

Increasing Dino Draw

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The quality of APDA tournaments often rely upon the quality of their judging, yet many teams seem to have trouble attracting a deep pool of good judges. Having been in charge of recruiting dinos (alumni judges) for a number of tournaments, I thought I'd put together a guide for tournament hosts on how they can improve their chances of drawing a respectable judging pool. Most of these suggestions are fairly straightforward and common sense, but it seems like quite a few teams -- small and large -- could use a refresher course every once in awhile.

- 1. Contact early and often.** Contrary to popular opinion, dinos do have lives that don't revolve around APDA. Contacting dinos early allows them to keep their calendars clear if they're at all interested in judging at your tournament. Some tournaments act surprised when they start asking dinos a month (or worse, a week) before the tournament and discover that the dinos are unavailable. If you start asking 3-6 months before your tournament, most of the responses will be "I don't know yet," but that gives you an opportunity to follow-up later, instead of losing that dino to other commitments by asking closer to the tournament date. But make sure you do follow up with your maybes instead of just forgetting about them.
- 2. Cast a wide net.** In line with popular opinion, dinos often don't have lives outside of APDA. Sometimes we have free weekends and wouldn't mind seeing old debate friends. But if you don't at least ask, it's incredibly unlikely that these dinos will show up. Since I graduated, I think I've been asked to judge by more southern tournaments than I've been asked by non-Boston northern tournaments. Was I likely to judge at most of the tournaments that didn't contact me? Not really, but you can't know that until you ask.

Yes, some dinos are better to attract than other "dinos" that barely qualify as such. But even attracting "dinos" is important for your tournament. If nothing else, they're probably better than your replacement novice judges, and they can make your total dino tally look much more impressive. So ask people if they have dino contact lists (there are a few floating around out there, with varying degrees of accuracy and recency; I've probably collected about a half dozen different lists like this from various sources), and contact as many people as possible. We contacted more than 150 dinos for Nats, and I'm sure we still forgot a bunch that would be great additions to a tournament's judging pool. It's definitely worth the effort to invite as many dinos as possible.

- 3. Send them updates on your team.** This applies mostly to dinos from your school: if you can make your dinos proud to be associated with your team, they're more likely to want to remain a part of it. On the other hand, if they feel no connection to the current team at all, they'll see no reason to return. If you had any OTY success or a promising novice class, tell your dinos at the end of the season. When BU first got the unopposed Elections weekend, we basically sent our dinos a newsletter about all the team's success that year, briefly mentioning that it would be cool to see them at our tournament the next year. This really excited our dinos, even the ones that had graduated before any current members had joined the team. And the next spring, we drew more BU dinos than ever before. Also, your dinos will love it if you attribute some of your success to them, regardless of whether or not they actually had anything to do with it.

- 4. Personalize your contact.** This takes much less time than people think, but it can have a big effect. Like I said above, dinos are much less likely to judge if they feel no connection to your team. This is worsened if they actually know you well, yet they still just receive a stock email. In my first year as a dino, my invite to the Harvard tournament started with, "This is Alex Loomis of the Harvard Speech & Parliamentary Debate Society." Unsurprisingly, I knew who this Mr. Loomis character was before receiving the invitation, so that opening line just made it painfully obvious that I had received a stock email. Did this change the fact that I was going to judge at Harvard anyway? No. But personalized communication can turn some nos and non-responses into maybes, and some maybes into yeses. Mass invites to Facebook events don't count. Personal emails or messages take 1-2 minutes each to write, tops. And they're definitely worthwhile.

Along those lines, divide up the responsibility of contacting dinos among the debaters on your team that are most likely to get them to attend. If your Judging Director is a sophomore that no dinos know, delegate dino contacting duties to the older members of the team. Dividing up the responsibility also minimizes the time commitment of having to send a lot of personalized messages.

- 5. Appeal to their desire to give back.** Even if you don't know many dinos personally, you still have a decent chance at getting a respectable dino draw by simply asking them for help. That's how TCNJ and Mount Holyoke were able to get commitments from dinos they'd never even met. A last minute plea is better than nothing, but a request several months in advance is much more likely to convince these dinos that their help will have a lasting effect. They'll see your team as more stable and committed to improving, and they'll want to pitch in.
- 6. Appeal to their desire to hang out with old friends.** A major reason why a lot of dinos return to the circuit is to see their friends. If you know who's friends with whom, tell dinos which of their friends have already expressed interest in judging. Those dinos actually might then convince each other to judge in order to hang out, making your job even easier. Obviously, there are different groups of friends among dinos. Try to figure out which dinos are "linchpins" for various groups -- the ones that will make others much more likely to attend -- and work extra hard at getting them to come. For the first BU Elections, we were willing to spend several hundred dollars of our dino reimbursement budget to get one dino in particular, because we knew that other dinos would come for free just to see that dino. Part of NYU's large dino draw this year was due to sheer luck: Garron Chiu happened to be in the country (and NYC specifically) that weekend, and some of his friends decided to judge primarily so they could hang out before he went back abroad. Looking for opportunities like that can make your job much easier.

Related to the idea of getting dinos to recruit their friends, try to avoid selectively inviting only certain members of a very close group of friends. For example, if you invite one roommate but not the other, it's less likely that you'll get either. You should also consider this when deciding the timing of your invitations so one roommate isn't invited long before the other, making them think that the tournament prioritizes one over the other.

- 7. Be persistent.** Dinos don't always mean no when they say no. I got three dinos that had previously said "no" to judging at Nats to change their minds. Obviously, you have to know the

dino relatively well in order to know who's likely to cave and how to get them to come, but don't just automatically give up at the first sign of resistance. Ask them why they can't/won't come, and convince them that their reasons are silly. If they say that they're busy, remind them that they can just come for one day of the tournament (or even just for outrounds). Or tell them to keep you in mind next year, and they'll have even fewer excuses when you try again the next time around. Even dinos that have "retired" from judging can often be convinced to come out of retirement with the right level of persuasion.

8. **Get others to help with recruitment.** If you have one or two dinos that are fully invested in your tournament (a coach or close friend, for example), get them to help out with the messaging. Teams that outsource like this can overcome the fact that they don't know many dinos themselves. And if you don't have a dino who's invested in your tournament, ask the APDA Board to help ask dinos for you. Not only are they elected to serve as advisors for teams seeking help, but they have as much of a reason to improve your tournament's judging pool as you do since they'll likely be competing there.
9. **Budget for travel reimbursement.** For the most part, people won't care at all about how good your food or trophies were when forming their opinion of your tournament, yet these are often the two most expensive items tournaments budget for. If you know that a deep judging pool is one of the three things people most frequently care about (along with running on time and tabbing accurately), why not have a budget that reflects that fact? It's especially effective if you can reimburse dinos at the tournament itself, so consider using some of the cash teams give you at registration to reimburse dinos on the spot. This will make them very happy.
10. **Reserve good housing.** Dinosaurs slept on floors for four years while debating, and that's not exactly the part of debate tournaments that will keep them coming back for more. When recruiting dinos, ensure them that they'll have a decent place to stay, whether it's a hotel or just someone's couch. Anything but the floor.
11. **Make sure they can eat.** Some people have silly things called "allergies" that make them sad. Tournaments go to different lengths to accommodate debaters' various needs, but make sure you're at least taking care of dinos as much as possible. If you learn about a dino's needs during the tournament, assign someone to make sure s/he is taken care of. For example, a vegan or gluten-free dino will be very happy if you send someone to get food if your banquet doesn't have anything they can eat.
12. **Make dinos feel appreciated for judging.** Some dinos are divas, and they can be a little ridiculous. You still have to keep them happy if you want them to come back the next year (or even the next day). Thank them for coming, ask them how their rounds have been, and make sure you actually pair them in for as many inrounds as they're there. Don't pair them into novice outrounds; some dinos are fine with judging anything, but most dinos would consider it more insulting than simply not being paired into outrounds at all, so it's not worth the risk. Some teams go the extra mile and buy all their dinos alcohol or something similar. Obviously, no dinos expect you to cater to their every whim, but the tournaments that put in the effort to make dinos feel appreciated will be the ones that get those dinos to keep returning.

13. Have sane judge rankings. All tournaments rank judges differently, but there are a few things you can avoid that will make dinos (and APDA in general) happier. It's fine to give your dinos' ranks a host team bonus, but do so within reason. Your worst dino should probably not be ranked higher than a former SOTY, for example. Debate success is generally accepted as a good starting point for rankings, but it's not necessary to adhere strictly to that. Also, it's usually silly to rank the worst dinos higher than your best current debaters. However, keep in mind that many dinos are unlikely to return if they think that their ranking is unjustifiably low. Just be mindful of that, and try to strike a good balance between keeping dinos happy and running the fairest possible tournament. For reference, if you're using a 10 point scale to rank judges, I never give more than a 1 point bonus for dinos from the host school or more than a 1 point bonus for dinos over current debaters with otherwise similar qualifications; usually, I limit those bonuses to half a point.

Similarly, when deciding who will chair outrounds panels, keep in mind how different dinos might react. Many dinos don't care (knowing that it's a silly title that carries no actual benefits), but others have egos that might be offended if you appoint someone less qualified than they are. Most dinos will understand if you appoint a dino from the host school as chair, but just be aware of different dinos' egos if you don't plan to appoint someone from your school.

14. Leave a good impression. Like debaters, dinos talk about how well a tournament was run afterwards. The last thing you want is a dino spreading bad word-of-mouth about your tournament to other dinos. That could ruin your chances of getting other dinos the next year. On the other hand, a good review can instantly make other dinos more interested in judging at your tournament.

15. Don't let dinos overrun your tournament. Like I said, some dinos are divas; others have an overly developed sense of entitlement. Be accommodating, but within reason. If you're stern but fair and polite, almost all dinos will understand that the tournament is yours, not theirs. I encourage teams to keep dinos that don't have an official role in tab out of the tab room. Definitely don't feel compelled to show dinos their scratches or rankings just because they want to see them. Seeing rankings or scratches is likely to only frustrate or offend the dino, and they rarely want to see them for productive reasons. If you have a problem with an overbearing dino that you're uncomfortable dealing with (possibly because s/he might judge you at a future tournament), feel free to recruit another dino or a respected current debater to help. Some dinos feel entitled to berate younger members of your team when they disagree with what you're doing; if you feel uncomfortable stopping them yourself, many other dinos would be more than happy to yell at them for you.

16. No excuses. APDA and dinos don't care whose responsibility it is to contact judges. If your judging pool is bad, your whole team will be blamed. So if you see that the person in charge is slacking, step up and get it done yourself. Worry about egos and team politics later. This is especially true if the people in charge of the tournament are apathetic seniors; if you're a younger team member, don't let their inaction screw over your team for years to come. Start reaching out yourself.