
Michael Pfau, David A. Thomas, and Walter Ulrich have written what promises to be a new landmark text on argumentation and debate. Debate and Argument: A Systems Approach to
Advocacy is a fresh look at the theory and practice of argumentation appropriate for both curricular and co-curricular use. It is the first text to my knowledge that approaches argumentation from a policy systems analysis basis rather than a "stock issues" basis.

The writers, distinguished teachers and coaches at Augustana College, the University of Richmond, and Vanderbilt University, note accurately that there has been a noticeable shift toward policy systems analysis, but no theoretical/practical text to undergird this development. Increasingly the negative team in a collegiate or secondary school debate presents an alternative plan similar to those heard in congressional debates or in debates one is likely to hear in any public arena. No longer are debates measured strictly on whether an affirmative proponent "proves" need, develops a workable plan, and show benefits. This was always a static, sterile, and unrealistic exercise. Thus, this welcome addition to the literature of the field has potential for becoming a standard text.

The text, I believe, stands out also because it is unusually well written. None of the unevenness of writing styles often encountered in multi-authored volumes seems to be present. The style is reader-centered, clear, concise, and interesting. Argumentation texts have never been books to curl up with on a Winter's eve, but this one is actually quite readable. Dare I say that it is "user friendly?"

Debate and Argument: A Systems Approach to Advocacy has three major divisions. The first is an overview of debate processes. Part two centers on research, briefing, tools, evidence, and reasoning. Part three presents guidance on case construction, strategies, and tactics, refutation, cross-examination, and style.

Another delight in this volume is the candor and professionalism with which the authors approach the issue of delivery skills of scholastic debaters. Issues such as incomprehensibility in delivery, in both articulation and in rate, as well as issues of insincerity and disrespect/discourtesy. Frank discussion of these characteristics is a delight because I personally have arrived at the point where I do not wish to judge or even hear many debates. I am weary of the rude, brash, arrogant "motor mouths" who (along with the coaches who condone and, in some instances, promote this behavior) have all but succeeded in turning scholastic debate into something other than a communication
event. There is hope if scholars and practitioners will take seriously the wise communication advice expressed in this volume.

In the chapter, "Style and Delivery," the authors referred to the problems and concluded:

Their opposites include making sense; speaking truthfully; engaging your opponents and your listeners with respect rather than as crooks or fools; maintaining your own authenticity and integrity; and exhibiting wholesome zest and enthusiasm for the intellectual game. Those are not bad ideals with which to conclude a chapter on style and delivery, or a book on debate and argumentation.

Not bad ideals at all.

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