

NPDA Survey Results Open-Ended Responses

Introduction

Throughout the month of April, the NPDA made available a web-based survey instrument to measure reaction to this year's Championship Tournament, as well as to explore some issues related to changing it. Three documents presented here contain the raw, unanalyzed data from that survey. We have applied two different "filters" to the data represented by two .pdf documents. The first filter represents all participants at this year's NPDA Championship. This was done to preserve the integrity of the questions related to the tournament itself. We have also applied a second filter to obtain a data set of only Director's responses (also limited to those in attendance). Both sets of data in .pdf form omit open-ended comments.

The later data set is useful in examining generational or experiential differences in participation--which are significant on some questions. It should be noted, obviously, that separating-out that data in its raw form is of relatively limited use. More detailed statistical analysis is needed to determine how certain levels of participation, certain types of experience, and so forth, correlates with the responses we've received here. Some of this work has already been undertaken by some members of the Executive Council. Toward that end we have exported the data to a comma-delimited Excel file and to SPSS. If any researchers find certain questions particularly interesting and have proposals for examining the data, please let us know.

Lastly, as users of the survey are aware, there were several open-ended questions presented. This document contains **summaries** of the open-ended content of ALL respondents, regardless of whether they attended NPDA. We have elected to summarize these responses as best we can in this document. We elected not to print each of the responses in their entirety. In several instances, these comments were potentially libelous and deeply personal, or presented other possible liabilities by exposing the content of pending confidential appeals. Rather than censor the responses, leaving other comments untouched, we opted for the summary version instead. While we had no problem sharing comments about Executives and Appointees (as we should be subject to public scrutiny), it seemed that personal attacks on judges, students, and the like did not need to be included in these results to convey the essence of how the community conceives certain issues. While no summary is perfect, we've tried to make as accurate a representation of the content as possible.

If you have any questions about this data, please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Kevin M. Minch
President, NPDA

Relevant File Names

Summary of All Participants	2007-allattendees.pdf
Summary of Directors	2007-DirectorsOnly.pdf
Open-Ended Questions	2007-Open-Ended Questions.pdf

12. Please provide any general comments you might have about the tournament invitation in the space below.

Summary of Comments

Respondents addressed a number of logistical concerns. On the negative side, respondents indicated a desire for greater specificity with regard to directions to and from the tournament and regarding principal locations on campus. Concerns were expressed about the parking situation at this year's tournament and suggestions were made that the invitation could have been clearer on this aspect of the tournament. Additional concerns were expressed about the perceived harsh tone of the invitation, clarification of the rules of pairing the tournament and judge assignment procedures, as well as rules about the amount of prep time before rounds, and the use of "prep rooms" and the degree to which Government ownership of the competition room was enforceable. Some respondents were concerned about the timeline for posting strikes and that it needs to be more clearly delineated in the invitation and adhered to in practice.

Positive comments included praise for the Executive Council for making an invitation that answered people's main questions

Suggested improvements included providing a brief outline for an invitation, with more detailed information that could be obtained online later. Others suggested that the invitation needed to be released in a more timely fashion and that more effort needed to be made to get the document in everyone's hands. It was suggested that a cover sheet with all of the things that needed to be done and their due dates would be desirable.

Additional comments not pertaining to the question posed addressed the lack of a guaranteed Internet connection, the altitude of the host site, the lack of more videotaped rounds, and the desirability of discount airfare arrangements.

16. Please provide any comments you might have about your experience at the tournament hotel, or with the hotel reservation process.

Summary of Comments

Several concerns and compliments were offered about this year's hotel choice. Positives included the perception that the rooms were nice—particularly the beds—and that the proximity to stores and restaurants proved advantageous.

Negative comments primarily focused on three issues: the Internet, hotel infrastructure, and access. Both in the Doubletree and the overflow hotel members encountered problems with the speed of Internet access and they were bothered both by the charges for the service and the limited access to wireless Internet. There were similar infrastructure concerns related to leaks in the building and problems with hot water. On the side of access, members experienced difficulty with the 1-800 reservation line, with rooms that were allegedly dropped from their reservations, and with problems accessing non-smoking rooms and doubles.

Generally speaking, members recommended access to hotels with cheaper rates and unfettered Internet access. Some members objected to the requirement of registration in a single tournament hotel. Some members recommended moving elimination rounds back to the hotel on the final day of the tournament.

21. Please provide any additional feedback you may have about the tournament entry process here.

Summary of Comments:

While some respondents found the entry process smooth or lacking significant problems, the most common concerns were related to deadlines, Internet glitches, and the process of

submitting paperwork. Some respondents called for streamlining the process, with paperwork being sent to fewer people and being completed in its entirety by March 1 without additional registration at the tournament. Several members reported issues with submitting judge philosophies, including people who submitted them on time and were not included in the pool. There were other reports of difficulty with the entry website. Other comments addressed the need to improve the ease of judge sharing and verification of novice entries as well as facilitating the use of non-Anglo names by coding for accent marks, etc.

28. Please provide any additional comments you might have about the judge strike/preference system or future options for it.

Summary of Comments:

There is divergent opinion on both the merits of an MPJ system and the form it should take if implemented. Some pointed out the advantages of having one national tournament that uses MPJ and another that does not. Some favored an expanded system of strikes (35-40% was mentioned) as well as additional strikes in elimination rounds. Some saw the value of restoring the rule enforcing limited judging by critics from a team's own region. These alternatives were seen as intermediate options to adopting MPJ.

Advocates of MPJ pointed to "poor judges" or "inadequate flow judges" as a source of a disproportionate number of losses to "amazing teams." Others suggested that MPJ might be an antidote to problems with regional bias. Some respondents generally saw MPJ as a more "fair" system and even argued that it might restore legitimacy to the NPDA for those who see the NPTE as the only place people can go for such a judging experience.

Some feared MPJ as a source of community fragmentation and endorsed the argument that MPJ advances forms of discrimination—particularly gender discrimination. They cited a perceived drop in a female judge presence in outrounds at this year's NPTE. Critics were also concerned about a "race" between teams to see who was most "cool" in acquiring a reputation with judges.

Some pointed out that while the philosophies that are currently published are helpful, there are steps that could be taken to make them more helpful, such as directed questions. Concerns were expressed that philosophies are not sufficiently transparent and that minimum standards of "adequacy" need to be met. Judge training was suggested as another possible aid in improving the problems of perceived inadequate judge performance, while others called for a greater effort toward getting judge information to participants earlier.

Some expressed a preference for variants of the MPJ system. Some saw an ordinal ranking system as valuable, while others preferred an A-B-C-Strike alternative.

While MPJ or increased strikes seemed favored by a majority of respondents, a significant group still voiced vehement opposition to an MPJ system, while others saw intermediate steps as workable and oriented toward the same objectives.

41. Please offer any comments you might have on the "ceremonial" aspects of the tournament, including the venue, opening and closing ceremonies, and receptions.

Summary of Comments:

Some respondents called for the return of the NPDA banquet. Critics saw the open reception as boring or insufficiently advertised to be useful. Others saw the expense of the closing reception extravagant (**Note:** this reception was paid for by Colorado College, not NPDA, and was a gift of the host.), while others thought it was inadequate.

Some were concerned about the size of the auditorium used for the final round and awards ceremony, since not all participants could sit on the main level. There were mixed views of how the closing ceremonies were handled, with some feeling they took too long, while others feeling they were rushed. Concerns were raised regarding the insufficiency of time devoted to the presentation of the All-American Awards as well as the speed at which other significant honors were presented.

Some calls were made to divorce the Irish debate from the opening ceremonies as it is viewed as a tactic to compel attendance. Significant criticism was offered of the Irish Debate itself, its selection process, and the content.

Additional calls were made to take extra measures to ensure consistency in announcements made at the opening ceremony and during the tournament. Criticism was offered of the tone of official announcements during topic announcement as well as the means used to deliver postings of debate pairings.

46. Please provide any feedback you have about this year's topics.

Summary of Comments:

Commentary about the topics ranged from pleased to displeased. Those who were satisfied commented that they were better than those of some other tournaments, with some indicating that the resolutions were far better than those at previous NPDA Championships. There seemed to be satisfaction that the topics were moving away from loose-linked, fact/value, and metaphorical topics and more toward specific, current events-based policy resolutions.

Nonetheless, there were complaints of every conceivable fashion, about most of the individual resolutions offered in the tournament. These concerns were often contradictory, with members favoring and opposing a variety of different approaches to crafting resolutions. Common agreement, naturally, could be found in the need for the topic committee to make every effort to maximize balance in resolutions, particularly in elimination rounds. While members were pleased with the move toward policy resolutions, and wanted more of them, several members expressed a desire for greater specificity in actors. Others, of course, felt the topics were already too specific in a number of respects.

Some members called for the adoption of topic areas, similar to NPTE, while others called for topics that would avoid similarity with NPTE topics in a given year. Others suggested that all resolutions should specify the USFG as the actor. Some called for an increase in metaphorical and value topics, while others equally vocally opposed them.

In short, on most points of contention related to topic writing (with the exception that they should be good and balanced) there were polar opposite positions taken by different participants.

56. Please feel free to provide additional feedback on the work of any or all members of the Executive Council and Championship Tournament staff.

Summary of Comments:

Respondents offered praise for the relative success of running the tournament on time and praised the Council for doing "thankless" jobs. Praise was offered the President for being respectful and dedicated to following procedure, while additional compliments were offered related to the expedited business meeting procedures implemented this year.

Further praise was offered to the tab staff for its continued improvements in procedure. Concerns were raised about transparency regarding the procedures for elimination round judge placement

and calls were made to remove tab staff from the tabroom once their teams reach deep elimination rounds.

While praising the executive Secretary for his work, one respondent indicated a desire for more frequent updates on Season Sweepstakes. Requests were made from improvements in recording tournament attendance for the purpose of Season Sweepstakes (though the comments sounded more like they were referring to sanctioning) while other general calls for improved transparency and last-minute checks were made. Concerns were raised about the inclusion of results from the NCCFA tournament in season sweepstakes.

Criticism was offered of the repeated admonishment of debaters and judges to get rounds started on time. It was argued that this position was hypocritical given the tournament management's inability to keep the tournament running on time. Additional criticism was offered of the tone of announcements at the tournament, some of which were alleged to be of a personal nature or aimed at promoting personal agendas.

61. Please provide any general comments regarding how the NPDA handles instances of discrimination or harassment at the Championship Tournament.

Summary of Comments:

Members acknowledge the continued existence of problems with sexual harassment and tournament conduct. It was suggested that more time needed to be devoted to reviewing the policy publicly, establishing the issue's significance, and covering how to file a grievance.

It was observed that the activity is proving increasingly divisive, with gossipy commentary and elitist attitudes coming to the fore. Subtle and not-so-subtle forms of discrimination and negative attitudes toward women still exist. It was also noted by several participants that there seemed to be a heightened frequency of unsporting conduct in the tournament.

Several people indicated that, despite problems, they were skeptical that any real solutions existed. Others were seriously concerned that attempts to address these issues would result in the existence of a "language police" whose presence could be as damaging as the discourse itself. One respondent suggested that MPJ would eliminate issues of discrimination entirely. Others expressed faith that community norms and censorship can solve the problem on its own.

Several writers commented on specific incidents at NPDA. Those comments are omitted because of their specificity and reference to specific individuals. These comments addressed both incidents at the tournament and incidents at the hotel. Some accounts of actual harassment—some not known to the NPDA—were provided as anecdotal evidence of the problem. Others charged that "false" claims of discrimination and harassment are being used as strategic competitive tools.