**Tony Li, Tarun Batchu (Biomedical Debate)**

Reaching over 200,000 members worldwide and nearly 11,000 competitors at this year's International Leadership Conference, HOSA has proven to be a well-organized, ambitious, and, most importantly, impactful event for rising healthcare professionals. We would like to extend our heartfelt gratitude to the HOSA organization and the countless individuals who have worked behind the scenes to create a conference that unites people from across the globe with a shared interest in healthcare.

It is essential to ensure that a club such as HOSA, with its many resources, is not just impressive from a distance but genuinely effective up close. We deeply value this event and intend for its continual improvement. Please consider the following comments as constructive criticism, based on our personal experiences as well as suggestions to enhance the structure of the club as a whole. These insights aim to improve individual events such as ours.

**Lack of equity**

The fundamental issue we identified with the structure of the Biomedical Debate (BMD) at the International Leadership Conference (ILC) is the format of judging. Because the two judges in each room are assigned individual sides to judge, there is little to no way to ensure that their judging standards are equivalent. When we approached a representative in the ballroom where our event was taking place, he acknowledged this persistent issue and mentioned that measures were being taken to mitigate the impact of this format. However, it seems that **effective protocols were not implemented**, and the representative's acknowledgment was merely for namesake.

For example, in Lincoln-Douglas (LD) debate, which the MichiganHOSA 'Biomedical Debate Short' YouTube video explains as the model for BMD, a more effective approach is used. While winning the 'flow' and actual argumentation *are* given more weight in LD than in BMD, speaking points are still involved. The National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) addresses this issue by determining an individual standardized speaking score based not on the raw points a judge assigns but on how these points compare to the judge's average scores. This accounts for differences in judges' scoring tendencies. For instance, among two judges hearing the same speech, one might score it 100/100 while another might score it 90/100, not solely due to their evaluations but because one judge typically awards higher scores than the other.

HOSA doesn't need to adopt a statistical and complex approach like the NSDA. A simple and effective solution would just be to have **both judges evaluate both sides of the debate**. This would ensure more consistent and fair judging standards across the board.

More specifically, in our experiences in BMD at ILC in both 2023 and 2024, we have faced the same issue multiple times. We have consistently been placed in the same room with the same

judges for each and every round. For instance, this year, from our very first round to our quarterfinal round, we have been placed in the exact same room for all of our rounds. Regardless of how this may have happened, no debater should ever be placed in the same room with the same judges repeatedly while competitors cycle through. A few problems related to this include:

**Comparison (Rubric-Based)**

It's often observed that when a case is presented multiple times, judges can experience burnout, leading to a decrease in perceived value. This event is judged based on a rubric with fixed values. When a judge hasn't seen the other competitors in different rooms and has limited exposure to the rest of the competition, their grading of the rubrics relies solely on what they observe in their room. For example, even if my team is the best at the competition and would rank highest on the rubric compared to all other teams, the judges in the same room wouldn't be aware of this. They would grade my team not on our true standing compared to the rest of the competition but on how we compare to our own past performances in other rounds in the same room.

Since this isn't a traditional event where a winner is decided purely based on who "won the debate," grading a rubric with fixed values such as "voice, pitch, and tempo" without any universal standards makes it challenging to compete when you have the same judges repeatedly. This becomes problematic when the final result in the entire event is based on your cumulative points. How can your overall result against hundreds of other competitors be graded on your own past results? **Why are we being compared to our own performances?**

We believed we were the strongest, most compelling team in the entire bracket, evidenced by our 1st seed and decisive victory over the returning champions. But because the judges in our room may not have known what the other competition looked like, they graded our losing round against our previous rounds and may have awarded us fewer points because our "speaking" and "fluctuation" were not as advanced compared to our previous performances, even though we won the debate. We are confident that if we had the same round in another room with a fresh pair of eyes grading us not on our past performances as a reference but compared to other competitors, we would have won that round. Because BMD is graded on a point scale, it is critical that these points are allocated with a view of the entire competition present at the event as a reference.

**Duality**

How can a team put forth their best effort and advocate for one side in a debate, only to switch to the opposite side? No debater should have to argue for one side on a topic, only to switch to the other side under the same judges. For instance, this year, my team and I were placed on the negation side and had to argue for it two times in a row, only to switch to the affirmation side and lose our round. After pointing out glaring issues with the affirmation and adopting unique

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frameworks that won us the round, is it our burden to address our own arguments that we created to win the debate after we switched sides, in front of the same pair of eyes that have been overseeing the same debate multiple times? Does it damage a team's credibility after they advocate so predominantly for something, just to switch to the other side and argue the opposite? These are all questions that need to be answered when considering this event and structuring the judging panel.

**Lack of Experience**

The goal of any HOSA event is to be judged by superiors who are expected to understand more than the competitors in the field. What happens when your judges, who are meant to understand your event, know less than the actual competitors? While on the surface, these topics related to biomedical debate may seem deeply related to the medical field, the rubric provided by HOSA suggests otherwise. HOSA BMD does not require experienced debaters to judge its events but usually opts for medical professionals or paid volunteers instead. When the rubric itself describes and grades this event as a "debate" event where your ability to generate substantive arguments triumphs above all, it should mandate that individuals with experience not only in the medical field but in terms of debate are assigned judging duties.

From our time competing at the local, state, and national levels in the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA), we can confidently say the skill level of the competitors and the knowledge of the judges is significantly higher under the NSDA compared to HOSA BMD. While we understand this is a different event, it should not be framed in a way that represents traditional debate. If the debate winner receives 10 critical additional points at the end, these points must be given with precision and awarded to the true winners of the debate. If the event is framed as a debate with points allocated and aligned with the same values, then it should be judged by experienced individuals in the field of debate and not by volunteers or individuals with purely medical knowledge.

In a broader sense related to the grading rubric itself, why is the event titled "Biomedical Debate" when only 10 out of 85 points are related to debate? Why are the additional 10 points at the end treated as an afterthought compared to the majority of points which are allocated for speaking? Although one may argue that certain parts of the rubric offer points for rebuttals, anyone can make a rebuttal in a debate—that's the entire point. What matters is how relevant and effective these are in the overall round and how effective they are at truely "winning" the debate. Winning the debate should be the primary indicator of who moves on to the next round. Being able to win the debate but not move due to requirements such as "enthusiasm" and "team participation" defeats the entire purpose of this event. If speaking is more important than the actual debate itself, then why not group it with the numerous other speaking events such as "Prepared Speaking"? **When you frame your event as "debate," you need to treat it as such and value the core principles of debate rather than prewritten speeches on slates of paper.**

In addition to the experience of judges, we believe that as rounds progress and rooms become obsolete. Rather than dismissing the judges, the remaining judges should all be grouped together on a panel to judge the final rounds. This provides a more comprehensive view with more eyes that have seen the rest of the competitors and a more holistic ranking of the debate as stated earlier. This strategy is commonly employed in high-level debate rounds under the NSDA, where the most experienced and least biased judges are funneled into the final round to decide a comprehensive winner on the largest scope possible.

Prior to ILC, my team and I had received a total of only 36 minutes of substantive debate. Compared to other activities such as the NSDA, where a **single** Lincoln-Douglas debate round is 45 minutes, the experience gained beforehand is negligible, if not non-existent. While we recognize that our regionals were canceled and most students receive just over an hour of practice prior to ILC, that still is nowhere near enough to prepare students.This issue, coupled with a lack of constructive feedback and not releasing scoring ballots for students to improve their craft, is a roadmap for disaster. What should a team that places first at their State Leadership Conference (SLC) use as a model to get better for the next step in their journey to ILC? Concerns like these are also the reason why the quality of competition in other activities such as ISEF and NSDA is on a much more sophisticated level compared to any HOSA event. **It is because there is much more time spent preparing prior to the main competition.**

We recognize that we are in a fortunate position to have two of our four-member team engaged in NSDA and recognize this as a reason for our success in achieving top 10 positions at ILC two years in a row. For the numerous other teams with no such experience, it is inequitable and unacceptable. As students in the event, we can tell you first-hand that no one treats HOSA as an actual independent competition. The people succeeding at HOSA almost never derive their award-winning skills purely from HOSA. The successful debaters and speakers almost always participate in other events to help them succeed in this event. For instance, in events such as prepared speaking and biomedical debate, or any speaking event in general, almost every single successful competitor has been engaged in NSDA at some point in their career. This creates an environment where simply signing up and preparing for your event in HOSA is not enough to succeed. The lack of time and competition opportunities in HOSA specifically isn't enough to put you up against individuals who have done previous activities related to the event and who have more than ten times your hours.

**Lack of accountability**

Similarly, when comparing Biomedical Debate (BMD) to other debate events, the lack of "calling for evidence" is a major concern. In many debates, participants can request to view and verify the credibility and authenticity of their opponents' sources and data. This practice is crucial in maintaining fairness and preventing the fabrication of facts. The absence of this mechanism in BMD is troubling.

Ensuring the authenticity of data is essential in preventing competitive event fraud, an issue that is becoming increasingly prevalent. For instance, the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair (ISEF), the largest pre-collegiate science fair that awards nearly $9 million annually, recently experienced a significant incident. The grand winner's $55,000 prize was revoked following an investigation into fraudulent practices. The Society for Science (ISEF Board) has since implemented stricter measures to maintain fairness and protect equity.

HOSA should adopt similar measures to prevent competitors from fabricating data or manipulating numbers to gain an advantage. When our team raised this concern in 2023 and again this year, we encountered a disorganized group of volunteers but no dedicated equity board. The concept of an equity board, actively adopted by the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA), ensures an even playing field in debates. HOSA should consider implementing such a board to uphold the integrity of its competition.

Link to Science Fair Fraud: **https://www.karlstack.com/p/exclusive-scandal-at-americas-top**

**Lack of continuity**

Another issue prevalent in the HOSA competitive event structure is the lack of continuity. We will use our event as an example, though we believe these issues are widespread.

During ILC's Biomedical Debate, no timecards were provided to signal debaters how much of their two-minute speech they had used. This is problematic not only because two minutes pass quickly when you have much to convey but also because our SLC judges permitted it. We know our concerns are echoed across other states; for instance, the team we debated in our first round had been allowed to use stopwatches at their SLC. This inconsistency in practices is a significant concern.

**Conclusion**

We would like to express our sincere gratitude for your time and attention in reading this far. It is our earnest hope that our efforts and voices are not only heard but also valued. We wish to clarify that our intention is not to criticize, but to constructively contribute to the improvement of an event we deeply enjoy and value. Should there be a reform, we would be honored to be a part of it, integrating an **international-scale leadership** initiative and contributing our insights and experiences to shape a more equitable and enriching future for all participants. Thank you once again for considering our perspectives.