

One way to educate the public is to stage a debate demonstration. Students also need to know how the team operates and what opportunities are available for neophytes. Many students will be attracted by the thrill of competition, and they must be assured that competition is not limited to seasoned veterans. But students should also be educated about the broad intellectual benefits gained from involvement. At its best, a debate program provides an intellectual experience comparable to that offered by the finest academic courses.

In keeping with the principle of inclusion, team leaders must work at retaining debaters rather than cutting the team roster. This means providing club members with meaningful activities. If teams rarely compete or rarely practice, students will quickly lose interest. Teams that rarely practice will rarely win. Students will be quick to desert a losing enterprise. It also means, in some cases, designing special leadership roles for some students. The student who is a perennial loser may become disheartened and think of quitting the club, but will be more likely to stay if given special responsibility for training a cadre of new debaters. Sponsoring non-debate events for club members will also help keep students committed to the team. Ping-Pong matches, basketball games, and entertainment outings can help to build the ties of a permanent community.

Above all, students must understand that the only requirements for club membership are commitment and a willingness to work. Success in competition cannot, and will not, come to every member of the team. Debaters need to know that even if they fail, their places on the team are secure and their participation is valued.

THE ROLE OF COACHES AND TEACHERS

Any adult who has an abiding concern for the creative education of young people can serve as a debate coach. Coaches do not need to be specialists with extensive training in oratory or logic (although training is certainly a plus). A debate coach is not expected to pass along a body of knowledge to his or her students the way that a chemistry teacher might. The rules and procedures of debate that must be taught are comparatively few. The coach's job, actually, is to foster the development of thinking skills. The coach is there to draw things out of the students rather than to pour things in. The coach must listen, question, and react. The coach may guide discussions and give them direction; she may help students focus on the appropriate issues, but she should not be regarded as the repository of ultimate truth. Indeed, students need to feel free to disagree with the coach and to engage with the coach in the same way they would with anyone else involved in the discussion.

The coach must also provide moral leadership for the team. Team members must understand that debaters will behave honestly and ethically in competition. Moreover, the coach must set the moral tone for the regular activity of the team. Students will disagree in discussions. If they didn't, the discussions would not be terribly productive. But the coach must ensure that disagreements do not become personal and that comments do not become insulting or demeaning. Students need to be able to take risks and test ideas in discussions; they must feel that they can do so without being mocked or disregarded. The coach must create a climate of respect, not simply by offering a model in his or her personal behavior but by articulating and enforcing standards.