

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

Debate programs offer an opportunity for high schools to put the power of their educational programs on public display. Demonstration debates on issues of community or national interest can make allies out of community groups. Kiwanis International, Rotary International, Lions Club, Junior Chamber of Commerce, the Young Lawyers division of the American Bar Organization, and numerous other community service clubs have been known to host demonstration debates featuring local debaters.

As a high school debater, I participated in numerous demonstration debates before community groups. My debate coach convinced a local television station to broadcast a series of debates between various high schools in central Iowa. My debate partner and I participated in demonstration debates before high school assemblies. On one occasion, we traveled 200 miles by passenger train to do a demonstration debate before a high school assembly in Omaha, Nebraska.

These demonstration debates offer educational and public relations benefits. Public debates cultivate persuasive speaking skills in ways that nicely complement the skills involved in tournament debates. Tournament debates are typically judged by professional *critics of argument*, meaning former debaters or current debate coaches from neutral schools. Such judges tend to focus more on the quality of logical arguments and supporting evidence rather than on public speaking skills. By participating in public debates, students hone the persuasion skills necessary to appeal to general audiences.

The public relations benefits of demonstration debates are substantial. Influential members of the community are able to see firsthand the impressive knowledge and skill displayed by bright high school students.

LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Dr. Alfred Snider, the Edwin W. Lawrence Professor of Forensics at the University of Vermont, has offered the following explanation of how competitive debate promotes leadership: “Debaters are more often seen as leaders. Studies in America show that those who communicate often and well, and give a balance of positive and negative comments, are seen as leaders. Leadership is given, not taken. Debaters are more likely to be given leadership. Debaters tend to become citizens in the real sense of the word—informed, active, participating, a force to be harnessed for the betterment of all.”

CAREER PREPARATION