Eleven years ago in these pages, Gordon Mitchell began asking some direct questions about the apparent lack of pro-social and political activism among participants in the debate community (Mitchell, 1995). Since then, a side-debate has simmered pitting Mitchell's critique of contest debating against a simple defense that I assembled as a balancing gesture generally supportive of Mitchell's goal (Coverstone, 1995). Although debaters have argued intensely over the virtues of preparatory pedagogy and individual activism, little has changed in the central area of concern first identified by Mitchell (1995). While students who debate at all are participating in a larger public sphere and are making a tangible influence on the public sphere while they are participating in these academic contexts? Mitchell and Suzuki identified at least six elements of debating skills that are translatable to the public sphere (2004, p. 10). It seems, however, that these skills are undervalued by debate participants. While plenty of room exists to defend the notion that the preparatory skills learned in contest debate do indeed produce active and involved citizens after graduation, Mitchell's original question is a fair one. What can or should be done to increase the public utility of the skills that contest debaters develop contemporaneously with their involvement in debate?

Contest debate is so all-consuming that there is a risk that participants will develop an overwhelming love for role-playing and become mere spectators to the real political world. While the risk of becoming a mere spectator during one's competitive tenure in contest debate is real, one would be hard-pressed to show that participation in contest debate raises the risk that associated with non-participation in contest debate. The spectator mentality is the predominant mode that Americans take regarding politics and public participation. Schools, media, movies, and peer groups all actively discourage individual participation in the public sphere. Norms of polite society encourage us to avoid discussions of politics and social issues while we allow the talking heads on 24-hour television news networks to do even our talking and debating for us. In this context, contest debating with its competitive incentive to research, understand, analyze, and argue both sides of a question cannot seriously be criticized as responsible for generating a spectator mindset.

A high percentage of debate participants do indeed find ways to make meaningful contributions to their communities both locally and nationally. Typically, those contributions are small while in contest debate, but after graduation these same people find their way into the public realm with a freshness unsurpassed by graduates of any other educational program. Purely preparatory pedagogy is not dangerous because it is preparatory. It is only dangerous if it is PURELY preparatory. Always on the bench, waiting for the call, the purely prepared never make a difference at all. While this attack is most often deployed as a reason not to engage in democratic, public policy role-playing (Kulynych, 2001), we must realize that it applies to purely preparatory training for political activism as well. It is crucial that we constantly remind participants in our activity of the imperative for social action so that they will not stop short. Contest debating inspires and provides more than rudimentary training. It is imperative that we teach students that their competitive training is not all that is available.

Let us begin that task from a position proud of what we do well, even as we search for ways to do it better. It is very important that we not succumb to the assaults of our critics who misuse Mitchell's speci-
is a fallacy in arguing that movements represent a better political strategy than voting and person-to-person advocacy. Sure, a full-scale movement would be better than the limited voice I have as a participating citizen going from door to door in a campaign, but so would full-scale government action. Unfortunately, the gap between my individual decision to pursue movement politics and the emergence of a full-scale movement is at least as great as the gap between my vote and democratic change. They both represent utopian flat. Invocation of Mitchell to support utopian movement flat is simply not supported by his work, and too often, such invocation discourages the concrete actions he argues for in favor of the personal rejectionism that undergirds the political cynicism that is a fundamental cause of voter and participatory abstention in America today.

Mitchell’s idea here clearly stops short of the uses to which it has been put, but he does acknowledge that “If reflexive flat became successful as a legitimate tactic on a widespread basis, it is true that the face of debate would change as contest rounds would come to resemble social movement organizing sessions more than hypothetical expert policy making forums” (1998b, p. 29). In and of itself, this is not a bad outcome. I have seen numerous debates with this focus that have been incredibly edifying. However, in the extreme this outcome does mean that we will abandon our role in training and inspiring students to find careers within the halls of power. We will train our students to eschew attempts to change government policy from within and pursue often marginal social movements as their principal strategy for social change. We will abandon the incredible insider influence after graduation that academic debate has always supported. Perhaps this outcome would be better for society, but former debaters like Karl Rove seem very unlikely to pursue this path, and that means that we would be ceding the halls of power to the right. I would prefer a middle ground that preserves the American tradition of debate and deliberation within government.

We need both strategic sense and insider savvy. Debaters who already shift easily between the technical field of the policy world and the rarified air of the ivory tower ought also to move easily in the public sphere. With some intentional effort by coaches, students will discover how easily they can enter this realm. Here again, however, some preparatory training is required. This training is easy, and public debates on campus, before parents, in the community and even as part of debate tournaments offer incredible starting points. Student engagement with authors and political leaders, meetings with social activists, and encounters with people whose lives are impacted by the policies and ideas they debate all offer incredible opportunities not to replace contest debating as it is so productively practiced but to supplement its training with a tangible training in public advocacy. Such training will ease the transition from contest debater to public citizen. Mitchell has advanced numerous tangible examples of political activism by debaters, and none of these required reflexive flat (1998a; Mitchell & Suzuki, 2004). Debaters who participate in community service projects as part of their commitment to the contest debate program at their school will not only learn to be socially conscious and capable public advocates, they will also become more competitively persuasive and successful contest debaters. Linking these aims offers the best chance to expand the magic of competitive debate rather than supplanting it in favor of risky strategies that may well upset the balance that makes debate so resilient.

Students with public realm experience of the kinds Mitchell proposes (primary research, public advocacy, public debating, and outreach) benefit as contest debaters in at least three ways. First, students gain confidence from speaking in the public realm. The comfort level that ensures when they return to the familiar confines of contest debates enables them to think more clearly and respond more effectively. Confidence slows the contest debate down in the minds of those with this experience. Second, students develop deeper understandings of the issues under debate. This advantage is especially likely using primary research strategies to contact authors and make public debates on the arguments they debate differently when in contest rounds. Third, students discover persuasive personal narratives. Meeting people whose lives are directly and importantly affected by the policies under debate in their contest rounds, students develop understanding and empathy for the subject that makes them more persuasive as advocates when they return to the contests. I could continue, and I will if anyone steps forward to challenge this notion seriously. My own experience as a debater and coach confirms repeatedly that public debating, primary research, outreach to exchanges, and public advocacy are all incredibly beneficial in helping contest debaters to improve their Toasting skills.

Similarly, debate programs with a vibrant public component are far less likely to encounter budget pressures and loss of support from the institutions that they serve. Contest debate is much easier to defend to curious administrators and parents when it is closely connected to the public performances that these academic supporters so clearly desire. Schools want us to train students to be strong public speakers, and we do, but programs that must rely solely on that assertion because the students never actually speak in a public setting are walking a dangerous line and frequently lose their political and monetary support. Parents, teachers, and administrators constantly ask when they can see our debaters in action. In many cases, although we know well the benefits of contest round debating, we are embarrassed to show these people because we know the long conversation that will follow. Three or four public debates each year are easily enough to convince these important constituents of the value of our activity, and the great irony is that in practice, the public debates don’t even have to be that strong. Just seeing students, especially high school students, in front of a crowd discussing complex issues with a high level of understanding is quite impressive for most people. Given a choice between contest and public debate for displaying our team in order to secure public, parental, and institutional support, few would choose the contest. Once these same groups see the students in public, they view the contest debates as much more impressive. They may not understand them any more fully than previously, but they will see them in the context of a training and development system that is impressive in its own right as well as useful in training public advocates.

The time has come to put away the notion that Mitchell and Coverstone present opposing dreams of debate. Vast agreement exists between the two on issues that are vital to the continued success of debate as an educational activity that enriches democracy and the public sphere. Where minor disagreement remains regarding alterations of contest practice in favor of activism, that disagreement pales in comparison to the dream with which we both agree. Mitchell has advanced and defended a dream of contest activity that inspires and enriches public advocacy and public dialogue. I have advanced and defended a dream of public activity that enriches and inspires contest programs and coach recruitment. These dreams are two sides of the same coin, and the time has come for all involved to find ways to expand the public agenda of contest debate programs while also preserving and protecting the incredible training and empowerment that experience in contest debate so clearly offers. We need to work together on this important project.

References
THE VALUES OF NATIONAL SERVICE

Stefan Bauschard, Lakeland High School

Introduction

As discussed in the topicality essay, although the topic lists specific programs that the affirmative needs to increase participation in, the resolution ties those programs together by pushing the affirmative to support “national service.” In many ways, the question of what constitutes national service is irrelevant since the programs are specifically identified, but the question nonetheless remains important because its presence in the resolution may require the affirmative to justify it, and because affirmative, even if not required, may choose to justify it as a way to leverage answers to common critiques and counterplans.

Discriminating justifications for national service is not a simple task. Most of the literature is focused on the need for service, not national service. Although many of the values of service can be captured through appropriately designed national service programs, the values of service in general do not inherently support national service.

The Value of Service

One of the most commonly cited justifications for service is the need for civic engagement—broadly speaking, a commitment to participate in our communities.

In 1990, Robert Putnam, a professor of Public Policy at Harvard, published a famous book, entitled, BOWLING ALONE, in which he argued that Americans were becoming disengaged civically. More recent evidence (B1-13) confirms that trend. September 11th (B99) and the war in Iraq (B100) have failed to reverse that trend.

At a basic level, a strong argument can be made (B18-21) that a failure to engage civically means that the institutions that we need to support democracy may fail to exist, making the growth of tyranny possible. Service can reverse that trend by encouraging Americans to become involved in their communities and building strong ties.

Precisely what it means to “engage” the civic is difficult to discern. The authors of both the most advanced studies and the most simple newspaper articles use the term very loosely. The term has been used to mean our participation in our local government, voting, volunteering in our communities and schools, and/or establishing personal ties in our communities. Given the differences in the values of each of these, they have been broken down further in subsequent sections.

Political disengagement has been well-noted (B27-30). The consequences of such disengagement are problematic because it allows for a full expression of who we are (B36-38) and prevents us from realizing liberty (B44). Since attitudes of the youth toward politics are developed when they are young (B42-3), political engagement of youth through service can help reverse these trends. Greater impacts can be found in defenses of state-centered politics and of participation in those politics. Studies indicate that Americans are less engaged in their communities (B45-47). The loss of community, however, is a threat to democracy because we are shaped by our community (B47, B52). Individuals depend on each other for their lives (B48) and strong communities support democratic engagement and problem solving (B57). Extreme individualism can result in excessive state strength (B61) and collectivism (B62).

Related to the importance of strong communities is social capital. Social capital is a concept developed by Robert Putnam. He argues that communities with strong social capital are more likely to have strong schools (B78). Happy children (B75-77), healthy individuals (B71-2), socio-economically advanced (B80-3) and more tolerant (B87-8), experience less inequality (B84-87), and be less likely to be totalitarian (B90). Service can boost capital by engaging individuals in their communities (B93-5).

The Value of National Service

None of the arguments discussed so far are specific to the values of national service. Although national service can, if appropriately designed, support engagement in our local communities and governments (B101-2), this is not a unique justification for the service being national. Affirmatives need to defend national service.

There are at least some arguments in favor of national service. National service could focus the nation and potentially avoid fragmentation (B93-5). Switzerland is one of the countries in the world that requires national service, and one of the reasons they do it is because Switzerland is an otherwise diversified country, with seven different languages spoken.

A second justification for national service is to strengthen the sovereign power of the state (B96) and, overall, strengthen the power of our national democratic government (B99) and community (B104). Local politics and engagement are unlikely to capture these benefits (B103).