

Connecticut Debate Association

Extemporaneous Cross-Examination Debate

<http://ctdebate.org>

The Connecticut Debate Association (CDA) is the premier high school debate league in Connecticut. We have sponsored a regular program of competition for over 30 years. Our debate format is cross-examination policy debate, but we change the resolution for each tournament and limit research so we have more in common with parliamentary debate as practiced at the high school, college and world level.

Why Debate?

Debate helps students to develop speaking, listening and analytic skills. It places a premium on quick thought and precise expression, skills needed for the CAPT and SAT reading and writing sections. Many noted public figures are former high school or college debaters: Al Gore, Senator and Presidential candidate; Lawrence Summers, former Chairman of the National Economic Council and former President of Harvard; Lawrence Tribe noted constitutional lawyer; Oprah Winfrey, noted television personality; and James Dean, the actor.

CDA provides a complete debate program close to home at low cost. CDA can also be an adjunct to competing in other leagues and using other styles of debate. CDA members participate in national high school tournaments sponsored by Yale, Vassar, Columbia, UPenn, Harvard, and elsewhere. Teams from the CDA have won or placed at the Yale Invitational, Yale Osterweis, Vassar Invitational, Columbia Ivy League Championship and UPenn Liberty Bell Classic parliamentary debate tournaments. Many CDA members also participate in model congress, model UN and mock trial competitions.

CDA Membership

Operating under the auspices of the Connecticut Association of Schools, the CDA is open to any high school in the State, public or private. We have approximately 40 members and average over 30 schools participating at each of our monthly events. In 2019-20, pre-COVID, we had an average of over 350 debaters at each of our regular tournaments. In 2020-21 we switched to online debate and averaged over 250 debaters each month.

Dues are \$300 for the 2021-22 school year and entitle members to attend all regular tournaments with as many debaters as they care to bring at no additional cost other than transportation and lunch. (Note we are limited by the space available, and each school must bring adult judges to cover their debaters.) Dues paying members may also vote at the Spring and Fall coaches' meetings to elect CDA officers and set CDA policy.

CDA Tournaments

The CDA season begins with a Novice Scrimmage in September to introduce new debaters to the format. We follow with tournaments one Saturday each month from October through March, followed by State Finals championship tournament. Debaters qualify for State Finals by their performance at the monthly tournaments. With as many as 500 debaters participating some months, we run tournaments at two or three schools simultaneously on each date to provide space for all, and, with luck, reduce travel time. Each tournament has a varsity and novice division to accommodate different levels of skill and experience.

Schools register for tournaments online using www.tabroom.com, a site sponsored by the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA). We use this software to run the tournaments and post results. Each school maintains its own tabroom entry, and this facilitates entering teams into both CDA and other tournaments hosted on the site. A coach can track the record of individual debaters using the school entry.

Tournament day opens with check-in from 8-9AM. At 9AM the debaters receive the resolution to be debated—the topic changes for each tournament—and a packet of research material. They have an hour to prepare before the first round. Each two-person team will argue in favor of and against the issue over the course of three rounds. During the preparation hour, we hold a workshop for new judges. There are two rounds of debate before lunch, at 10AM and 11:30AM. Lunch is at 1PM and the third round begins by 2PM. The top two varsity teams compete in a public final round at 3:30PM. The awards ceremony follows the final round at 5PM, and we break at 5:30PM. We have been successful at keeping very close to this schedule and ending on time.

Extemporaneous Debate

The CDA extemporaneous debate format is a modified form of cross-examination policy debate practiced at the high school level, but by changing topics each month we are closer in spirit to college-level parliamentary debate. Each team consists of two debaters, a first and second speaker. Each debater has a six-minute constructive speech after which they are cross-examined for three minutes by their opponents. The speeches alternate between the Affirmative and Negative. Each debater also has a four-minute rebuttal speech. A single judge decides the result of each preliminary round, and a panel of three to five judges decides the final round.

The debate resolution changes each month, announced the morning of the tournament. The debaters receive a packet of six to twelve pages of material with the resolution to help them understand the topic and develop cases and arguments. Debaters may also bring a dictionary, an almanac and a copy of the US Constitution. During the one-hour preparation period, debaters may work as two-person teams or in larger groups from their school.

Limits on research materials and preparation time favor students who are well-read in current events and public policy. The resolution topic is usually an issue in the news and of lasting importance. For example, at State Finals in 2018 we debated whether individuals should be paid for the use of their personal data. The CDA website has over 20 years of past resolutions and over 10 years of evidence packets for review and practice.

Starting a Debate Program

A debate program requires a moderator or coach to organize the team. The coach will need to recruit and to train debaters, and to enlist adult volunteers to serve as judges. The coach will also have to organize tournament registration and transportation.

CDA coaches vary in experience from none to some to lots. A few are former debaters. Most are social studies or English teachers with no prior debate experience. Some teach an elective class in public speaking or a related subject that helps them build their team. Some also coach related activities such as model congress, model UN or mock trial. Experience in any of these areas tends to benefit both coaches and students.

Lack of debate experience is not a barrier to coaching. Debaters do much of their learning from each other in competition. A coach's most important job is organizing the team and getting them to the tournaments. Stronger teams benefit the entire league by providing models for newer debaters. The CDA website provides extensive material to help new coaches and debaters. Veteran coaches are available to provide advice and mentoring.

In some cases, we have had parents or the students themselves start the debate program at their school, often running it for many years quite successfully. We are always happy to help a new team get started!

CDA Volunteers

The CDA depends on volunteers from the member schools for its success. The Board consists of an Executive Director, an Assistant Director and at least five at large members. These and other coaches help run the tournaments. We rely on member schools to host our tournaments. This provides an opportunity to show off your facility and repay the generosity of others.

A debate tournament requires qualified judges, one for every four students. These are often parents of the debaters who volunteer for one or more events during the year. These parent-judges often become quite experienced over the course of their child's debate career.

Contact CDA

For more information, visit the CDA web site at <http://ctdebate.org>. For inquiries, send an email to ejrutan3@ctdebate.org.