Arkansas Debate in 2011-2012

Much like the cancellation of the team in 1986, many factors contributed to the team's same fate in 2009. However, the conflict between the team and the University administration that happened throughout the 2000's added a different dynamic than in 1986. The impact to this became quite clear as I helped begin the process of restarting the team in the spring of 2011. Due to the complex history the debate team had with the University administration, I understood that finding other funding outlets were going to be necessary to fully support the team's efforts. Luckily, after coming into contact with current Arkansas junior Matt Seubert, he provided the outlet for at least partially funding the entry fees at potential tournaments. Seubert, who restarted the student congress team in the fall of 2010, secured an RSO account that paid for the entry fees for the tournament. This proved to be a vital part in transitioning the team from student congress to debate without losing any funding. In the fall of 2011, Seubert and ten other individuals (many who participated the prior year) competed in and won the 2011 ACTAA Student Congress Tournament. After such a strong showing in student congress, I convinced several members of the team to participate in debate tournaments starting in the spring of 2012. Fortunately for the team's competitive outlook, many members competed extensively in debate in high school, which made the transition from student congress to debate easier than expected. Aiding in this shift was the decision to compete in IPDA, which (due to the emphasis on real-world application of arguments to broadly known topics) allowed our students to be competitive even without

collegiate debate experience. Our team experienced immediate success in a landmark event, winning second place in the first ever IPDA debate tournament held exclusively online.²²⁷ Unlike a conventional debate tournament, each entry was not made up of individual debaters, but instead the universities they represent. As such, we used this format to insert a new debater in each round, giving everyone experience without incurring the usual stress of competing every round. This change proved to be crucial in providing our competitors a chance to acclimate more effectively.

Following the online tournament, our team competed in the first IPDA tournament held at a high school, the “March Madness Invitational” held at Har-Ber High School in Springdale, Arkansas. Despite the fact that this was the first college tournament in which most of our competitors were participating on their own, our team performed admirably. Our freshman team of Joe Kieklak and Mark Cameron made it to the semi-finals of team debate, with Kieklak capturing the award for first place speaker in Team IPDA.²²⁸ In addition, I made it to the final round of the professional division and won fifth place speaker award.²²⁹

These two tournaments gave our team the requisite experience and confidence necessary to compete in the final tournament of the semester, the “Ozark Rookie Championships” hosted by John Brown University. Given that this was a small tournament made up of local colleges and universities, our team focused on winning the sweepstakes award to make for a fitting culmination to the season. In contrast to the two prior tournaments, I challenged the team to participate in both individual events and debate to not only increase our chances in winning sweepstakes for the tournament, but for their own personal growth as public speakers. The team responded, and nearly every individual who competed in the tournament entered in at least two different events. The extra dedication paid off as our team and captured first place trophies in

both formats of debate (Impromptu debate and a hybrid Parliamentary-Lincoln Douglas debate), religious oratory and informative speaking.²³⁰ In all, our team captured four of the top eight overall speaking awards en route to reaching our goal of winning overall sweepstakes for the tournament.²³¹ The enormous success our team enjoyed in the final tournament of the year gives hope that—lacking any consistent funding and a sporadic practice schedule—the University of Arkansas can once again be a competitive regional and national force in intercollegiate debate.

In its off-and-on 110 year existence, hundreds of young men and women were molded and influenced by their involvement in debate at the University of Arkansas. From its first, painful defeat at the hands of University of Missouri in 1896, to its triumphant repeat as champions on its own campus in the 2002 IPDA National Tournament, the University of Arkansas debate team has a long, storied history. Yet, beyond the statistics accumulated by the team, there is a “story” that can be told by every debater that allows the debate team to be constructed as more than just a competitive, academic team. As an institution, The University of Arkansas cultivated (and funded) an environment that allowed for intercollegiate debate to flourish for nearly a century. However, as I will argue in my next chapter, this relationship between university and team is symbiotic in nature, meaning that the Department of Communication and the University of Arkansas reaped significant rewards from the debate team’s existence.

Chapter Three

The Benefits of Debate: A Narrative Perspective, Collective Memory, and the Lost Value of Debate at Arkansas

“Ultimately, debate attempts to improve a [person] by laying a foundation for better understanding of [one’s] self and those around [them], to inculcate habits of mind, breadth of interest, and enlargement of spirit, the same goals of the liberal education.”²³²

Very few quotes can encapsulate the holistic value of debate so succinctly as the one provided by Daniel Rohrer. Reflected in Rohrer’s comments is a common effort among scholars to depict debate as a vehicle for enhancing education in the classroom.²³³ In an era of tightening university budgets and increased competitiveness among extracurricular activities, maintaining this theme is essential. As a combined activity, debate and forensics’ survival on each individual campus is largely dependent upon consistently articulating this message.

This tenuous situation persisted throughout the existence of the University of Arkansas debate team. From its initial emergence in 1896 to its most recent resurgence in 2011, the coaches and students who made up the Arkansas debate team spent significant time and resources justifying their continuation to University administration. This inherent conflict stemmed from the idea that, as former Arkansas debater and current professor of law at Arkansas Carol Goforth stated, “what makes debate a hard sell to administration is that the direct educational value went only to the participating students.”²³⁴

Though this is certainly a valid issue that debaters and their coaches must express a compelling response, very rarely is the burden of proof and pressure flipped in favor of the actual

debate program. Meaning that, university administrators are seldom faced with the question: what does the department and university as a whole stand to lose with the termination of the debate team?

In this chapter, I seek to provide the answer to that question in the context of what the Department of Communication and the University of Arkansas as a whole collectively lost from the cancellation of the debate program in 2008. But first, I will provide a review of the available literature concerning the benefits of debate to colleges and universities. Next, I will explore the ways former members of the University of Arkansas debate team enhanced their careers academically and professionally. Finally, with David Compton's "collective memory" as the guiding framework, my final argument will be twofold. First, I will outline the ways in which the Arkansas debate team positively benefitted both the Department of Communication and the University of Arkansas as a whole. To finish, I will contend that the University of Arkansas was tangibly harmed by the termination of the debate team.

Benefits of Debate: Literature Review

From its inception as a competitive, intercollegiate event in American higher education in the latter stages of the 19th century, participators and advocates of debate claim that one of its most beneficial components is how it augments learning in the classroom. More concisely, scholars state "forensics [and debate] competition requires that students take what they have learned in the classroom setting and apply it in order to do well in competition."²³⁵

These benefits were extensively examined by both scholars and debate organizations. In the fall of 2008, the National Forensics Association (NFA) Executive Council formed a

“Committee on Pedagogy” to compile a list of the skills a student of forensics and debate learns.²³⁶ The committee released a report in 2010 that identified “four over-arching categories of outcomes for forensic participation: Discipline Knowledge and Skills, Communication, Critical Thinking, and Integrity/Values.”²³⁷ This report is critical in quantifying the intangible benefits debate and forensic participation provide for students. As any academic professional can attest, competency of critical thinking, knowledge, and skills in a desired discipline is the foundation for success in academia.

These findings support what Susan Millsap, Director of Forensics at Otterbein College, found in her study on the use of debate and forensics skills in classes across the academic curriculum at Otterbein College. In summarizing what debaters garner from participation in the activity, Millsap identified three distinct benefits. The first was an improvement in “the students’ communication skills.”²³⁸ Second, Millsap stated that “forensics provides a unique educational experience because of the way it promotes depth of study, complex analysis and critical thinking.”²³⁹ Third and finally, Millsap argued that “forensics offers excellent pre-professional preparation.”²⁴⁰

The actual findings in Millsap’s study supported the use of these skills in classes across the academic curriculum. Specifically, Millsap found that skills gained from debate and forensic competitions were essential in activities used in a multitude of different classes. Millsap posited that “as a college, almost half of the accounted for classes use at least one oral method that utilizes argumentation skills.”²⁴¹ On a more general level, Millsap’s data indicates “that the skills that forensics teaches and perfects are used in classes across the curriculum.”²⁴² The significance of these findings cannot be overstated; it provides solid justification for any student of any academic background or interest to compete in debate or forensics. Millsap’s study further

contends that debate and forensics coaches could be useful in helping mentor instructors in other academic departments on how to more effectively communicate information to their students. She states “debate coaches’ knowledge of use of evidence and analysis as well as helping faculty to motivate students to look at issues from multiple perspectives and the extension of these perspectives could be a valuable campus service.”²⁴³ Likewise, Millsap speculates that “the experience that individual events coaches have on topic selection, focus, development of topic statements, and presentational skills could be helpful to other faculty.”²⁴⁴

The premise of Millsap’s research that the skills learned from debate are useful across the academic curriculum finds support in a narrowed context through Gordon Mitchell’s study on the use of switch side debating in improving the demand-driven field of the rhetoric of science. In his study, Mitchell concludes that government agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and even the intelligence community are best served by “rhetorical processes such as *dissoi logoi* (debating different sides) and *synerchesthe* (the performative task of coming together deliberately for the purpose of joint inquiry, collective choice-making, and renewal of communicative bonds).”²⁴⁵ These two rhetorical processes are essential components of debate, where a competitor in CEDA/NDT policy debate will debate one topic from both sides dozens of times throughout the season. Likewise, competitive debate is almost a literal construction of *synerchesthe*, due to the fact that coming together for the purpose of joint-inquiry is the real-world purpose of debating. The connection between science and debate in Mitchell’s argument is imperative in demonstrating how debate is a productive activity even for those in a field like science, where conventional wisdom holds that there is little overlap.

The above review of literature effectively notes how vital debate and forensic experiences can be in a classroom environment for both the instructor and the student. Yet, other studies

show that the skills of debate in the context of the academic environment extend beyond the classroom.

Katherine Stenger sought to “examine if forensics helps students be better presenters at professional and academic conferences.”²⁴⁶ Stenger hypothesized that forensics would indeed be helpful because it emphasizes three components that are paramount in delivering a successful conference presentation: audience analysis, research skills, and organization. Stenger argues that forensics students are better equipped to efficiently analyze the audience because this activity “involves learning about what sorts of topics are acceptable for platform speeches, which interpretation pieces will be considered ‘overdone,’ and what type of argumentation will be most effective.”²⁴⁷ Also, in the context of research skills, Stenger further posits that participating in forensics helps students discover the best techniques for collecting information for use in a wide range of events.²⁴⁸ Finally, in improving organizational skills, Stenger intimates that organization often wins debates, which solidifies the importance of maintaining an efficient and orderly structure in a debate round.²⁴⁹

The results of the study provided clear support for Stenger’s hypothesis. Respondents who participated in forensics and debate and presented at a professional or academic conference “strongly agreed” that they were “better prepared to present because of the skills they learned from participation in speech and debate.”²⁵⁰ In addition, Stenger’s study revealed that respondents who received feedback from their presentation found that the feedback was “not just ‘positive,’ but they received numerous complements on both the presentation and the academic material.”²⁵¹ This study proves enlightening not because it unearths a newfound advantage of debate participation, but because it strengthens and reinforces the belief that debate’s benefits extend far beyond competition in tournaments and the college classroom. This study holds

additional importance because it surveys the benefits of debate in an academic arena rarely explored by conventional debate research and literature. Whereas many studies focus on how debate skills translate to teaching and learning in the classroom, this study illustrates how talents gleaned from debate can prove useful in an arena that has become essential in garnering acceptance into graduate programs and tenure for qualified college professors.

Yet, the academic benefits of debate are not solely accessed by former debaters who are academic professionals; they are readily measurable for current debaters as well. In a study conducted by Richard Paine and John Stanley, the authors surveyed current competitors and asked them which aspects of participation in debate and forensics were most rewarding.²⁵² The answer that emerged most frequently did not involve the acquirement of academic knowledge or the competition itself. Instead “it referred to the social connections forensics helps students forge, the opportunity to meet other people.”²⁵³ In essence, “people lie at the core of our perception of fun” in competitive forensics and debate.²⁵⁴ Though this response does not seem as academically significant as other findings outlined in this literature review, it reveals two vital implications for the debate community as a whole. First, it helps to preserve the desires and aspirations of high school debaters who seek membership in collegiate debate programs, thus ensuring the continuation of the activity on a national level. Second, and more importantly for the competitors themselves, it provides them with life-long connections that will prove advantageous in maintaining friendships and securing employment. These two humanistic factors become vital in selling potential debaters on the benefits they will reap by participation in collegiate debate and forensics.

These important findings are enhanced by an additional, more important study, which works to alleviate the struggle debate programs have in securing funding from university

administrations. Robert Littlefield surveyed administrators at a three hundred and thirty-nine colleges and universities and posed questions to them concerning the value they believe debate and forensics held on their campus.²⁵⁵ The results of Littlefield's study were striking, particularly given that despite enormous budget cuts, sixty-five percent of administrators "considered the presence of these teams as either very important or important compared with 10 percent who valued debate and individual events as unimportant or very unimportant."²⁵⁶ Yet, the most significant outcome of this study was the reasons administrators gave in supporting the value of debate and forensic programs. Littlefield stated "the data suggest[s] that enhancing a student's education and recruiting and retaining students were the greatest benefits to be gained from having debate or individual events programs."²⁵⁷ The confluence of results from Paine and Stanley's study as well as Littlefield's generates an argument that, theoretically, will be vital in demonstrating to university administration the value of debate. Coaches and scholars recognize that administrators are "interested in ways to keep enrollment in the university high."²⁵⁸ Thus, "Paine and Stanley's findings about the 'fun factor' of forensics bear an even greater importance when considering that these are the very factors that keep the students in forensics and, ultimately, in school."²⁵⁹

As this review of literature has consistently illustrated, debate as a competitive activity possesses an abundance of qualities conducive to academic success. Yet, these same qualities, as other literature has shown, extend beyond academia into the "real-world" working environment. A study completed by Deanna Sellnow provided the rationale for forensics programs to call themselves "experiential education" opportunities for potential students.²⁶⁰ Experiential education, according to Sellnow, "is grounded in the notion that students learn most effectively when they are afforded the opportunity to apply theories in real-life contexts."²⁶¹ Sellnow's

fundamental argument is that debate and forensics effectively connects theoretical knowledge to real-life experiences, values and fosters different “ways of knowing,” and encourages life-long learning, thus fulfilling the main tenets of experiential education.²⁶² Kuyper reinforces this notion by adding “forensics, in this particular mode of thinking about the activity, offers a unique connection to theory and practice that few other co-curricular activities can provide.”²⁶³

The connection between theory and practice is an essential part of why debate and forensics is so crucial to the holistic learning of a student. For a debate program to progress this idea needs to be more than just communicated to administration, it needs to be proven through action. Luckily for debate coaches who wish to see a model of this in action, it was provided by former Director of Debate at the University of North Texas, Don Brownlee. Brownlee noted that academic debate (especially CEDA and NDT) can neglect the “political feasibility” of some arguments in their debate cases, which in turn “moves debate away from a real world setting and often generates outlandish cases.”²⁶⁴ Brownlee argues that his team “overcomes these deficiencies [by] establishing links with both local legislators and a research group.”²⁶⁵ Brownlee notes that the aim in doing this “is to transform the mountains of debate evidence into policy papers for the legislators,” which means that “students can practice policy analysis in a realistic setting.”²⁶⁶ This undertaking, although quite extensive, pays huge dividends not only for Brownlee’s North Texas debate squad, but for the value of debate as a whole. Debate in its purest form is meant to simulate policy analysis and weigh the costs and benefits of change versus the status quo. This means that for academic debate to have real-world implications, the ideas and concepts discussed in competitions must be argued in some research or governmental forum. Brownslee’s attempt to do just this illustrates that debate is not just theoretical in nature;

it proves that academic debate can have an actual effect on policies implemented on the local, state, national, and international level.

Beyond creating and improving policy, debate also provides the tools necessary to enact a different type of change in society. Ede Warner and Jon Brusckhe argue that “debate can help students become critical consumers of knowledge, social critics, and agents of change.”²⁶⁷ This claim is well supported by research done by Eric English, Stephen Llano, Gordon R. Mitchell, Catherine E. Morrison, John Rief, and Carly Woods that situates the role of competitive debate in exposing the logical flaws of McCarthyism during the 1950’s. The authors note that in 1954 the Speech Association of America (now called the National Communication Association) “invited thousands of college students to debate the relative merits of an American diplomatic recognition of the People’s Republic of China in 1954.”²⁶⁸ Despite claims from McCarthyites that this “practice would indoctrinate America’s youth,” the switch-sides format of debate on this issue actually sparked constructive engagement about how fear of communism affected America’s foreign policy.²⁶⁹ In the end, English et al. argue that “the timing of [McCarthy’s] political implosion...suggests that the great 1954 ‘debate about debate’ indeed may have helped rein in McCarthyism run amok.”²⁷⁰ The emergence of debate as a tool to help defeat a dangerous socio-political ideology underscores a critical skill garnered from participation in debate. While a large portion of this literature review focuses on how debate prepares competitors in academic and professional life, the evidence provided by English et al. illustrate how debate is a tool to empower individuals to achieve progress and change in society. The benefits of this skill permeate all aspects of an individual’s life, from their intellectual development to their belief in their own self-worth. Empowering individuals in this manner connects an academic skill to a life-long social utility, a feat that few other activities besides debate can lay claim to.

As demonstrated thus far throughout this chapter, ample research supports the benefits of debate from an all-encompassing academic and professional perspective. Yet, for this research to truly derive meaning, it must be placed in its proper context. The context for this body of literature exists in the stories and narratives that make up the University of Arkansas debate team. Thus, I will now enumerate these stories and narratives from former Arkansas debaters that seek to articulate one goal: to show how the debate team enhanced their academic and professional careers. In conjunction, I will pair the narratives provided by the former debaters with the coinciding literature. In doing so, a comprehensive view is constructed that shows the totality of the benefits of debate at the University of Arkansas. To conclude, I will contrast the Arkansas debate team with its respective golf team and provide a budgetary solution that will properly reward the debate program for its role in beneficially shaping the University's past, present, and future.

The Benefits of Arkansas Debate: A Narrative Perspective

For this project, I conducted over a dozen in-person interviews and many more via e-mail and over the phone. The process of choosing who to interview were two-fold. First, I sought to interview individuals who represented every possible time-period, from the 1960's to the present. Second, I placed special emphasis on individuals who participated in or were present for a seminal moment in the program's history. This included one of the many accolades accrued under Mary Ingalls, a well-attended or controversial chamber debate, the Harvard Tournament, or an IPDA or NPDA National Championship Tournament. Through this process, I was able to

narrow my focus and interview individuals who covered every pertinent aspect of the Arkansas debate program.

It is almost universally understood that the courtroom is the most common forum for formal argumentation in society. As such, one of the most common career paths for debaters to choose is one in the legal field, most commonly as an attorney in some form. This generalization holds particularly true for alumnus of the University of Arkansas debate team. Of the dozen interviews I conducted for this project, five were connected to the legal profession in some manner. This ranged from a former law student who is currently working towards an MBA, to a professor of law at the University of Arkansas Law School, to current practicing lawyers. In conceptualizing how their experiences in debate helped them in their forays into the legal profession, each former debater provided a variety of answers. Yet, one common theme emerged from all the separate narratives: debate proved to be the most important reason why they achieved success in the legal field.

This theme was certainly supported by law school graduate and current MBA student at the University of Arkansas Walton College of Business, Tammy Lippert. Lippert, who competed with the Arkansas debate team from 2004-2007, notes that debate was an integral part of her success in law school because it “forces students to plan strategically for both sides of the argument.”²⁷¹ Lippert states that this is the case because “truth” in the legal system can be very subjective.²⁷² As such, lawyers need to be able to “consider both sides” and analyze the best way to construct arguments.²⁷³ Lippert’s analysis justifies debate as a steppingstone into the legal profession. As an academic competition, the foundation of debate is the idea that there are two seemingly equally valid truths, and that whichever side articulates their truths more effectively (however that may be judged) will win. This, as Lippert illustrates, is also the basis of the legal

system. In any court case, two sides exist, with narratives (testimony) and evidence presented as a means to show that the truth of one side should be utilized as the basis for a decision. In connecting this phenomenon to the literature, Lippert's analysis is supported by Sellnow's argument that debate is a forum for experiential education because it "values and fosters different 'ways of knowing.'"²⁷⁴ Thus, Lippert's experiences illustrate how a legal career can be almost infinitely benefitted by the lessons debate teaches about the power of "both sides of the debate."

Two of the top debaters from the team's renaissance in the mid-to-late 1970's under Mary Ingalls not only experienced substantial success in the legal profession, but profess that their experiences in debate were the reason for it. The first is Carol Goforth, who is currently Clayton N. Little Professor of Law at the University of Arkansas School of Law. Goforth stated that the "personal growth and education" she gained from debate allowed her to graduate number one from her class at the School of Law.²⁷⁵ Dr. Goforth also reiterated that, beyond her own experiences, debate is a useful preparation for all students in during the time in and after law school. Goforth identified two different areas of proficiency debate cultivates that Goforth identified as essential for law school success. The first centered on "note taking, and synthesizing ideas."²⁷⁶ This area focuses on the structural and organizational aspects of compiling and disseminating information, all skills nurtured by debate and perfected by involvement in a law school program. The second area focused on "audience analysis" and "improvisational thinking and speaking."²⁷⁷ Goforth elaborated on this point by noting that the "ability to switch gears and think quickly" is skills that are imperative for success as a courtroom attorney. Goforth further notes that in debate, students are trained to think and speak in an improvisational manner, given that all rebuttals are exercises in impromptu speaking. These two areas directly relate back to two of the three ways outlined by Katherine Stenger's study that exemplifies how forensics

experience is conducive to giving a successful conference presentation. Given the inherent parallels between a courtroom presentation and a conference presentation (communicating an argument to a room full of individuals who are critically analyzing the message), it is logical that debate would prove to be a worthy training ground for both oratorical scenarios.

Goforth expressed an additional benefit of debate participation to a law career, the ability to “deal with the professional obligations of managing confidential material.”²⁷⁸ Goforth explained that attorneys are often given sensitive information (such as in the attorney-client relationship) that must not be disclosed to anyone else. Although debaters do not deal with information that is secretive in nature, they face a similar situation in deciding what information to discuss and refute in a round. In an event that places rigid time restrictions on each speech, debaters cannot include all information, which means that there is a premium placed on only articulating the most poignant and essential arguments. In this way, the benefit described by Goforth is a real world construct of the “experiential education” debate offers, as outlined by Sellnow. By learning how to interpret which information to include and exclude from a speech, debaters are being afforded the opportunity to perfect the link between theory and practice.

The second standout debater from this time period, fellow law school graduate and practicing lawyer Dr. Joellen Carson, provided two benefits that were equally instructive. Carson argued that debate gave her the “ability to be assertive in law and in life,” which proved vital in “winning several cases due to relentless analytical breakdowns.”²⁷⁹ This quality, though not as easy to measure as other learned debate skills, is no less important. A timid debater, no matter the intellect or communication skills, will find success hard to achieve. And, as Carson explained, these same skills are imperative to becoming a successful trial attorney, where oratorical presence can mean the difference between a converted jury and a dissuaded jury.²⁸⁰

This focus on preparation and a successful delivery of the information reiterates the findings by Katherine Stenger: presenters at an academic conference received positive feedback in large part because of the skills they perfected as forensic competitors.

Carson's second benefit is the way in which the "village" (all the members and coaches) helped guide and instruct her about how to achieve success in debate.²⁸¹ Carson elaborated further that this is comparable to how a law student (or any other student) learns that academic success does not stem from isolation from peers and faculty, but from constantly inquiring and soliciting their help until they understand the concept.²⁸² Carson's analysis here is both unique and illuminating because it incorporates the concept that, despite the bevy of individual burdens felt in a debate round, debate is a team activity where individual success is attained through team cohesion and discussion of ideas. The idea that learning from the "village" is a vital and fun component to success in debate and school strengthens the conclusions drawn from the study done by Richard Paine and John Stanley. Paine and Stanley found that debate competitors most thoroughly enjoyed the social connections and people in the debate circuit, thus increasing the likelihood they would continue competing.²⁸³ This same logic (as Carson intimates and Paine and Stanley argue) is one of the fundamental reasons why students are willing to endure the stress and rigors associated with a college education, because of "the people."

These stories certainly illustrate how a legal career is greatly benefitted by participation in debate. Yet, testimony from team alumni outside the legal field proves that debate is a useful activity for students from a wide array of academic interests. In my contact with Anthony McMullen, longtime Arkansas debater and former debate coach at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA), he revealed an important, unconventional benefit of debate participation. McMullen told the story of a former debater at UCA who was a management information

systems major and “a computer geek, but wanted to do debate because [she] thought it would help her confidence.”²⁸⁴ In the end, McMullen states that this competitor revealed that “debate helped her in her field” by allowing her to make “many observations about young technology users versus old technology users” and how the internet affected the level of communication in modern day society.²⁸⁵ The relaying of these experiences by McMullen reveals a connection to the premise behind Gordon Mitchell’s argument about the role of debate in science-based academic fields. Much like Mitchell’s argument that principles of debate are useful in producing constructive solutions to scientific problems, the narrative of McMullen’s student exemplifies how experiences and skills shaped by debate can be used to improve understanding of issues relating to computer technology. The combination of these two arguments provides sufficient evidence to prove how debate is a useful activity for students of all academic backgrounds and interests.

Former debate participant and coach at the University of Arkansas, Candy Clark, took the lessons she learned from the debate team and transitioned them to a career in business. Clark, who now owns and operates two small businesses, testified that “debate has been a cornerstone in my life, teaching me the value of critical thinking and providing me confidence in interpersonal interactions in my business dealings.”²⁸⁶ Clark’s comments are indicative of debate’s application in a field where practicality is believed to be more useful than theory. Clark’s statement reinforces the findings of Sellnow by justifying how skills learned from debate are directly applicable to running a business. Clark elaborates on this point by arguing that “the lessons of critical thinking in debate are ever-lasting, which helps me deal with a business world that is constantly changing.” Clark’s comments here provide unique insight on how the rapid changing nature of competitive debate is actually great preparation for life after college. As

Clark's comments illustrate, businesses much change to fit the diverse needs of their customers. In doing so, different strategies are used to not only articulate how the business is changing their practices, but must convince potential customers that they will benefit from these changes. Debate is an activity that aids in the development of innovative thinking with limited preparation, a perfect complement to what Clark states are essential skills to be a business owner in modern society. By making these comments, Clark provides solid justification for claiming debate as "experiential education" in that the abilities learned while competing clearly link to skills necessary for real-world employment.

A corollary to Clark's arguments is provided by former Arkansas debater and current medical device representative Jason King. King provides unique, impactful commentary when he states that "debate teaches you how to frame issues to change people's opinions and make a difference in how important topics are viewed and acted upon by the audience."²⁸⁷ This statement is crucial in supporting the premise of English et al's research that argues that debate is an agent for social action. Most importantly, King's comments provide the modern day empirical proof of English et al's contention that switch-side debating of the U.S. policy towards China in 1954 helped begin the process of defeating the red-baiting policies of Joseph McCarthy. By asserting that debate is an important utility in moving the audience to action, King provides the link between the skills taught in debate and how to use those skills to change and progress society.

Each of the benefits described above are indicative of the important foundation that competitive debate is for a career in business, sales, and the legal profession. Yet, competitive debate was not the only form of debate offered by the University of Arkansas in the long history of the team. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the Arkansas debate team (including the

Arkansas Union Society) operated public “chamber debates” for much of team’s history. These chamber debates provided their own distinct benefits, many of which related to building a better informed populace. Skinner Layne, former president of the student senate and member of the Arkansas Union Society’s chamber debate team, participated in several chamber debates during his four years at the University of Arkansas and found that they taught all students valuable, practical skills. After extensive participation in these debates, Layne found that they trained him and others “to be better negotiators, which is a skill that debate provides one of the few outlets for practicing and perfecting.”²⁸⁸ Layne further explains that negotiations (much like debates) are convincing people of ideas that they may either be unfamiliar with, or already hold a firm belief.²⁸⁹ The ability to overcome these rhetorical barriers is what makes negotiations (and achieving victory in debate) so difficult and taxing. Yet, a polished negotiator is highly sought after by public and private sector entities because of how important the skill is in a hyper-competitive, money-driven society. This reality gives debate an added value to society, one whose importance cannot be overstated. And, as with knowing how to determine and utilize the important information from the superfluous information in a debate round/court case, the sharpening of negotiation skills in a debate round is symbolic of the experiential education Sellnow says competitors gain from participation in debate. As stated earlier, negotiation of ideas and in real-world scenarios are an important pragmatic skill, one that debate help bridges through linking theory and practice.

Beyond acquiring pragmatic skills through participating in public debates, Layne posits that there is a greater, societal benefit that is accessed by the audience members when they critically evaluate the arguments presented. Layne argues that “chamber debates draw attention to important issues” that the public at large is “generally apathetic towards,” which cultivates “an

active and open dialogue that benefits the entire community.”²⁹⁰ As discussed in the prior chapter, chamber debates sponsored by the Arkansas Union Society tackled divisive topics that held significant economic, political, and social implications in modern day society. In addition, after listening to arguments presented on both sides, audience members participated in these debates by “switching sides” in the audience if they agree with a point being made by the present speaker. Likewise, after the end of the debate, audience members walked through the door labeled with the side of the debate they thought won. This symbolic gesture reinforces Layne’s sentiment that an audience’s critical evaluation of both sides on important issues combined with active participation creates a better informed community; thus achieving the goal of chamber debates. In making an analogy to Millsap, she argued that debate and forensics coaches utilized techniques and methods that would prove useful in other academic areas. As such, the benefits the community gleans from public debates parallels the benefits other academic faculty stand to gain from debate and forensics faculty sharing their coaching experiences. In making this connection, the value of debate is reinforced on multiple levels, which provides solid justification for claiming that debate an activity that can be beneficial to all.

In extensively examining the beneficial components of debate, this chapter has explored all aspects of available research and narratives from former Arkansas debaters that participated in different time periods in the team’s history. To complete my analysis, I will be utilizing the theoretical framework of collective memory to make a final argument about the role of the Arkansas debate team. In this thorough assessment, I will quantify the ways in which the University of Arkansas, and the Department of Communication, were tangibly harmed by the termination of the debate program.

Collective Memory and the Lost Value of Debate at Arkansas

For the University of Arkansas to legitimize itself as one of “the nation’s great comprehensive academies,” it needs to foster an environment where enlightening, extracurricular outlets are available.²⁹¹ As this project seeks to demonstrate, the debate team plays an integral role in the University’s ability to fulfill this student-centered vision. However, this analysis comes with an important caveat. Given that total enrollment at the University of Arkansas has increased exponentially from 18,648 students in the fall of 2007²⁹² (the semester after the debate team was terminated) to a school-record 23,199 students in the fall of 2011²⁹³ (the most recent available data), the University is clearly successful in its recruiting efforts. Therefore, this analysis will not contend that the termination of the debate team hurt the University as defined by conventional metrics. Instead a collective memory framework that seeks to utilize “historical narratives” as a means to “document the importance of a program to the school and to the students who have participated in debate at that school” will provide the foundation to quantify the harmful effects the cancellation of the debate program had on the University of Arkansas and its corresponding departments.²⁹⁴

One of the measurable harms of the debate team’s termination was the loss of the documentation of team’s successes by local media outlets. Although Arkansas continues to receive ample media attention, it is the lack of coverage of debate that hurt the University in terms of attracting high achieving students who attend the University for specific reasons. Former chair of the Department of Communication at the University, Dr. Dennis Bailey, underscored this by stating “the [debate] team gave the department and the university constant publicity from both the Arkansas Traveler and the Northwest Arkansas Times.”²⁹⁵ Bailey’s claim

is well-supported by the depth and breadth of articles published that detailed the accomplishments and accolades of the Arkansas debate team. This reality cannot be overstated in the impact it had on raising the profile of the debate team across the Northwest Arkansas region. In my research for this project, I discovered over 50 articles written about the team from 1960 to 1977 alone, just in the local newspaper, the Northwest Arkansas Times. This was complemented by the bevy of articles that were constantly published in the University of Arkansas student newspaper, the Arkansas Traveler. As documented earlier, even the team's budget allotment was given priority by staff writers for the Arkansas Traveler.²⁹⁶

The concurrence of these factors played an important role in not only the expansion of the debate team's reputation on campus, but on the state and national debate circuit as well. Dr. Richard Rea, another former chair of the Department of Communication at Arkansas who held his position from 1970-1976, noted that in the 1970's, the University "played a leadership role in spreading the value of debate within the state of Arkansas."²⁹⁷ This role manifested itself in the form of two tournaments a year that the Arkansas debate team hosted during Mary Ingalls' tenure as the director, one of which was a tournament held exclusively for high school competitors from Arkansas.

What these tournaments contributed to the University of Arkansas can certainly be measured in the media coverage surrounding them. Yet, as Joshua Compton reminds us, "how the forensic community remembers its past...denotes how the past is remembered, recalled, and revived."²⁹⁸ In this specific context, it is the stories and narratives created by those involved with the program that create this "collective memory" that justifies the debate team's worth to the University. This theoretical analysis materialized in the form of memories and stories from individuals who played a role in fostering debate at the University. As Rea further noted, in

addition to debaters from all over Arkansas, the “entire campus, including the faculty, participated and judged in these tournaments;” which meant that debate tournaments held at the University were truly campus-wide events.²⁹⁹ While the tournament is taking place, memories and stories are created as a result of the events that transpire before and during rounds, and throughout award ceremonies. These stories gain more tangible meaning through the publication of awards in media outlets. Yet, as Compton notes, the narrative construction of the past “plays a pivotal role in the way forensics is viewed and done” in the present.³⁰⁰ This statement justifies attributing great value to narrative reconstruction of debate tournament proceedings, because it shapes the way debate as an intercollegiate event works in the present, and potentially in the future as well. In the context of passing down the tradition of debate from one class to the next, Compton concurs with this assertion when he states that “current team members ‘teach’ new members about a program by telling stories.”³⁰¹ Compton continues by stating “whether through the larger picture of team members recruiting or the more specific acts of telling stories to new team members, team members’ collective memories have substantial impacts on the initiation of new team members into a program.”³⁰² The recollection and “handing-down” of these memories by former and current team members to new team members ensures that debate, and all its benefits, will have a future in the collegiate setting.

For these findings to be used as justification for claims that the debate team’s absence harmed the University community, they must be situated to show the impact the debate tournaments held at Arkansas had. As both Bailey and Rea sufficiently illustrated, the University of Arkansas debate team was the leader among debate programs on the high school and college level in the state of Arkansas. When the University no longer financially supported the debate team, it sent an even stronger symbolic message that it was not willing to support debate in the

state of Arkansas as well. And, as the collective memory framework helps illustrate, the University not only lost its role as a leader in the state in a widely popular activity, it helped contribute to the decline of debate as a competitive activity in the entire state. The implications of this extend far beyond the financial loss of revenue procured through hosting tournaments, it brings a symbolic conclusion to the events, memories, stories, and narratives that debate is so fruitful in fostering. This effect is immeasurable not only for sentimental reasons, but because it means the termination of a culture and philosophy that permeates through the entire University, and city of Fayetteville.

The idea of a created culture through debate supports another important harm of the team's termination. By bringing together high school debaters, former competitors, and University students and faculty, a certain culture and identity is created. This idea was reinforced by Dr. Jimmie Rogers, chair of the Department of Communication from 1981-2000, who said that both the department and the University "gained an identity from holding tournaments that [could not] be replicated by other departmental activities."³⁰³ This concept is reinforced by longtime forensic coach and scholar Bob Derryberry who argues that "as a team develops and communications in the local community as well as in the contest setting, numerous links with public audiences can become a part of the team's memorable reservoir of relationships."³⁰⁴ Derryberry elaborates on this argument by noting how the departments that house forensic and debate teams can showcase the accumulation of awards and trophies to document the overall success of the department. Derryberry contends that departments can achieve this through archiving success in debate and forensics. He states that archives "help to preserve memories while serving as sources of recollection and inspiration for alumni, incoming students, and developing teams."³⁰⁵ In essence, glorifying achievements in debate becomes a way to ensure

that past success is carried into the future. In the context of the University of Arkansas debate team, Rogers furthers this argument when he adds that “most debaters were not communication majors,” but that their experiences with the team helped the department by “leading them to switch their majors to communication.”³⁰⁶ This phenomenon was important in not only adding strong students to the department, but as an effective recruiting tool to persuade other non-communication majors to make a similar switch. This ongoing reality substantially hurt the department when the debate team was shut down. No longer were an abundance of skilled communicators in other departments switching majors. Though this loss is hard to quantify numerically, Derryberry summarizes the loss through the symbolic nature of trophy cases and award displays. He states that without a team to continue the traditions and procurement of accolades, students may not feel “there is a place for each incoming speaker to achieve and leave a record of growth and success.”³⁰⁷

This loss is not just limited to students from other departments at the University, but from students at other institutions who might be interested in attending the University of Arkansas largely because of its debate team. An empirical example of this argument is the case of debater John Jerome Thompson. In 2009, as a senior at Har-Ber High School in Springdale, Arkansas, Thompson became the first high school student in the history of IPDA debate to win the Varsity Division at the IPDA National Championships.³⁰⁸ Thompson followed that up in 2011 by becoming the first debater to ever win the Varsity IPDA Division at the Pi Kappa Delta National Tournament and the Professional Division at the IPDA National Championships in the same year, as a sophomore at Crowder Community College no less.³⁰⁹ As a Northwest Arkansas native looking to transfer to a four-year university, Thompson had a desire to attend the University of Arkansas.³¹⁰ Given that Thompson is a three-time national champion and the most decorated

IPDA debater in the entire country, he would be an enormous asset to a university (and department) looking for high achieving students. Yet, despite the proximity and emotional appeal, Thompson decided not to attend the University of Arkansas. Thompson's reasoning was that since "Arkansas doesn't have a debate team, I did not believe I could reach my full potential as a student there given how important debate has been in my intellectual development."³¹¹

Thompson's statement not only reinforces the findings of research focusing on the benefits of debate, but it is an affirmation of how important a debate team is in attracting top notch students (and debaters) to universities. Through his spurning of the University of Arkansas, Thompson assured that the University of Arkansas and the Department of Communication would be missing out on creating "memories that build a sense of tradition" in debate, which can give the department greater recognition and achievement.³¹² With Thompson's unparalleled history of success in competitive debate, his potential to accrue more trophies as an Arkansas debater would have added to the already extensive tradition of archives (both materially and metaphorically) at the University. In terms of measuring the impact of this loss, Tenner encapsulates it best when he posits that "every archive is not just a row of acid-free boxes but a manifestation of a quixotic yet indispensable aim: that we can give generations that we will never meet, under circumstances that we cannot foresee, what they will want to know about us."³¹³ Because the University did not possess a debate team in 2011 (and Thompson's decision to eventually attend Arkansas State University on a debate scholarship), the University of Arkansas (and the Department of Communication) missed out on an opportunity to expand upon the successes, traditions, and memories from debate teams' past by giving it a connection to the present and future. Although debate as an activity thrives from the efforts of the collective, an individual such as Thompson (with his resume of past success) become instrumental in

expanding the opportunities afforded to the Arkansas debate program. The attraction of a national champion to the program helps restore greater media recognition and expands the level of competition the team faces. The resulting advantages of this individual success can be accessed by the entire team, thus illustrating why the loss of Thompson becomes an identifiable harm.

Instrumental in both Compton and Derryberry's work is the role of alumni in "preserving the link from the present to the past while gleaning practical (e.g., judging at tournaments, forensic coaching, recruitment) and philosophical benefits (e.g., embodied tradition and heritage)."³¹⁴ Former Arkansas debater Joellen Carson summed up the importance of the alumni to Arkansas debate by stating "the alumni of this team is all that is left; all the successes and the memories only live on through the former debaters."³¹⁵ In terms of translating this to an identifiable harm to the University, Carson states "many [former debaters] felt the greatest connection we made to the University of Arkansas was through the debate team, if there is no team, there is nothing for alumni to come back to."³¹⁶ The significance of this quote cannot be overstated, given its implications. Compton states that "collective memory is both a memory and a guide, as these recollections serve as lenses, or scripts, for ongoing and future action."³¹⁷ In relation to this, Carson's statements illustrate how this "ongoing and future action" will be obstructed for a duality of reasons. First, there are no competitors to continue the traditions and memories of team's past, thus ensuring the "death" of the Arkansas debate team's true core. Second, as Carson's statements confirmed, the only verification of the debate team's "living memory" will not wholeheartedly contribute to the ongoing connection between past, present, and future, because the team no longer exists.

These two reasons provide the rationale for the fundamental reason why the University of Arkansas and the Department of Communication are inextricably harmed by the termination of the debate team. Without an active alumni base returning to the University on a semi-annual basis, the only living recollection of a team that contributed to the University's social, extracurricular, and academic core for the greater part of an entire century is gone. Although published records will continue to exist, they only document the material success of a team whose true value lies in the continued articulation of stories and memories. This line of logic can be viewed best through a broader analogy of the value of a college education. The tangible reward for earning a college degree is a diploma, which validates the completion of all degree requirements. Yet, if any college graduate were to be asked about where the actual diploma ranks among the most worthwhile and enlightening aspects of their education, it is safe to assume that they would not rank it at the top. The life-long social connections, learning experiences in the classroom, exchange of ideas among friends, and memories procured from social gatherings would more than likely be the most common answers respondents would give about what they truly valued in their college degree. Following this line of reasoning, the cancellation of the debate team means that the most integral components to being a member are symbolically dead. With no alumni to instruct current and potential team members about the history and tradition of the Arkansas team, the value of what former debaters contributed and accomplished under the banner of the University of Arkansas is irreparably diminished. This is a loss not solely felt by the Department of Communication, but by the entire University of Arkansas community.

To ensure that the University of Arkansas community continues to cultivate a mentally stimulating environment (and avoids the aforementioned harms), I propose a solution that will sustain the University of Arkansas debate team for the long-term future. As an activity that is

predicated upon the intellectual competition of ideas, debate possesses both pedagogical and competitive components that make it similar to athletic endeavors like golf. However, as this thesis demonstrates through an extensive examination of the Arkansas Union Society chamber debates, the holding of debates can engage the entire campus in a discussing pertinent events and concepts. Golf, even with its wide-spread popularity, cannot access these same benefits. Yet, despite this reality, the average NCAA Division I golf program commanded \$2,176,160 in yearly operating costs and expenses (including scholarship money, coaching salaries, travel expenses, and equipment).³¹⁸ At the University of Arkansas, the men's golf team is allotted four and one-half scholarships (which amounts to roughly \$67,000 in annual costs³¹⁹) and pays their two coaches a combined \$243,000 per year.³²⁰ Given these figures, I propose that (taking resources from the Department of Communication, Department of Athletics, and the Honors College) dedicates \$1,000,000 annually (or roughly half of the annual total expenses for the golf program) to maintain a debate team. This total expense figure covers scholarships, salary for the coaching staff, travel expenses, entry fees, and any other miscellaneous costs necessary to sustain a debate program. Although this figure may seem exorbitant in the context of budgets afforded to debate at other public universities, it is a reflection of the holistic value of debate. Intercollegiate debate incorporates many of the beneficial components (social and professional connections, team camaraderie, development of a strong work ethic, etc...) that participation in an athletic event such as golf provides. In addition, involvement in debate supplies students with unique advantages not found in athletic competition (improvement in public speaking, critical thinking, and research skills, just to name a few). By accepting my proposed solution, the debate team will be properly rewarded for its role in shaping the successful past, present, and future of the University of Arkansas

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Throughout the development of intellectual thought from the storied classrooms of Cambridge to the lawns of Old Main at Arkansas, debate served as both a stimulating intellectual activity and a competitive intercollegiate event. With the development of oral disputations and “proctors,” the University of Cambridge helped increase the use of argumentation in an academic setting.³²¹ The creation of the Cambridge Union Society in 1815 and the Oxford Union in 1823 not only provided Great Britain with premiere debating societies that encouraged public engagement, it provided the blueprint for American universities to follow. The integration of these debating societies into American universities took the form of various literary societies from the Philolexian Society at the University of Pennsylvania to the Jefferson Literary and Debating Society at the University of Virginia.³²² The cultivation of critical thinking and public discussions in these literary societies laid the foundation for the first two intercollegiate debates that took place on May 5 and May 6, 1881 from the Midwest to the Northeast.³²³

The progression of intercollegiate debate extended into the state of Arkansas, starting with the Little Rock Debating Society in 1822 and culminating in the first intercollegiate debate at the University of Arkansas in 1896.³²⁴ Debate at Arkansas quickly flourished, with great school spirit and interest shown in debates that happened on campus throughout the early parts of the 20th century.³²⁵ An integral part of continuing this success came in the form of the chair of the Department of Speech and Dramatic Art, Dr. Virgil Baker. Baker’s visionary leadership helped attract high schools from all over the state to on-campus tournaments, and even international competition for public debates.³²⁶

After suffering through years of turmoil before and after the onset of World War II, the team regained its stature as the preeminent debate program in Arkansas during the 1960's with the addition of Dr. Jack Gregory as the head coach. Under Gregory's leadership, summer workshops were created to grow the activity of debate in high schools across Arkansas. However, the landmark achievement of the team under Gregory came in New York City in 1969 when Arkansas captured the overall sweepstakes award at the Iona College Debate Tournament, defeating 34 other teams in the process.³²⁷ After Gregory's departure in 1970, Fayetteville High School forensics coach Mary Ingalls took over control of the program, and focused the team's efforts on growing debate in Arkansas. This focus not only led to one of the most collaborative periods in debate history among high schools and universities in Arkansas, but culminated in winning the Arkansas Speech Communication Association State Festival in 1975.³²⁸ After reaching the pinnacle of achievement in the 1970's, the debate team began a steady decline that finally ended in 1986 with the termination of the program.³²⁹

Despite several efforts to restart the program throughout the duration of the 1980's and 1990's, the only competitive speaking team the University of Arkansas supported was the student congress team, founded in 1997.³³⁰ Two years later, however, Dr. Stephen Smith brought competitive debate back to Arkansas with the creation of the Arkansas Union Society in 1999.³³¹ After holding controversial debates that drew in enormous, passionate audiences, the Arkansas Union Society branched out into competitive IPDA and NPDA intercollegiate debating later in the fall of 1999, where the team traveled to Harvard for its first tournament.³³² While maintaining the popular chamber debates, the Arkansas debate team grew to be a dominant force in the IPDA circuit, becoming the first team to capture back-to-back first place awards in overall sweepstakes at the 2001 and 2002 IPDA National Championships.³³³ However, despite

maintaining great success through the 2005 season, a contentious relationship with the University administration proved to be an obstacle that could not be overcome. After switching coaches multiple times in a five year period, and even switching to the Department of Philosophy, the Arkansas debate team officially shut down in the spring of 2009.

In conjunction with members of the 2010 and 2011 student congress team, I began the process of rebuilding the Arkansas debate team in the fall of 2011. Our team not only competed in and took second place in a groundbreaking event in intercollegiate debate (the online IPDA tournament), but won the overall sweepstakes award at the Ozark Rookie Championships, solidifying the Arkansas debate team's place as one of the preeminent teams in the region.³³⁴

Recollecting the long, complex history of the University of Arkansas debate team serves an integral purpose in preventing past teams from fading out of memory as time progresses. However, in undertaking this endeavor, Clay Redding and Jeffery Hobbs remind us that "a historical narrative documents the importance of a program to the school and to the students who have participated in debate and individual events in that school."³³⁵ Before I documented the existence of this at the University of Arkansas, I first provided a sample of the many benefits debate provides for a wide range of individuals.

As both the 2007 National Forensics Association Committee on Pedagogy and Susan Milsap found, debate fosters critical thinking and specialization of skills that are applicable across nearly every academic area.³³⁶ Gordon Mitchell's study on the use of debate skills in finding solutions for scientific problems further justified the importance of debate in a wide range of academic areas.³³⁷ Adding to the academic benefits was Katherine Stenger, who found in her study that individuals with competitive forensics experience performed much better at academic conference presentations.³³⁸

Apart from its academic benefits, Paine and Stanley's study proved that the social connection gained from participation in debate proved to be the most worthwhile and enriching aspects.³³⁹ From the viewpoint of university of administration, Littlefield's study illustrated that debate's ability to recruit and retain high-achieving students made it worthy of continued funding and recognition.³⁴⁰

This thesis also went to great lengths to illustrate the ways in which debate builds and strengthens skills and qualities necessary for achievement in other arenas. Deanna Sellnow's study provided evidence to show that debate is a form of "experiential education" that allows students the opportunity to "apply theories in real-life contexts."³⁴¹ Supporting Sellnow's study is former director of debate at the University of North Texas, Dan Brownlee. Brownlee explained how he gave his debaters a link between their boxes of evidence and creating real-world policies.³⁴² Contributing to the real-world applicability of debate is the research done by English et al. that illustrated how debate among college students about American foreign policy towards China helped lead to the downfall of McCarthyism in the 1950's.³⁴³

In the context of the Arkansas debate team, many former debaters who I interviewed confirmed that their experiences with the team played an integral role in their career success after college. Employment in the legal field proved to be the most popular career choice among former Arkansas debaters, which reinforced the value of debate outside of academia. Testimony from University of Arkansas Law Professor Carol Goforth, former Law School graduate Tammy Lippert, and practicing lawyer Joellen Carson all revealed how debate helped strengthen and perfect skills necessary to not only completing law school, but succeeding in the courtroom as well. Former Arkansas debater and University of Central Arkansas debate coach Anthony McMullen relayed an important narrative that illustrated how debate is an important activity to

participate in even for students interested in computer technology.³⁴⁴ In addition, former debate coach and current business owner Candy Clark emphasized that the critical thinking skills and confidence in interpersonal interactions she learned from debate dramatically improved her business career.³⁴⁵ In addition, medical device representative Jason King argued that the techniques learned from debate are important skills in framing issues to enact social change and progress.³⁴⁶ Complementing these narratives is testimony from former Arkansas Union Society member Skinner Layne who argued that skills learned from the AUS chamber debates taught participants practical skills of negotiation that were not being emphasized in the classroom.³⁴⁷

The final analysis in this thesis focused on how the collective memory framework provides the necessary lens to understanding how the University of Arkansas was tangibly harmed by the termination of the debate team. The first level of support for this claim came from the constant media coverage of the team's endeavors that promoted a culture of support for debate not only at the University, but throughout the entire state of Arkansas. This culture often took the form of tournaments hosted by the Arkansas debate team, which brought together competitors, coaches, faculty, and a host of other individuals from around the entire state. These tournaments served as the host site for the creation of stories and memories that not only bring people together for a common purpose, but help grow the activity of debate. Without the debate team to foster intellectual growth, national champion debaters like John Jerome Thompson decided to spur the university.³⁴⁸ Similarly, as posited by Joellen Carson, the absence of debate at Arkansas means that team alumni will not return on a consistent basis to pass down the memories and stories they created while competing.³⁴⁹ Carson's responses provide great evidence to support the value of debate to the University community. Without the consistent recollection of stories and memories from competitors of one Arkansas' most decorated and

prestigious student organizations, an entire history literally ceases to exist. In closing, I advocated for a budgetary solution that seeks to accurately reward the Arkansas debate team not only for its role within the University community, but its contribution to public discourse as well.

The collective memory framework was first conceptualized by John Bodnard, who succinctly summarized it as “a body of beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present, and by implication its future.”³⁵⁰ This definition was the driving force behind the theoretical lens for this thesis, as I sought to connect the past achievements and stories of the University of Arkansas debate team to the present and future. Yet, this project goes one step further by linking this framework to the intrinsic value of a debate team to a specific institution and the careers of its alumni. Whereas Compton, Derryberry, and other collective memory scholars focus their research on how collective memory can reinforce and strengthen a debate program, this thesis did not limit itself to such a narrow focus. This thesis broadened the scope of the collective memory framework through the recollection of stories from well over a dozen alumni, the reconstruction of team successes from media outlets, and by conveying the significance of these stories outside the University. In all, this project provides new insight on the ways in which collective memory can quantify the value of debate in the collegiate setting by not limiting itself to conventional narratives. Instead, by using collective memory to support the argument that a university is irreparably harmed from a debate team’s termination from campus, this framework serves a new purpose for future debate and collective memory scholars.

The overall goal of this thesis is to situate the Arkansas debate team in its proper context by recollecting the stories and narratives that made the team’s existence memorable. But, a reoccurring theme underlining this thesis is nostalgia. Amongst the dozens of narratives this

thesis articulated, a fond remembrance of past stories permeated every single one. This reality is a natural human action when asked to recall a past that includes forming lifelong relationships and lasting memories of success. But, I would be remiss if I did not advance every aspect relating to the framework of collective memory and the Arkansas debate team. Joshua Compton summarized the true value of recollecting a team's past when he states "intercollegiate forensics' past serves as more than an historical reference point; forensics' past guides and informs current practices, and perhaps most impacting, affects forensics' future."³⁵¹ The last part of Compton's statement hits at the crux of not only why I undertook this specific thesis project, but worked diligently to help restart the debate team. If a team can no longer build upon the achievements of those who preceded them, then those achievements lose value as debate progresses into a different era. The Arkansas debate team certainly possesses a celebrated past, but its prior achievements hold even greater meaning when a bright future lies in the horizon. This line of logic drove me and the rest of the current Arkansas debate team members to create a future for debate at Arkansas that is not defined by its past achievements, but excitement for what lies ahead. So, when encapsulating the true value of collective memory in the context of the University of Arkansas debate team, it should not be a constant recollection of memories' past, but a yearning to create new stories and memories in the future.

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⁴ Despite the clear emphasis on “debate,” this thesis will utilize research and document the University of Arkansas’ participation in both competitive debate and forensics. Although traditional scholarship treats debate and forensics as different entities, many articles tend to codify them together to make a singular argument (see, for example, Jack Rogers, “Longitudinal Outcome Assessment for Forensics” and Susan Milsap, “The Benefits of Forensics Across the Curriculum;”).

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