5.4 Resource Collection

This activity develops research skills. It can also be used to build advanced research skills. The following project is a way to organize the initial stages of writing or updating a debate argument file, such as an affirmative case or disadvantage, as a class. Students work individually in a small group to collect relevant documents while recording every step of the process. This activity also ensures that students have a chance to practice using a variety of research techniques.

Time Allotment

This is a two to three day in-class and/or take home assignment. This activity can be adapted to be a short, overnight assignment or extended into a long project based on how many articles students need to find.

Objectives

By the end of this activity, students will:
- be able to strategically employ multiple methods of research.
- be able to find evidence to support a given argument.
- identify a set of resources that can be processed for use in a debate round.

Materials and Preparation

Access to the school, public, or university library. You will need a printed list of 4-5 different search mechanisms that can be used to find different resources. For example, you may have students use:
- An electronic or card catalogue to find books.
- An electronic or print index (like the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*) to find periodicals.
- Thomas (http://thomas.loc.gov/) to find congressional documents.
- A general internet search engine (like www.google.com) to find the web sites of organizations that produce information related to the topic.

Method

Decide upon an argument to research. The argument can be an affirmative case, a negative case file, counterplan, etc. You may want to pick 3-5 arguments to research as a class and have each student select one argument (or one component of an argument) to work on independently. If you prefer to have students work in groups to complete the activity, each group should have a different argument (or component of an argument) to research.

Individually or in groups of other students with a similar research topic, have students brainstorm a list of several potential search terms for their topic.

Give students the list of search mechanisms they must use to find information. Decide how many documents each student must find using each search mechanism. For example, you may have each student choose three of the search mechanisms and find two documents using each mechanism. If students are working in groups, you may still want to hold each individual responsible for finding a set number of documents. The goal is to ensure that each student gains experience using a variety of research techniques.

For each document they find, students should list:

> • The search mechanism they used.
> • The EXACT wording of the search terms (including the ANDs NOTs and ORs) that they entered to find the document.
> • The full citation of the document in proper form.
> • Three to four sentences summarizing the facts and arguments included in each source and why the source is relevant to the research project.

Follow up on the assignment with a class discussion about the differences between search mechanisms and strengths, weaknesses, and uses of each.

Possible Follow-up Activities:
Have each student or group give a brief oral presentation to the class using the articles (or evidence) they found. Students should first give an overview of the argument they researched. Then, students should explain the major arguments in each of the documents they found and talk about how each document can be used to support the assigned argument.

It may make sense to compile and save the bibliographies generated by the students for future research assignments. If you have access to copier or a printer, you may wish to keep a file of all the substantive, useful articles the students find to use for future research assignments. It may make sense to turn the copies of the evidence over to varsity debaters.