



The state of college debate according to a survey of its coaches: data to ground the discussion of debate and civic engagement

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ABSTRACT

In 2015, prominent figures from the debate community gathered at Penn State for a Conference on Speech and Debate as Civic Education. Convened in response to a perceived decline in debate's contributions to civic education, the conference also aimed to start a conversation about the future of debate education. Although a great deal can be learned from anecdotal evidence about trends in debate education, surprisingly little is known about the actual activity of college debate teams across the country. For example, there are no real data about how many tournaments the average college debate team attends each year. In this essay, we present results from the first national survey of college debate coaches concerning the shape and scope of the activity. With a focus on debate's role in civic education, we present our findings to help ground the emerging conversation about the future of debate.

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In their call for papers, the organizers of the 2015 Conference on Speech and Debate as Civic Education juxtaposed two disturbing trends in the contemporary world of debate. First, the call suggested that “many speech and debate programs have lost sight of their connections to civic education.” Second, it observed that “programs across the country have been downsized or eliminated altogether” (Center for Democratic Deliberation, n.d.). Although the conference concerned debate in both domestic and international contexts and at all levels of education, this familiar declension narrative of collegiate debate is instantly recognizable for any current or former member of the college debate community. In short, there is a widespread belief that college debate's institutional standing has been imperiled by an all-consuming competitive impulse, which supposedly drove debate away from plain talk to impenetrable technical jargon. The same competitive impulse has been blamed for debate shifting its subject matter from rigorous discussions of national policy to petty feuds over cultural politics.

Like any narrative, the tale of college debate's decline is itself debatable. In the 1950s, Penn State's own debate coach Schug (1952) administered a national survey of teachers and administrators and found that midcentury debate was perceived as having “an over-emphasis on tournaments and winning” (p. 252). Schug's 60-year-old finding begs

the question: just when did the decline begin? Unfortunately, Schug's survey has no contemporary equivalent. Without data, the discussion of the state of college debate tends to revolve around dramatic anecdotes. For example, when Towson University won the 2014 Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) National Tournament with a case concerning the racial and gender exclusivity of college debate, the supposed injustice of their championship became a cause célèbre for the conservative press ("Decline of Debate," 2014; Lynch, 2014). Likewise, when a Fort Hays State University coach mooned a colleague in 2008 during a heated exchange over judging preferences—a topic of great import to policy debate's history of exclusivity—his actions made national headlines and prompted some to question the civic health of college debate (Guess, 2008; Hogan, 2010; "Kansas Debate Coach Loses Cool," 2008).

This preoccupation with dramatic anecdotal evidence is not confined to incidents that make the popular press. A series of documentaries concerning competitive debate—*Spew* (Kung & Calderon, 2005), *Resolved* (Whiteley, 2007), *Debate Team* (Robbins, 2008), and *Fast Talk* (Tolchinsky, 2011)—have also informed discussions of collegiate debate, and they have relied on the same kind of evidence to tell the tale of debate's decline. For example, *Fast Talk* sheds a particularly negative light on Northwestern University's policy debate program. Yet, the most competitively successful team in the history of college debate may not necessarily reflect the experiences of most debate programs. Likewise, *Debate Team* focuses on the teams that competed in the CEDA National Tournament in 2005, one of the most competitive of the (at least) six national end-of-the-year debate championships. Although it is dubious to generalize about the state of collegiate debate across the nation based on these anecdotal accounts, in all fairness to those who have, there has been no better alternative.

Whether one agrees with the declension narrative or not, the broader sense that college debate has changed in important ways over the past few decades is difficult to deny if no other reason than that college itself has changed over that same period of time. And, if it is true that college debate programs have changed so much, then it seems reasonable that we should ask whether we really know what we are talking about anymore when we speak of "college debate." What do we know about the average college debate team? How many civic events does it hold? How many tournaments does it enter? How many coaches does it employ and how many members does it have? What kinds of universities have debate teams and what types of debate do they do? There are currently no definitive answers to these questions based on anything more than anecdotal evidence like documentaries or sensationalistic journalism. Even national debate organizations that have access to data concerning competition still silo college debate into its different forms: policy, parliamentary, Lincoln-Douglas, and so forth. Without data to track the changes that have led college debate to its current state, we are missing evidence we need to tell fact from fiction and begin meaningfully "chronicling, theorizing, and illustrating the connections between debate and educating for citizenship in the past, present, and future," as the Penn State conference call implores us to do (Center for Democratic Deliberation, n.d.).

To provide some grounding for the understanding college debate as a national enterprise, we created and administered a nationwide survey of college debate coaches—the first of its kind. We asked coaches a range of questions about their programs as well as their perceptions of various debate practices. In our work we have found that some

popular truisms, such as the idea that competitive activity and civic outreach trade off, are simply false. Teams that attend more tournaments participate in more civic outreach events, not the other way around (Lain, Hlavacik, Ivanovic, & Ontiveros-Kersch, 2015). In addition, we have obtained baseline national data for information like the average membership of a college debate program, how many coaches it employs, how many tournaments it attends, and how many civic outreach activities it puts on. In this essay, we report information about college debate across the nation to put some numbers and perspective to the trends currently under discussion regarding the connections between debate and its civic mission. Our hope is that what we share here might help inform discussions about the present and future of college debate, both for the sake of those currently in the debate community and for other educators interested in how cocurricular debate might contribute to civic education programs at their colleges and universities.

Surveying the history of debate surveys

There is a limited history of using surveys to examine the state of college debate as a national enterprise. Most surveys concerning debate on a national scale have assessed student learning outcomes (see Rogers, 2002), minority participation (see Mcree & Cote, 2002; Stepp, 1997; Stepp & Gardner, 2001), and a 50-year plague of coaching burnout (see e.g. Gill, 1990; Preston, 1995; Richardson, 2005; Rives & Klopff, 1965). These surveys tackle important issues for the improvement of college debate as an educational activity, but they provide little insight into the structure and activity of contemporary debate programs, let alone how those programs facilitate civic education and outreach.

Some surveys have focused on the external perception of debate. Schug's aforementioned 1952 survey compared the attitudes of a group of Pennsylvania teachers and administrators concerning college debate with those of a national group of teachers and administrators. Schug's primary findings were a series of negative perceptions concerning debaters and debate coaches. Schug found that teachers and administrators agreed that, "debate coaches need better training and a more wholesome philosophy of debate," and that "debaters lack sincerity and honesty" (p. 252). He concluded by noting that, "it is time we debate coaches started paying attention" (Schug, 1952, p. 252). The best contemporary follow-up to Schug's work is Littlefield's (1991) survey of college administrators concerning their perceptions of the value of competitive forensics as a cocurricular activity. Notwithstanding popular documentaries, news stories, and Littlefield's 15-year-old survey of administrator perceptions, there is no assessment of contemporary college debate organizations that allows us to say what they do or who participates in them beyond sweeping impressions cobbled together from anecdotal evidence.

In the social scientific literature, the humanities literature, and the public conversation concerning college debate, there is an assumption that we already know what a debate program is and what it does, and that we can cull trends from that knowledge. This assumption is dangerous to make, especially in a recently enlivened academic conversation that is predicated upon the assertion that college debate has endured a fundamental change from what it used to be. Prejudices and stereotypes—both old and new—might cloud our understanding. In order to provide some of this missing information, we

have surveyed those with the best ability to tell us about the current state of college debate: the coaches who run college debate and forensics programs across the country.

To create baseline data regarding debate in U.S. higher education, we asked the following research questions:

RQ1: How big is the average debate program?

RQ2: What kind of university has what kind of debate program?

RQ3: How do debate organizations balance competition and civic outreach?

RQ4: What debate organization characteristics support civic outreach?

Method

Participants

One hundred and two college debate coaches completed the survey. Seventy-two percent identified as men, 26% as women, and 1% as transgender. Thirty-eight percent held doctoral degrees as their highest degree, 50% held master's degrees, and 11% held bachelor's degrees. The survey was open to college coaches at all levels, but our sample skewed towards the coaches in charge of the programs. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents selected the best description their position in their debate program as "director of debate or forensics," 13% selected "assistant director of debate or forensics," 12% selected "debate coach," and 7% selected "graduate student." Not surprisingly, 61% of the respondents reported having more than 11 or more years of coaching experience.

We were able to identify and directly target a population of 212 college debate coaches, meaning the response rate was 48%. Although only 102 respondents completed the survey, 158 began it. With no other existing data on the perceptions of college debate coaches, we have obtained the best data currently available, but the difference between the number of coaches who began the survey and the number of coaches who finished it suggests a need to shorten and otherwise improve the instrument in future studies.

Procedure

In order to reach our target population of college debate coaches, we created a database of debate programs, their coaches, and their contact information. We used membership lists from college debate organizations, college debate web-forums on Facebook and elsewhere, and extant debate list-servs to create our database, and to target the coaches of active programs. In addition, we used university web pages and our own contacts across the college debate community to collect email addresses for all the coaches we were able to find. In the end, our database included the contact information for 212 college coaches.

Having identified a target population, we began a public campaign to encourage coaches to take our survey. Over four months, we sent direct emails to all of the coaches listed in our database three times asking them to take our survey. Over the same period, we also posted an invitation to take the survey on the same list-serves, organizational web pages, and Facebook groups we used originally to help make the list. On occasion, we used our connections in the debate community to provide additional encouragement and reminders, making announcements at debate events and reminding coaches we came into contact with. Overall, we did what we believed

to be our best to make the survey as available and inclusive as possible within the college debate community.

Instrument

We created a new instrument for this survey. It invited college debate coaches to share their perceptions of debate and civic outreach and to describe some of the key characteristics of their own debate programs. In total, the survey asked 37 closed ended questions investigating the coaches' perceptions of themselves, their own debate programs, the civic outreach promoted by their debate programs, and college debate generally. We asked the respondents to tell us how many coaches their home university employed, to estimate how many students were members of their team, and to share how much competitive debate and civic outreach their debate program did in the last year. We also asked them to gauge the civic engagement at various debate and debate-related activities. All of the questions asked for the coaches' perceptions, but some required the coaches to estimate the reception of their efforts among students and their institution.

Because competitive college debate is not homogenous, but actually a collection of national organizations that oversee yearly tournament schedules, we used our questions about tournament participation to get a picture of college debating across a spectrum of activities that all call themselves debate. Many, but by no means all, college debate programs are heterodox, identifying with multiple national debate organizations in the same way a scholar might take part in several professional organizations. We used our familiarity with the debate community to break down debate tournament participation into four recognizable categories: policy (National Debate Tournament and CEDA tournaments), parliamentary (National Parliamentary Debate Association and American Parliamentary Debate Association tournaments), National Forensics Association (NFA tournaments), and International Parliamentary Debate Association (IPDA tournaments). By asking debate coaches to indicate how many parliamentary, policy, NFA, and IPDA tournaments their debate program participated in, we were able to build a map of which kinds of schools competed in each kind of debate and the extent to which the various college debate communities overlap. We were also able to better account for the full range of competitive activity undertaken by each debate program.

For some items, we used ranges. For example, for the item asking the coaches to estimate their team membership, the survey provided a series of ranges to choose from: 0–4, 5–10, 11–20, 21–50, and 51–100 members. We also used a series of ranges for the both the tournament participation and civic outreach items. We translated those ranges into averages in order to create discrete figures for the comparison of total tournament and outreach participation figures using a process described in our previous work (Lain et al., 2015).

When asking coaches to report on debate outreach activities, which could include anything from hosting a political debate watch, to running a high school debate tournament, or even putting on an argumentation workshop open to their campus, we included an “etc.” at the end of our list of possible civic outreach activities. We did this to allow the coaches themselves to define civic outreach via their own perceptions, and because what counts as civic education or civic engagement can vary from campus to campus and team to team.

Results

Research question 1: How big is the average debate program?

To get a sense of the size of contemporary debate programs, we asked the coaches to estimate their team membership. From 102 responses, we learned that almost half (46.0%) of debate programs have 11–20 members and the vast majority (80.4%) have 11–50 members (see [Figure 1](#)). Thus, on most campuses the debate program is about the size of an upper-division undergraduate class.

In addition to membership, we asked our respondents to report how many coaches their university employs. As coaches themselves, we assumed that they could put an exact number on it. The mean from all respondents was $M = 2.5$ coaches ($SD = 1.5$). Three quarters (75.5%) of the 102 debate programs represented in our survey reported that their institution employed between one and three coaches for the debate program (see [Figure 2](#)). It should be noted that not all of these coaching positions are equal. Debate coaches can be tenure-track faculty, lecturers, contingent faculty, or graduate students on fellowships.

Perhaps not surprisingly, after running a cross-tabulation and administering a chi-squared test of independence, we found that the number of coaches on the average debate team increases in concert with the number of members the team has, $\chi^2 (24, N = 102) = 34.117, p = .083$. In [Figure 3](#), we have visualized this relationship with the average number of coaches represented on the vertical axis and the team membership range on the horizontal axis.

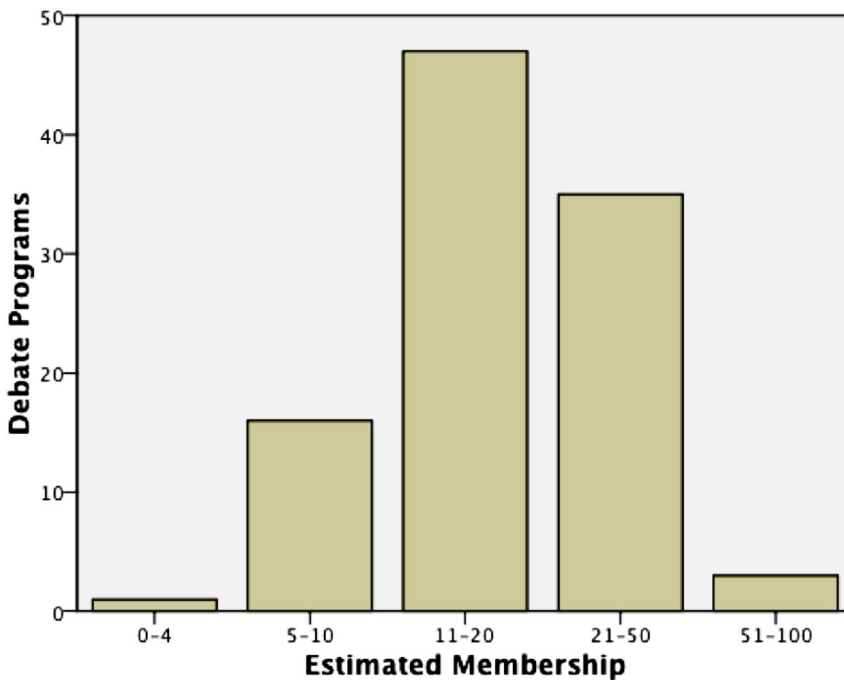


Figure 1. Estimated membership.

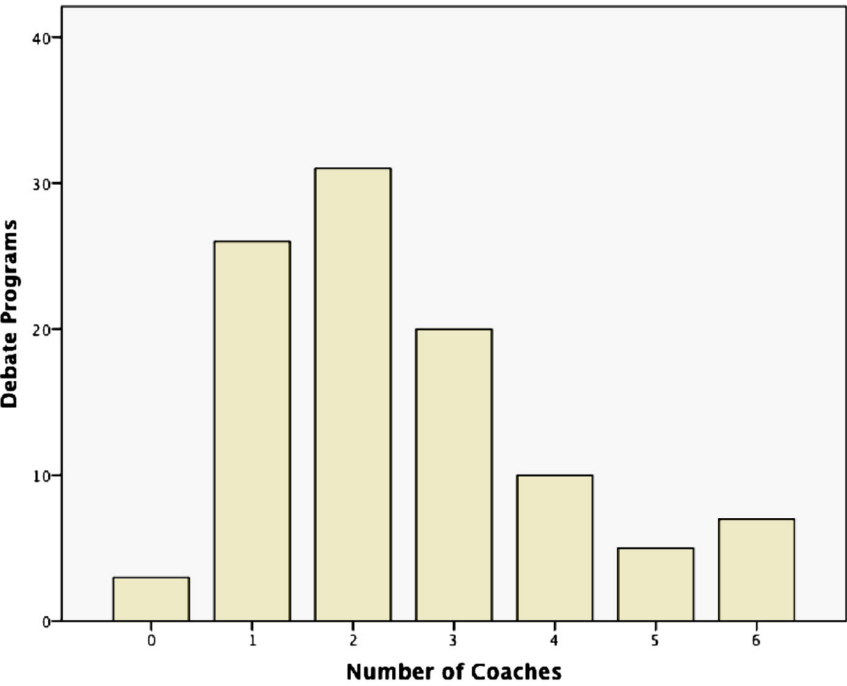


Figure 2. Number of coaches.

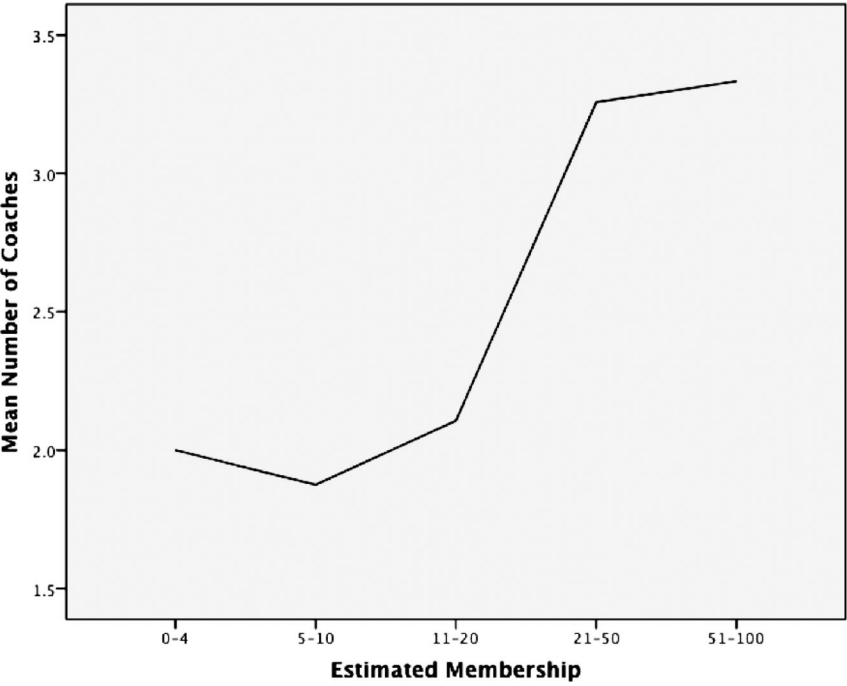


Figure 3. Mean of coaches versus estimated membership.

Table 1. Debate organizations by institutional description.

Institutional description	Percentage (N)
Flagship Campus of a University System	34.3 (35)
Branch Campus of a University System	8.8 (9)
Regional University	11.8 (12)
Community College	10.8 (11)
Liberal Arts College	29.4 (30)
Other	4.9 (5)

N = 102.

Interestingly, we found a clear dividing line wherein teams with 20 members or fewer averaged a little more than two coaches and teams with more than 20 members averaged a little more than three coaches. Although we cannot speak to causation, there is a strong correlation between this one extra coach and the overall size of a college debate program.

Research question 2: What kind of university has what kind of debate program?

To get a sense of the makeup of the contemporary college debate community, we asked each of the 102 coaches we polled to select the best description of the kind of educational institution that their debate organization resides in. [Table 1](#) lists these descriptions. As a result, we found that 63.7%, or nearly two thirds, of all debate organizations come from either flagship universities or liberal arts colleges. What motivates these two different kinds of institutions to invest at a similar rate in college debate warrants further investigation.

In addition, we asked each coach to report the amount of tournament activity their debate organization engages in during the average year dividing that activity between the four major types of college debate: policy, parliamentary, NFA, and IPDA tournaments. The coaches' responses to this series of questions in combination with descriptions of their educational institution give rough a picture of what kinds of educational institutions participate in what kinds of competitive debate. In [Table 2](#), we have provided a breakdown of each kind of debate by the percentage of the type of university that participates in it.

Because flagship campuses and liberal arts colleges together makeup almost two thirds of all debate programs, it is not surprising that they also make up more than half the participants in policy, parliamentary, and NFA debate tournaments. However, the coaches of community college debate programs reported the highest participation in IPDA tournaments.

Table 2. Debate tournament participation by institutional description.

Institutional description	Policy	Parliamentary	NFA	IPDA
Flagship Campus of a University System	43.6 (24)	27.4 (20)	30.77 (8)	16.7 (3)
Branch Campus of a University System	7.3 (4)	9.6 (7)	7.69 (2)	0.0 (0)
Regional University	12.8 (7)	11.0 (8)	11.54 (3)	16.7 (3)
Community College	1.8 (1)	15.1 (11)	19.23 (5)	33.3 (6)
Liberal Arts College	27.3 (15)	32.9 (24)	30.77 (8)	22.2 (4)
Other	7.3 (4)	4.1 (3)	0 (0)	11.1 (2)

N = 102.

Table 3. Means of outreach activities and tournament participation.

Item	Mean (SD)
Public Debates	2.8 (2.4)
Debate Outreach Activities	4.3 (3.3)
Total Outreach Activities	7.0 (4.8)
Total Tournament Participation	12.1 (4.9)

$N = 102$.

Research question 3: How do debate organizations balance competition and civic outreach?

From the same items we used to determine which kinds of educational institutions participate in which styles of competitive debate, we culled a total figure of tournament participation for each responding coach's debate program (see Lain et al., 2015). The mean of all responses was $M = 12.1$ ($SD = 4.9$; see Table 3). This means that the average debate program participates in little more than 12 competitions each year.

In addition to asking coaches to report their program's tournament participation, we also asked them to estimate how many public debates they held during the year. From this item we learned that average team holds 2.8 public debates each year ($SD = 2.4$; see Table 3). We also asked the coaches to report how many civic outreach activities they participated in annually excluding public debates. The responses for outreach activities was $M = 4.3$ ($SD = 3.3$; see Table 3). By combining the public debate item with the outreach activity item, we were able to create a measure of total civic outreach activity. Altogether the total outreach activity was $M = 7.0$ ($SD = 4.8$; see Table 3).

Altogether, the average debate program competes in 12 tournaments each year and holds seven outreach activities. As a percentage of its total efforts in creating events, the average team devotes 63.2% of its time to competition and 36.8% to civic outreach. This result is consistent with our previous finding that debate coaches perceive greater institutional reward from for their program's competitive success than its civic outreach efforts (Lain et al., 2015).

Using the institutional descriptions provided by each coach, we have compared how debate programs divide their resources between competition and outreach by institutional type. These results appear in Table 4, but before discussing them we need to highlight the "other" category. Although we cannot be entirely sure, the five coaches who chose to identify their institutions as "other" probably work at private research universities—a group of schools not captured by the other categories.

Table 4. Means of total tournament participation and total outreach by institutional description.

Institutional description	Public debates	Outreach activities	Total outreach	Total tournament participation
Flagship Campus of a University System	3.0 (2.53)	5.4 (3.61)	8.4 (5.11)	12.9 (5.28)
Branch Campus of a University System	3.4 (3.32)	4.4 (4.10)	7.9 (6.92)	9.3 (3.77)
Regional University	1.9 (1.88)	4.9 (3.70)	6.8 (5.22)	10.9 (4.06)
Community College	2.0 (1.41)	2.6 (1.04)	4.6 (1.44)	12.7 (5.20)
Liberal Arts College	2.5 (1.59)	3.2 (2.57)	5.7 (3.52)	11.7 (4.60)
Other	5.8 (3.90)	4.4 (3.13)	10.2 (5.22)	13.8 (5.59)

$N = 102$.

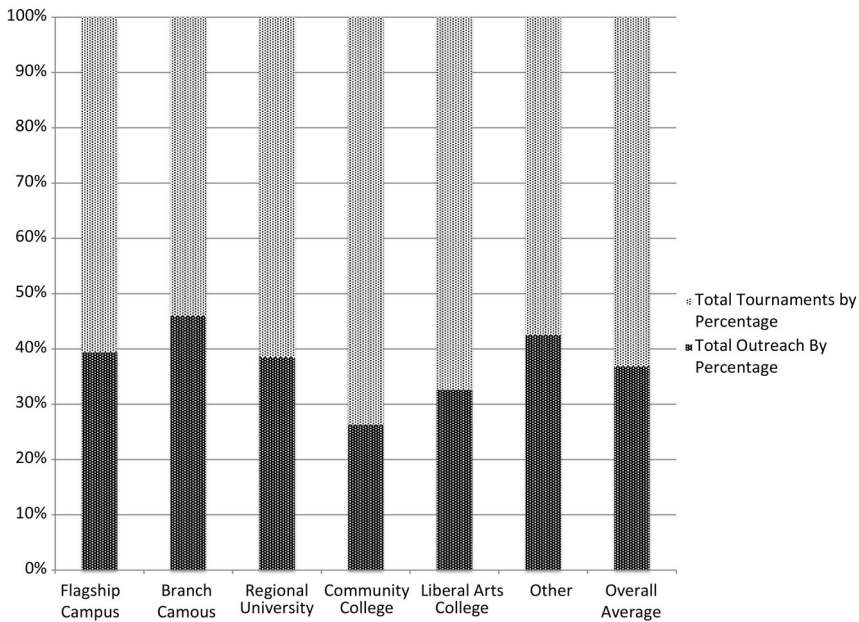


Figure 4. Total tournament participation and total outreach as percentage of overall activity by institutional description.

Overall, we found that debate organizations in the other (24.0) and flagship campus (21.3) categories were more active in terms of their combined tournament participation and outreach activity. This is probably at least in part a reflection of the impressive institutional resources available at those universities. The rest of the categories grouped together in terms of overall activity between 17 and 18 total events with branch campuses coming in last at 17.1. In addition, though, we found that the ratios between total tournament participation and total outreach activity also varied by institutional type (see Figure 4).

Figure 4 compares total outreach activity with total tournament participation as percentages of a debate program's total activity. Debate coaches at the branch campuses of larger university systems reported the lowest overall activity while also reporting the highest percentage (46.0%) of their activity as civic outreach. This might be a reflection of a greater commitment to civic outreach or a result of fewer institutional resources for travel to competitions.

Both flagship universities and the other category made up mostly of private research universities reported both the highest overall activity and a ratio of civic outreach (39.7% and 42.5% respectively) to tournament participation slightly greater than the overall average (36.8%). Given their preeminent ability to travel to participate in large numbers of tournaments, these teams likely reflect an average of how a contemporary debate program chooses to balance competition and civic outreach under the best of institutional circumstances.

Coaches of community college debate programs reported a middle-of-the-pack level of overall activity, but by far the lowest percentage of civic outreach (26.3%). We found this result surprising. However, our community college sample likely reflects a higher

proportion of campuses with large numbers of commuters and it can be difficult to get an audience for civic outreach events like public debates in an environment where students do not live on or very near their campus. This suspicion is reflected in the result that coaches at community colleges reported the second-lowest average of public debates per year (2.0; see Table 4).

Liberal arts colleges mirrored our overall averages of activity, lagging slightly in their percentage of overall civic outreach (32.6%) versus tournament participation.

Research question 4: What debate organization characteristics support civic outreach?

We have already demonstrated that estimated membership and the number of coaches an institution employs for its debate program are correlated. We have also found that membership and total tournament participation are positively correlated using a cross tabulation and a chi-squared test of independence, $\chi^2 (72, N = 99) = 153.686, p = .000$. Putting the mean of tournament participation over estimated membership, Figure 5 visualizes the direct relationship between tournament participation and the size of a debate organization.

Not surprisingly, membership and tournament participation both go up and down together. Bigger teams compete more frequently. However, there is a plateau in membership for teams averaging about 11 tournaments per year. This may be due to teams perceiving 11 tournaments as a minimum level of participation to get an adequate educational benefit out of tournament competition or to ensure a reasonable chance of competitive

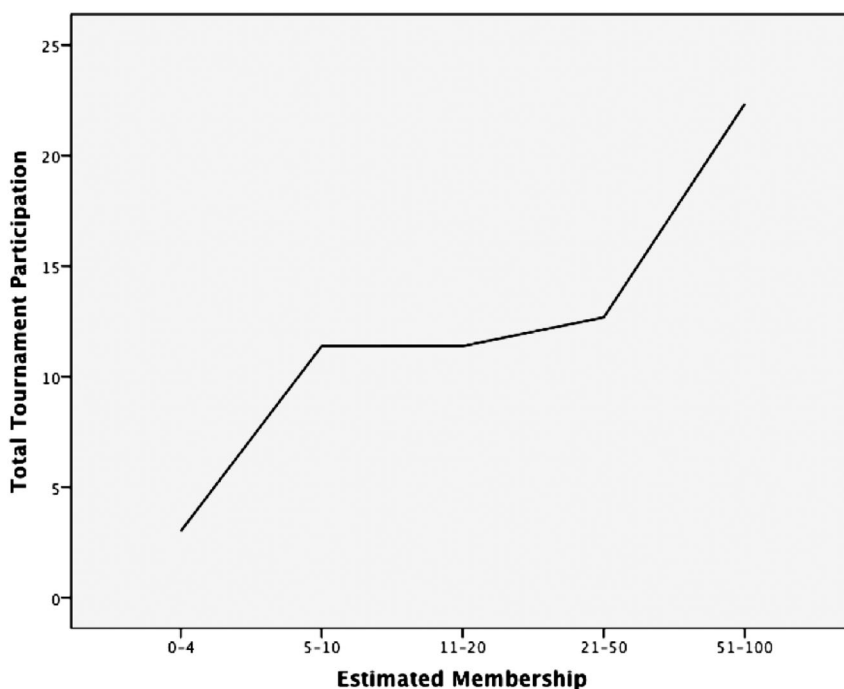


Figure 5. Total tournament participation versus estimated membership.

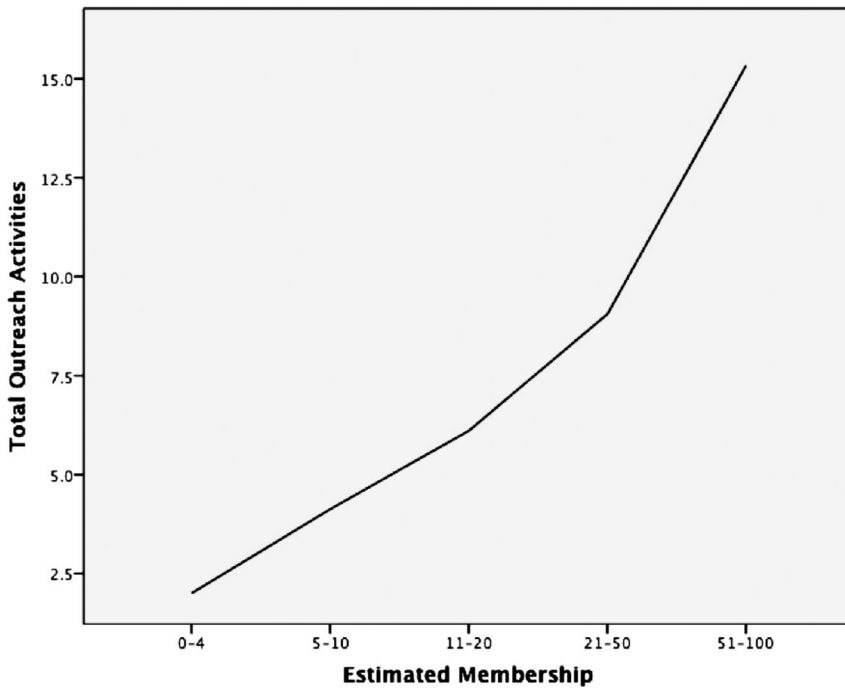


Figure 6. Total outreach activity versus membership.

success. It might also reflect issues related to travel funding allotment—something we have not measured. Whatever its cause, this plateau warrants further investigation.

Less obviously, we found that membership and total outreach are very strongly correlated by performing another cross tabulation and another chi-squared test of independence, $\chi^2 (72, N = 102) = 98.885, p = .000$. This result is depicted in [Figure 6](#) where estimated membership size remains on the horizontal axis, but total outreach activities appears on the vertical axis. Once again, they rise and fall together with the largest teams creating the most civic outreach activities on average. Interestingly, though, a debate program's civic outreach activity not only increases but actually accelerates with additional membership. This result is visible in [Figure 6](#) as the upward line gets steeper as it moves to the right.

Taking [Figure 3](#) in combination with [Figures 5](#) and [6](#), we find that teams with more coaches have more members, they go to more tournaments, and they engage in more outreach activities. Moreover, the increase in outreach activities as teams get bigger and have more coaches accelerates and outpaces the increase in tournament participation. This need to make debate programs bigger and thereby more civically active is a problem spanning all institutional contexts. In [Figure 7](#), we have visualized the count of coaches reporting each level of estimated membership by institutional type in a line graph where each line represents institutional type.

Although debate programs at flagship campuses made up all of the programs that reported more than 50 members, the vast majority of debate programs at flagship universities have 11–20 members. This trend is consistent across all institutional types with the exception of regional universities, which had slightly more programs with 21–50 members

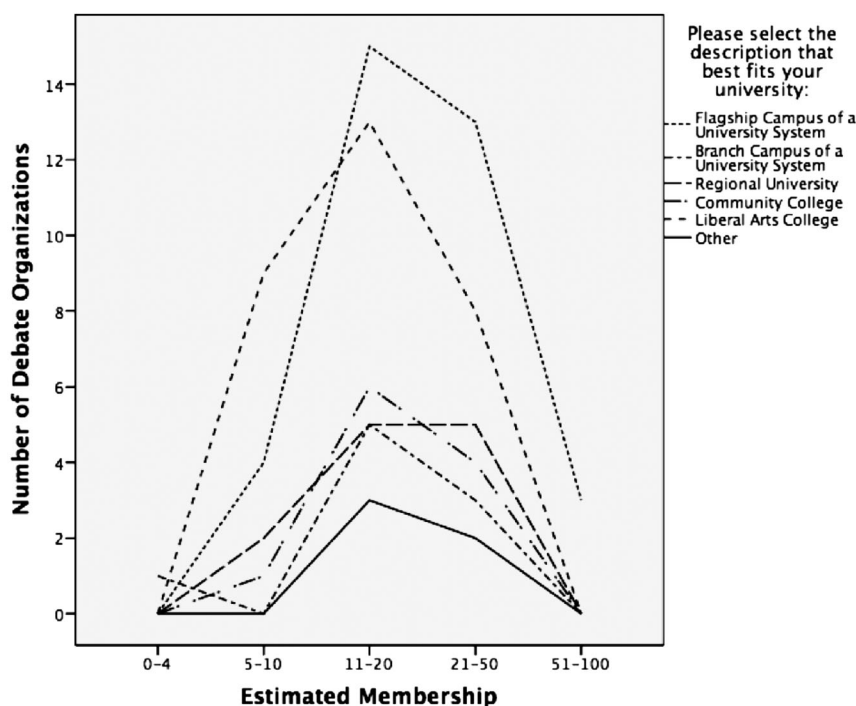


Figure 7. Estimated membership by institutional type.

(see Figure 7). Regional universities also reported a slightly higher overall percentage of outreach activity (38.5%, see Figure 4). Nonetheless, there is ample room for growth.

Discussion

The quantitative study of college debate is an important tool for understanding its current state of affairs and for forming successful efforts to improve it. This includes any initiative to make college debate a better vehicle for of civic engagement and education. Certainly, the popular sense that college debate has changed over the past few decades—in some ways for the worse—has merit. However, without testing our perceptions we run the risk of tilting at windmills instead of addressing real trends and making real improvement.

Based on our findings here and in our previous work, we believe that the claim that “many speech and debate programs have lost sight of their connections to civic education” is not substantiated by the data—at least in terms of how the typical program invests its efforts (Center for Democratic Deliberation, n.d.). The average debate organization maintains civic outreach as more than a third of its activity despite coaches’ perceptions that they are rewarded more by their university for focusing on competitive success. So far, we have found better evidence that the universities that maintain debate programs, not the programs themselves, have lost sight of the connection between debate and civic education (Lain et al., 2015). Nonetheless, a ratio of seven outreach activities to 12 tournaments still may be seen by some as “an over-emphasis on tournaments and winning” and may well reflect a shift in emphasis toward competition over the past few decades

(Schug, 1952, p. 252). At least with a baseline measurement, we can begin an informed conversation about what counts as an unacceptable preoccupation with competition—and what difference that makes. Yet, in contrast with the picture painted by documentaries like *Fast Talk* and *Debate Team*, the greatest deficit of civic outreach versus tournament participation exists at community colleges, not at the most competitively successful public and private research schools.

Our evidence also suggests that the best way to enhance a debate organization's civic outreach activity is for the team to have more members. This suggests that the trend where "programs across the country have been downsized or eliminated altogether" may indeed be related to decline not just in the total civic outreach performed by debate organizations, but also in the rate at which those debate organizations engage in civic outreach (Center for Democratic Deliberation, n.d.). If those programs have fewer coaches and fewer members, and their coaches perceive competitive success as the best way to win favor with their institution's administrators, they may well favor competition over civic outreach to a greater degree than they once did. Perhaps with the addition of archival research on the decline of debate organizations over the past few decades, it might be possible to more meaningfully connect the shrinking of the debate community with its efforts to provide civic outreach.

Debate programs attend tournaments together, but aside from a relatively small number of debate exchanges (like the annual public debate between the University of Pittsburgh and Penn State), they typically hold civic outreach events on their own. The 102 coaches who took our survey, who at best represent 48% of all debate organizations, reported a total of 718 outreach activities created by their own college debate programs. Certainly that figure could be higher if debate programs worked together to increase the civic contributions of college debate. As we reimagine the connections between debate and civic education in hopes of elevating debate to a more prominent position in civic education, let us keep in mind that we are not beginning our climb at sea level, college debate already produces a great deal of civic education. Through the careful study of existing debate programs, including those with strong commitments to *both* competition and civic engagement, we may be able to discover best practice already at work that can be leveraged to bring about meaningful improvements on a broader scale.

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