

LDEP Research Ethics Guidelines for Coaches

Educating ethical researchers is a major responsibility for all debate coaches. Research skills are among the most important that debate can teach, and research integrity is also essential to fair competition. Today's debaters are the future academic researchers of our society, and the habits they develop now will shape their future character as such. The Lincoln-Douglas Education Project strongly encourages all teachers of debate to adopt the following practices to foster ethical research.

- 1. Discuss the academic and competitive importance of ethical research explicitly with students.**
Many students view debate research as a means to a short-term end: a competitive edge. Coaches should explain the larger significance of research to the academic enterprise, to one's personal integrity, and to the fairness of debate competitions.
- 2. Teach students to use a library responsibly.** Courtesy to other library patrons and staff, conscientious preservation of all library materials, and a willingness to share resources with competing debaters are habits that every student should cultivate. If possible, on-site instruction by coaches in these and other basic library skills is ideal.
- 3. Teach students to read academic sources carefully for genuine understanding.** Help students to replace mining for quotations with seeking accurate understanding as their first research priority. Even bright students need dedicated practice to learn to understand academic prose. Use guided reading assignments to help students learn to isolate theses, identify supporting arguments, interpret statistical and historical evidence, and attend to limitations of an author's position. *Students especially need practice distinguishing an author's statement of her own position from her explanations of opposing positions.*
- 4. For all debate evidence, require students to have complete citations and original photocopies (for printed sources) or printouts (for computer sources) of the quotations themselves plus enough surrounding text to establish context.** All evidence should be available for inspection by coaches, judges, or opponents in its original form. A direct-copy requirement reduces the chances for transcription errors as evidence circulates among friends and teammates. An explanation of complete citations for common research sources is included in LDEP's student research guidelines, which should be distributed to, and discussed with, all students.
- 5. Stay abreast of student research for each resolution and check cases against original copies supplied by students.** Ideally, know what sources your students are using, and ask students to explain and defend their interpretations of those sources. Check student understandings against copies from the original texts. In general, promote a team atmosphere of interest and accountability for research excellence so that students police themselves.
- 6. Pursue research ethics concerns directly with other coaches, judges, and tournament officials.** Every coach is responsible to promote an ethical research community in debate. If you become aware of a possible ethical violation involving another team's student, inform the coach, who may not know what his students are doing. Likewise, if someone comes to you with a concern about your own students, investigate the concern seriously and respect the tournament's policies.
- 7. Treat intentional research misuse with appropriate severity.** Each situation is unique, and some research infractions may best be addressed as constructive learning opportunities. However, deliberate fabrication or distortion of research sources to one's own advantage is a serious academic offense and may merit harsh penalties, including, at the limit, expulsion from the debate team and/or referral to school administrators for violation of applicable honor codes.