

## INTERNATIONAL TOPIC REQUIREMENT

At the 2005 topic selection business meeting, the issue of the international topic rotation was raised and, following discussion, the issue was referred to the speech committee. The committee then revised the international requirement for the policy debate topic as follows:

- 2007-2008 – international topic (Africa)
- 2008-2009 – mixed (Alternative Energy)
- 2009-2010 – domestic (Poverty)
- 2010-2011 – international (Military Presence)
- 2011-2012 – mixed (Space)
- 2012-2013 – domestic (transportation infrastructure)
- 2013-2014 – international (Latin America)
- 2014-2015 – mixed (Oceans)
- 2015-2016 – domestic (to be determined)
- 2016-2017 – international (to be determined)
- 2017-2018 – mixed (to be determined)
- 2018-2019 – domestic (to be determined)
- 2019-2020 – international (to be determined)

The topics would continue this rotation for future years.

### History:

The topic selection process has traditionally searched for the best national or international topic in any given year. Jon Fitzgerald of Michigan had urged the Topic Selection Committee to mandate an international topic in each three-year cycle. His rationale was that the high school debater should explore an international topic in at least one year of his or her debate career.

The Fitzgerald proposal was submitted to a national referendum in 1991; the proposal received approval by a significant margin of the voters involved in topic area balloting. The NFHS Speech Advisory Committee was charged with the task in the October 1992 meeting of suggesting the means for implementing this proposal.

The Committee adopted a fixed calendar with the following specifications:

- 1992-93 – international (environment)
- 1993-94 – mixed (health care)
- 1994-95 – mixed (Immigration)
- 1995-96 – international (China)
- 1996-97 – mixed (juvenile crime)
- 1997-98 – mixed (renewable energy)
- 1998-99 – international (Russia)
- 1999-2000 – mixed (education)
- 2000-01 – mixed (privacy)
- 2001-02 – international (weapons of mass destruction)
- 2002-2003 – mixed (mental health)
- 2003-2004 – mixed (Ocean Policy)
- 2004-2005 – international (UN Peacekeeping)
- 2005-2006 – mixed (Civil Liberties)

2006-2007	-	mixed (National Service)
2007-2008		international (Sub-Saharan Africa)
2008-2009		mixed (Alternative Energy)
2009-2010		domestic (Poverty)
2010-2011		international (Military Presence)
2011-2012		mixed (Space)
2012-2013		domestic (Transportation Infrastructure)
2013-2014		international (Latin America)
2014-2015		mixed (Oceans)

This brief report is designed to create understanding of the criteria used by the Speech Advisory Committee in selecting the above system of implementation. Three other options for implementation will be explained along with the rationale for their rejection.

#### Criteria Utilized in Selecting This Option:

1. An international topic should be selected once in each three-year cycle.
2. A maximum number of topic meetings with international topics should be unencumbered – the Topic Selection Committee should be free to select the best available topic in every given topic year.
3. The selected proposal must allow 9-12 months lead time for the assignment and collection of topic reports. The reports must be assigned, researched, written, reviewed, revised and then re-worked for the Topic Selection Committee Meeting. A full academic year is required for this process.

#### **Rejected Option One:**

Alternating cycle of international and domestic topics as in:

year one – international  
year two – mixed  
year three – domestic  
year four – mixed  
year five – international, etc.

This option was rejected because it failed to guarantee the most important mandate (one international topic every three years). In the above example, it would be possible to have a domestic topic in years two, three and four consecutively.

#### **Rejected Option Two:**

year one – international  
year two – domestic  
year three – international  
year four – domestic  
year five – international

This option would guarantee an international topic in every three years and would also assure the regular selection of domestic topics. The problem with this option is that it fails to meet criteria two above; it locks in every year. It also limits topics to either domestic or international each year. In addition, the committee felt that the mandating of the domestic topics went unnecessarily beyond the scope of the mandate from the national referendum. Domestic topics have historically needed no special protection in the selection process.

**Rejected Option Three:**

Reset the three-year counter whenever an international topic is selected. Originally this seemed to many of us the most reasonable option. Why not, for example, relieve the 1995-96 requirement of the selection of an international topic if the Africa topic is selected?

The problem with this option is the lead time necessary to set the topic reports. The result of the voting is not known until mid-January, leaving only five months of effective lead time – far too little to maintain the existing review procedures so essential to topic report quality. We considered the possibility of trying to add just one or two hot domestic topic reports within the shortened time frame. Aside from the obvious problem of pushing for a hurry-up job on these reports, there is also a problem for all of the other authors working on international reports. If we buy the notion that it would be somehow wrong to debate an international topic in two consecutive years, then we are effectively telling the authors of the international topic reports that they have wasted their time because their topics have no chance for adoption.

The topic papers must be assigned two full years before debate on a selected topic begins. This lead time makes it difficult to change the planning process mid-stream.

**Rationale for the Selected (set-calendar) Option:**

1. The proposal guarantees an international topic in every three-year cycle.
2. The proposal allows unencumbered selection of the best available topic in two of every three years.
3. The proposal adequately provides for the lead time necessary for research and review of all topic reports.

The selected proposal provides no guarantee of a domestic topic, but the Committee felt that domestic topics would be selected without a mandate to do so. The selected proposal could result in some consecutive years of international topics, but the Committee saw no particular problem with that outcome.

KS: arh  
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