



**2015 National Catholic Forensic League
Extemp Topic Area Analysis**

by Lily Nellans

Introduction

This Extemp Central topic analysis breaks down the eight extemp topic areas that will be used for the 2015 National Catholic Forensic League (NCFL) Grand National Tournament in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. This topic analysis is not sponsored by the NCFL and the author has not participated in writing questions for the NCFL Grand National Tournament. Her advice is based on her years of experience as a competitor at the event.

For each topic area, extempers will find an explanation of big issues, strategy tips, and a list of practice questions that they can use to prepare for the tournament.

It is my hope that extempers and their coaches will find this topic area analysis useful in their preparation for this year's NCFL Grand National Tournament. I thank you for reading it and using Extemp Central for extemporaneous speaking resources.

If you have any comments about this topic area analysis, or any Extemp Central services, please forward them to me at logan.scisco@topper.wku.edu.

-Logan Scisco
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About the Author

Lily Nellans competed for Des Moines Roosevelt High School in Iowa and holds the all-time record for major championship wins. She is the three-time winner of the MBA Extemp Round Robin and the Extemp Tournament of Champions (TOC). During her career she also won the 2012 NCFL National Championship and was a three-time finalist at the NSDA National Tournament. She was a four time Iowa State Champion, won Extemp Central's 2012 National Points Race, and she notched victories at Wake Forest, St.Marks, Florida Blue Key, The Glenbrooks, GMU Patriot Games, The Schwan's Speech Spectacular and Harvard. She is studying International Affairs at Western Kentucky University and competes on the university's forensic team.

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2015 NCFL Nationals
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Welcome to the Extemp Central topic brief for the 2015 NCFL National Tournament. Congratulations on qualifying! You have an interesting eight rounds ahead of you. There are a couple of really important things to keep in mind for NCFLs.

First, the judges. Unlike most tournaments, you are likely to see the most experienced extemp judges in prelims and less experience in out rounds. However, there is no guarantee your prelims judges will be familiar with extemp. You may also be presented with a situation where one of your prelims judges is a former extemp national champion and the other judge is a theatre teacher who brought three interp students because there are two judges in each prelim. What all of this means is that blending good, easy to understand analysis with clean, engaging delivery is more important at NCFLs than perhaps any other tournament. You have to have the delivery at NCFLs, but you also have to have the analysis. A mistake a lot of extempers make is thinking that NCFLs is only about delivery. All it takes is one judge to call you out for sacrificing analysis for the sake of delivery and you are out of the tournament.

The second important thing to keep in mind about NCFLs is the way topic areas are assigned to rounds. All of NCFLs questions are written before the tournament and put in envelopes. Before each round, an envelope is drawn at random and that topic area will be the topic area for the round. Additionally, there are nine topic areas, but only eight rounds. Thus, one topic area will not be utilized. What all of this means is that you cannot rely on the usual trope of prelim questions being easier than out round questions because all of the questions were written to work for all of the rounds. So you may get difficult questions in prelims and really easy questions in out rounds. Generally speaking, hard prelim questions and easy out rounds questions present challenges to everyone. So you should prepare for this. It also means you cannot rely on an even IX/DX split in prelims and out rounds. So you must be well read on both domestic and international issues if you hope to do well.

Finally, some of topic areas and questions will be...different, to say the least. Be prepared to speak on everything from the anti-vaccine movement to Zimbabwe's economy and everything in between. You can't let an unusual question faze you, just do the best you can. The practice questions in this brief are written to mimic NCFL questions. Also, one last word of general advice, don't be weird at the postings party dance. Your judges are probably there, and they are already judging you. With that, let's dig into those nine topic areas.

Topic Area #1: U.S. Legal and Constitutional Issues

Issues

A lot of people panic about the legal and constitutional issues round because extempers don't run into these questions very often. However, this round shouldn't be difficult if you read-up on the major legal and constitutional issues. The first issue that you should be ready to talk about is police brutality. I expect questions about issues of racism surrounding recent events in the US will be found in a different round. However, this round will likely ask questions about oversight of police forces. Popular measures to improve oversight of police officers include body cameras, independent prosecutors for police abuse cases, and demilitarization. Polling shows body cameras and independent prosecutors are pretty popular across party lines. Body cameras would be worn by police officers to film their interactions. This film could then be reviewed if questions were raised about officer conduct. Challenges facing body cameras include costs and how much access the public would have to the videos. Having independent prosecutors

would, at least in part, remove the perceived conflict of interests between prosecutors and the police because they often work hand in hand. There is also the challenge district attorneys who are up for re-election face. If they indict a police officer they may lose support from the police unions or the public, encouraging them to act with bias. Unlike body cameras and independent prosecutors, demilitarization is a more controversial issue. Police militarization refers to the process in which leftover or outdated military equipment is given to local police forces from the federal government, usually free of charge. Police militarization has been criticized for encouraging the police to act like a military force, the lack of training police officers receive with the new equipment and creating a public perception that the police are becoming more aggressive. Its things like giving the police pulling out MRAPs that has been viewed negatively. The other side of police militarization, however, is the majority of the equipment received by police officers through the program are things like night vision goggles and bullet proof vests, which the police need.

The next issue to look out for in this round is gay marriage. The Supreme Court is currently hearing the case *Obergefell v Hodges*. The case originated in Ohio, when James Obergefell sued in the US Southern District of Ohio when he was not listed as the surviving spouse of his partner, John Arthur, despite the fact that the two had legally wed in Maryland. The Supreme consolidated this case with three other similar cases against Tennessee, Michigan and Kentucky. According to SCOTUS Blog, the questions facing the Supreme Court in this case are 1) Does the Fourteenth Amendment require a state to license a marriage between two people of the same sex? 2) Does the Fourteenth Amendment require a state to recognize a marriage between two people of the same sex when their marriage was lawfully licensed and performed out-of-state? Essentially, the Supreme Court is deciding whether or not the Constitution protects the rights of same-sex couples nationwide to marry. Like in many Supreme Court cases, Justice Kennedy is likely to be the deciding vote. In the past, Kennedy has voted with the liberal justices on issues of gay marriage. In fact, he has written the decisions for past Supreme Court cases, which advanced gay rights. Kennedy still seems to be undecided, but during the oral arguments it sounded as if he was leaning towards voting in favor of gay marriage.

Another important cases before the Supreme Court is *Glossip v Gross*. *Glossip v Gross* is a case about Oklahoma's use of a three-drug cocktail in its lethal injections that has been known to cause pain. This case is particularly important because there have been several botched executions in the headlines recently. Most lethal injection procedures use three drugs. The first to render the inmate unconscious, so he/she does not feel any pain. The second causes parallelization and the third stops the heart. The problem is there is a shortage of pentobarbital, the drug usually used in the first step. This has caused states to turn to midazolam, which does not reliably reduce pain. Again, the issue will come down to Kennedy's vote. If the SCOTUS votes to allow continued use of midazolam expect even more states to start using it and for it to be harder for inmates to challenge lethal injection procedures in the future. If the SCOTUS votes against the use of midazolam, expect a decline in lethal injections or states switching to other methods (think Utah's firing squads.)

These three issues are the big issues you could draw questions on that you are least likely to have spoken on in the past, so give practice speeches on them. I am sure there will also be questions about marijuana legalization. Issues surrounding this include its implementation in states that have already legalized, recent safety concerns in Colorado and Oklahoma/Nebraska's lawsuit against Colorado. Also expect questions about minimum sentencing, judicial elections, and the *Abercrombie* hijab case.

Strategy

You can think about the legal and constitutional issues round similar to the way you would think about a social issues round. You should avoid overtly controversial issues that your judge is likely to have a strong opinion on. If you absolutely must take a controversial issue, be sure to distance yourself from

your answer. Attribute any controversial claims to sources and make sure your warrants are really strong. The best way to stand out in this round is to take a specific question, preferably about a specific case, and use actual legal precedent to support your answer. You don't have to have the expertise of a lawyer, but mentioning how the court ruled in a similar case or how an existing law factors in will definitely prove to the judges you know your stuff. Also, if your question allows you to use humor, do it. This round can be boring for judges to watch. On the other hand, if your question calls for a strong emotional appeal, go for that too. Narratives can be just as entertaining as humor. You should definitely be filing SCOTUS blog. The Washington Post has really good SCOTUS coverage. Vox has some good pieces breaking down the gay marriage issue. Other than that, taking some extra time to Google the major issues and make sure you have files on them would be a good idea. If you have time to read a book on the SCOTUS, which might be helpful if you are also doing DX at NSDA, I highly recommend *The Oath* by Jeffrey Toobin.

Practice Questions

1. Do the benefits of requiring policemen to wear body cameras outweigh the costs?
2. Is the Supreme Court likely to rule in favor of legalizing gay marriage?
3. Will the shortage of the drug pentobarbital lead to more states eliminating the death penalty?
4. Did the governors of Oklahoma and Nebraska make a good decision in suing Colorado?
5. Should minimum sentences be eliminated?

Topic Area #2: U.S. Foreign Policy

Issues

The US foreign policy round is pretty predictable. Most of your questions will be something along the lines of, "How should the US respond to X event in country Y?" So if you are read up on most international issues, you are also read up on the US foreign policy round. That being said there are a few fofo specific issues that are of importance.

The first issue that is bound to come up is Iran. Back at the end of March, Iran and the US agreed to the framework for a deal on Iran's nuclear program. Iran and the US are currently in negotiations about the details of the deal, the deal is supposed to be finalized by June 30. So what does the framework say? First, Iran can only keep 6,000 of its 20,000 centrifuges and it will only be able to use its first-generation centrifuges. Next, Iran will not be allowed to enrich uranium beyond the level necessary for nuclear energy. Iran also has to give up 97% of its enriched uranium stockpile. In exchange for all of this, the US and the UN will remove sanctions on Iran. Additionally, Iran can continue to use its nuclear facilities as long as it lets IAEA inspectors in. Keep in mind sanctions don't get lifted until after Iran fulfills its part of the bargain, and no one is quite sure how that will be determined. That is one hiccup that absolutely has to be worked out in the negotiations leading up to June 30. This deal upset some people. First, it upset Israel. The US-Israeli relationship is at an all time low. Compounding this, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu won re-election on a promise not to negotiate with Palestine. This has further escalated tensions between Netanyahu and Obama. Next, the US-Iran deal upset Congress. Congressional Republicans sent a letter to Iran threatening the deal would have a short shelf life. Also, President Obama has given Congress the ability to review the Iran deal. This has added a new level of uncertainty about the success of the deal. Finally, Iran's Ayatollah Khamenei is still skeptical of the terms of the deal. If Iranian negotiators cannot get the Ayatollah on board there likely will be no deal in June. So think of Congress and the Ayatollah as the kingmakers of the Iran deal.

So the next big issue in the Middle East is Yemen. Hopefully, by now you are familiar with talking about the civil war in Syria and the birth of ISIS. However, the civil war in Yemen is relatively new. So if you haven't competed in a while you may not be as familiar with what is going on, but it is important you

read up! Yemen could come up in several rounds. For more background on the conflict, look at the international conflicts and civil unrests section. Here I'm mostly going to talk about the US role in Yemen. The biggest threat to the US coming from the conflict in Yemen is that it has created a safe haven for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula or AQAP. AQAP is currently the most active and lethal branch of Al Qaeda. In other words, if the U.S. were going to be attacked by Al Qaeda again, the attack would most likely come from AQAP. Right now the US is already providing some air support and intelligence to Saudi Arabia, who is bombing the Houthi rebels. The US has also stationed warships off of the coast of Yemen to tighten the siege. The likelihood of the US using any more military force than what it already is, is slim. Instead, the US is pushing for talks between rival groups in Yemen. However, the US is going to have to exert more pressure on Iran to convince its allies, the Houthis, to come to the table if talks are really going to be a success. The US also needs to walk a tight line with helping Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia has been criticized for attacking civilians and giving untrained fighter weapons.

Now let's move from the Middle East to Asia. The first big issue in Asia is China. Expect the classic questions about whether or not a rising China is a threat to the US. There are really two big events that have impacted the US-China relationship recently. The first is China's creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The US is pretty freaked out about this because major US allies, like the UK, have joined the AIIB. The US sees the new bank as an effort by China to undermine the IMF and the World Bank, both organizations in which the US has considerable sway. Chances are undermining the IMF and the World Bank is China's goal. For years China has complained about how heavily dominated by the US these two institutions are. The only way for the US to convince China and other countries to back away from the AIIB is for the US to finally push for reform of the IMF and the World Bank. The next big issue in US-China relations is maritime conflict, specifically the South China Sea. Increasingly, it seems as though the US is working against China in the SCS. Many of the countries China has territorial disputes with, like the Philippines and Japan, are countries the US has close relationships with. If military conflict were to break out in SCS, the US would most likely have to get involved. The US's negative views of China were further cemented in early April when the US accused China of being a "bully" in the SCS. That being said, the American Navy and the Chinese Navy recently held a meeting that went quite well. Increased communication between China and the US signals that the type of miscalculation and posturing that usually leads to a military conflict is unlikely to occur.

The next big issue in Asia is Japan. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe paid a visit to the US in the end of April that revealed how close the US and Japan have become. During a joint address to Congress, Abe encouraged closer economic and military ties between Japan and the US. As a result of talks that occurred during his visit, a ban on Japanese forces fighting alongside American forces outside of Japan has been lifted. However, Abe still needs parliament to pass this agreement and remilitarization is not popular in Japan. This new agreement serves as a symbol for debating whether or not Japan should amend its constitution to allow for an offensive military. Most of the impacts of this go back to China. If Japan and the US have a stronger military relationship, and the US is endorsing Japan to be more militarily aggressive it appears as though the US is supporting a strong Japan as a counter to a strong China. China is most likely going to interpret recent actions as a threat. Also while in the US, Abe championed the Trans-Pacific Partnership. This is a big deal because in the past Japan has been pretty lukewarm about the trade agreement. With Japan's full support it is more likely to agreement will get passed.

The last big issue worth talking about is the US opening up relations with Cuba. Just a word of wisdom, the Cuban embargo has not been lifted. Do not say it has. This is just not true. While President Obama has authorized trade in several areas, a true lifting of the embargo requires Congressional approval. Congressional approval may be extremely hard to get. In December, President Obama restored full diplomatic ties with Cuba. Also, trade in areas like telecommunications and agriculture has been reopened. The new deal also allows for US banks to begin doing business in Cuba. President Obama also met with Cuban President Raul Castro during the Summit of the Americas in April. This marks the first

meeting between the American and Cuban President's since 1956. While Obama and Castro were respectful to one another, it was clear tensions still remain high. The US's biggest concern is human rights abuses in Cuba and Cuba's is its position of the State Department's state sponsors of terror list. If Cuba is removed from the list, it will open up even more opportunities for US-Cuba engagement.

You should also be prepared to answer questions about Russia's conflict with Ukraine. If you have been doing extemp all year, not much has changed since the last extemp speech you gave on Russia and Ukraine. Russia is still saying it hasn't done anything wrong. And the world is still calling Russia a liar and sanctioning them. It is highly unlikely the US will do anything more in Ukraine. However, the top US commander for NATO has warned that the US needs to increase its intelligence gathering in the region, as he believes Russia could be using the weak ceasefire to plan a new offensive.

Strategy

There are a couple of different question selection strategies you can deploy in the US foreign policy round. The first strategy is choosing question about the topics that are dominating the headlines. You know your judge will care about these issues and it will be very easy to impact them back to your judge. If you have really interesting or new analysis on the more common topics, go ahead and take them. There are two downsides to this strategy. The first is your judge may already have a strong opinion, thus you will have to distance yourself from your answer and provide really strong support. The second is your judge may feel like you are simply regurgitating what he/she has already heard on CNN. The next strategy is choosing questions about more obscure topics, like US engagement with Malawi. If you have the files on these topics and can educate yourself on them in 30 minutes, take these questions. Your judges will likely be very impressed with your knowledge of an unfamiliar topic. If you can simplify an obscure topic for your judge and teach them something, you will be rewarded. The downsides to this strategy are also two-fold. First, you might not be able to have impacts that directly relate to your judge. Second, your confidence might be shaky if you are speaking on a topic you aren't super familiar with which could hurt your delivery. In the end, both strategies have their positives and negatives. You have to pick the strategy that fits you and your style of extemp best. Also, keep in mind the US is not synonymous with the world. Be sure to keep in mind US interests and capabilities in crafting your analysis. In terms of filing, make sure you are cutting Foreign Policy (duh), Foreign Affairs and the New York Times.

Practice Questions

1. How can President Obama convince Congress to approve a deal between the US and Iran?
2. Should the US continue to support Saudi airstrikes in Yemen?
3. What is the likelihood of China responding aggressively to increased military relations between the US and Japan?
4. Is the US benefiting from closer relations with Cuba?
5. How should the US respond to growing unrest in Burundi?

Topic #3: U.S. Economic Policy

Issues

Oh domestic econ, arguably the most exciting round of the tournament, just kidding. Domestic economics can be really boring and scary, but only if you let it. When you really breakdown the issues, it can be interesting and dare I say fun.

The first economic issue that is bound to come up is student loan debt. This is becoming a larger and larger problem everyday. Just a word to the wise, don't say anything in a speech about student loan debt that minimizes the problem too much. A lot of your judges will likely be college students who have first hand experience with how awful student loans are. It's old news by that the US now has over \$1.2 trillion in student loan debt. However, the questions on this issue will still keep coming because no one has found a solution to the problem. The first important thing to keep in mind is why student loan debt is so high. The cost of college education has skyrocketed. So students have to take out more and more loans because they can't afford to pay out of pocket. Thus, a natural solution to make student loan debt go away is to reduce to cost of college. Plans to do this include President Obama's free community college plan and reforming how much administrators are paid. Next, you may be asked to talk about why student loan debt is a problem. There are a lot of reasons. The first is that millennials may struggle to pay off their student loan debt because they can't find a job and because of wage stagnation. If millennials can't pay off their debt, that means fewer Americans buying houses, cars and other large items. This drop in consumer spending could seriously stunt US economic growth. However, the problem is more complicated than that. The next problem is a lot of parents, not just young people, have taken on student loan debt. As a result, parents have to stay in the workforce longer in order to pay off their children's loans. This means they aren't leaving the workforce to retire and thus they aren't opening up jobs. So to recap, student loans are a big problem because they could slow down the whole US economy and lowering the costs of education can help solve them. Some form of loan forgiveness may also be necessary for those students who already have massive amounts of debt.

The next important economic issue is the growth rate of the economy. It recently came out that in the first quarter of 2015, the US economy basically stagnated as it only grew at 0.2% of GDP. This is pretty big news because it seemed like US economic growth had pretty much recovered. There are a lot of factors that converged in the first quarter to slow US economy growth. Factors include the brutal winter suppressing consumer spending, low oil prices hurting energy companies, and strikes at West Coast ports. The strength of the US dollar hurt exports as well, which dampened growth. While at first this may all seem like a bad sign, be careful of over exaggerating the importance of this news in round. As the weather warms and workers go back to work at ports, it's believed growth will rebound. Thus, this was more of a hiccup than anything else. The only real effect of this slower growth is that the Federal Reserve may wait longer before increasing interest rates.

The final economic issue that is going to be big is when the Fed should raise interest rates. US interest rates have been near zero for six and a half years. It was believed the Fed would raise interest rates in June, however, with news of slow growth they will probably push off raising interest rates until September. However, it is highly unlikely that the Fed won't raise interest rates in September. Low interest rates have basically done all they can do to help the US economy and investors have planning on them being raised this year. The fear is that if interest rates are too low for too long it could lead to inflation, which would be damaging to the US economy. Raising interest rates could be really good for the US because it serves as a signal that the US economy has finally returned to full strength.

Of course, there are other economic issues you could draw questions on. A common economic question is whether or not we should raise the minimum wage. Chances are you have given that speech many times before. If you want to give a speech arguing we should increase the minimum wage, make sure you have a source in your files that explains why that won't cause inflation or unemployment to increase. You will probably also draw questions about oil prices. Remember that the oil market has changed dramatically in recent years. The US now gets a lot more of its oil and natural gas from the US, the Middle East is exporting a lot less oil and production has declined in Venezuela.

Strategy

Make it simple. Make it simple. Make it simple. I cannot repeat that enough. The goal of the domestic econ round is to take a complicated economic issue and make it easy for your judge to understand. The goal of the domestic econ round is not to show off how much vocabulary you learned in your AP macro class. It is also really important that you make the speech interesting. You can either do this through picking a question that you can relate to people and pulling in narratives and emotional appeals or just utilizing humor. All you really need to do to win a domestic econ round is to give an entertaining speech that is easy to understand. Your judge will be so grateful they don't have to listen to another boring speech they can't follow. In terms of filing, make sure you have the Wall Street Journal. Also check out the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities and the Economic Policy Institute.

Practice Questions

1. Should the federal government require public universities to lower tuition?
2. Should community and technical college be free?
3. What steps should the US take to combat low growth in the first quarter of 2015?
4. What impact will rising interest rates have on the US economy?
5. Are lower oil prices good or bad for the American economy?

Topic Area #4: Medicine, Science, and Technology

Issues

The medicine, science and technology round is going to contain a broad range of questions. It is extremely difficult to predict what questions will make it in to this round, but we can try.

Let's look at medicine first. In the medicine round you are probably going to draw lots of questions about Ebola. What is important to keep in mind about Ebola, is that the worst of the crisis is over. An Ebola speech about how to move forward is going to be far more persuasive than one about how to battle the current outbreak, which is all but over. There are a lot of interesting ways to think about how the World could prepare for another Ebola outbreak. For starters, doctors believe they have developed an Ebola vaccine and quick-test for the disease. That could do wonders to stop the spread. Also the WHO is reworking its strategy towards epidemics like Ebola. The WHO is trying to increase communication between the Geneva office and local offices and create an emergency fund. If successfully implemented, these steps would go a long way to fixing the problems in the WHO's response to Ebola. Also, a variety of organizations are looking to build up primary health care in Western Africa. This is important because it was a failure to detect Ebola that allowed it to spread. However the silver lining of the Ebola crisis is it is a lot easier to improve West Africa's primary health care now because there are more doctors and nurses with experience. A lot of analysis about how West Africa and the WHO are reforming can be applied to speeches about Malaria, AIDS/HIV and other communicable diseases.

Okay, now let's move on to science! The issue that is going to come up again and again in regards to science is going to be climate change. I wouldn't be surprised if most of the questions in this round are somehow related to climate change. There are really two types of climate change questions. The first is questions about the impacts of climate change. You should be prepared to talk about the spread of disease, the increase in natural disasters, water shortages, and harm to agriculture. California's drought will likely play a role in this round as will the typhoon in Vanuatu. The next type of questions is questions about how to resolve climate change. Unfortunately for these questions, a recent report revealed limiting global warming to 2 degrees will not stop the worst impacts of climate changes. This is a problem because almost all current climate plans revolve around limiting global warming to 2 degrees. That being said, recent steps towards climate change agreements are better than nothing. Be prepared to answer questions about the US-China agreement and the Paris Climate Conference. For the first time in a while, a

comprehensive agreement on climate change looks likely. Countries like the US, China, Japan, India and Australia are already beginning to lay out plans.

Finally, let's look at technology. The technology questions tend to be the most difficult to answer. Inevitably, there will be a question or two about the Apple Watch. Unless you happen to be extremely interested or well versed in the Apple Watch I would not advise taking this question. However, there are a couple of interesting arguments to be made about the Apple Watch. The first is that it could revolutionize health. The Apple Watch can monitor a number of body functions and then report back to you, and maybe even your doctor, about your health. Thus, the Apple Watch could be an extremely effective tool in preventative health. There is also an argument to be made about whether or not Apple has put itself out of business by inventing products that already do everything. With an iPhone or an iPad it is unclear why someone would also need an Apple Watch. And Apple is refusing to release info about how many Apple Watches it has sold, some believe because the number is pretty low. Thus, you could use a question about the Apple Watch to talk about the decline of Apple. The next technology issue that is of importance is cyber hacking. You could draw questions about both attacks on government and private infrastructure. By now, it is pretty well known that cyber attacks are happening and their fallout is huge. What is less well known is how we should address them. In terms of government attacks, it was recently revealed by the head of the National Security Agency that China could shutdown the US power grid with a cyber attack. Russia may also have similar capabilities. Thus, protecting the power grid should be a priority. Luckily, the Pentagon recently announced a new cyber defense strategy that is focused on deterrence by denial. Thus, the US is adopting a more aggressive stance on cyber security. In terms of private businesses, a recent report revealed cyber breaches have spiked by 23% since last year. However, it was also revealed simple attacks regarding fake emails or tainted links accounted for most of the attacks. Thus, upgrading software and training employees to be on their guard could help prevent future attacks

Strategy

The best strategy for the MST round is to stay relaxed and confident. A lot of extempers will freak out because they have to talk about something they are less familiar with. But remember, if your question is really hard everyone else's question is probably pretty hard as well. So just stay calm and do the best job you can. In terms of question selection, you should be taking questions that seem important. Take questions that can somehow impact back to your judge or a bigger issue. For example, you should take a question about droughts over a question about eBooks. To prepare for this round you should be filing Popular Mechanics, Popular Science, the Scientific American, Health Affairs and the New England Journal of Medicine. Also, going to Google News and using the Science, Technology and Health filters can make sure your files are good to go.

Practice Questions

1. What lessons should the WHO learn from the Ebola outbreak in West Africa?
2. Is Apple in decline?
3. Should the international community be prioritizing adaptation over prevention when it comes to climate change?
4. Will China emerge as a leader on global climate issues?
5. What steps can the US government take to safeguard critical infrastructure from cyber attacks?

Topic Area #5: Societal Values and Ethical Issues

Issues

Societal values and ethical issues is really just a clever way of NCFLs disguising the social issues round. What's even trickier is that you get to talk about domestic and international social issues.

The first issue that will likely come up is the issue of race. You are likely to draw questions about Ferguson, Baltimore, affirmative action and income inequality. You may even get questions that ask about race relations in broader terms. You have to be really careful about your rhetoric and arguments when you speak about racial issues. Here are some things you should keep in mind. First, don't ever refer to a group of people as "these people." Next, if you are not a person of color don't assume you know what it is like to be a person of color in the US. Saying something like, "most Black Americans do not deal with police brutality in their everyday life," is inappropriate, regardless of your opinions on recent events. Finally, don't make broad sweeping statements that assume every member of a racial group is exactly the same. Also, it goes without saying, don't use stereotypes, even for the sake of humor.

Women's issues are also likely to come up in this round. Again, similar rules apply to the way you speak about issues. Don't essentialize women and if you are a man don't pretend you understand women's issue better than a woman. On a domestic level, you are most likely to draw questions about the gender wage gap. As of 2013, women still earned 78 cents on the dollar when compared to men. What is even more troubling is that progress towards closing the gap has stalled over the past decade. Recently, some have tried to chalk the wage gap up to the types of jobs men and women want. However, it has been shown that women make less than men at all rungs of the pay ladder, debunking that claim. In 2010, 2012 and 2014 Congressional Republicans prevented Congress from considering the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would improve pay-equity rules. It is highly unlikely Republicans will change their mind and support it in 2015. Thus, states are starting to take action on their own. New York State, for example, recently increased the burden of proof on companies who say they have a good reason to be paying a male employee more than a female employee. Not having a bona fide reason now results in triple the damages. Other states may look at New York as a model. It is especially important to note at Catholic Nationals that Pope Francis recently called the wage gap a scandal.

On an international level, women's issues could be raised as well. The most likely issue to come up is rape in India. In the past three years, there has been increased media coverage of India's rape epidemic. Historically, the government has swept rape in India under the rug. However massive protests and international attention forced the government to take action. The government has put in place fast track courts for rape cases, however they have been met with mixed responses. Not to mention, the government refuses to criminalize marital rape. Also with India, or China, you could draw a question about the skewed gender ratios in these countries. In order to solve this problem, India and China need to do two things. First, they need to better regulate abortion, but that is only a short-term solution. The governments also need to end the economic and social conditions that lead to a preference for boys, namely, dowries and poverty. Keep in mind the gap is more severe in India than China. Outside of India, you could also draw questions about FGM or female genital mutilation. The UN recently announced its proposed new development goals would include a target to eradicate FGM by 2030. Steps to achieve this goal include passing legislation, improving enforcement of existing legislation, education health care providers and education women and girls.

The final big issue you could run into in this round is privacy versus security. Because the NSA scandal has sort of fallen out of the headlines, I think most of the questions along these lines will be about drones. The controversy surrounding drones is back in the headlines after the US accidentally killed 3 western hostages in a drone strike. The reason the hostages were killed was President Obama had incomplete intelligence about who was at the location of the drone strike. This raises startlingly questions about what other mistakes have been made because of a lack of intelligence. Thus, if you pull a question about drones talking about the necessity of match intelligence with strikes could be a successful strategy. You can also expect questions about the success of US drone strikes in Yemen, Pakistan, and Nigeria. It is important to

remember that civilian deaths are a side effect of how drones are used, not drones themselves. Used correctly, drones dramatically reduce civilian casualties in comparison with traditional warfare. Thus, a speech advocating the responsible use of drones encompasses many facets of the drone debate. You may also draw questions about domestic drones, the same strategy of talking about how the drone is used, not the drone itself, should be successful. Similarly, I believe you draw a question on Germany's role in the NSA scandal. Germany's chief public prosecutor is investigating the country's role in helping the US spy on EU countries and firms. It is pretty easy to make the case that the US and Germany were in the wrong, because no proven national security gains were made as a result of the spying. However, if you draw a more general question about national security and spying make sure you weigh impacts about privacy against national security and vice versa.

Of course, these aren't the only societal and ethical issues being debated today. There will likely be questions about gay marriage, abortion and the death penalty in the mix as well. But it is probably not a good idea to take questions on these social issues if it can at all be avoided, especially at NCFLS.

Strategy

The most important part of this round is to not offend someone. If you can take a question about a non-controversial issue do it. You are also going to be much safer discussing an international issue than a domestic issue. Also, chances are these questions will be pretty broad. Make sure you define any general terms, like "morally correct," in your intro. If you get a broad question, you have to have a good mix of broad theory and specific examples in order to make a successful argument. A good way of thinking about this is to make theory arguments in your As and apply them to more specific examples in your Bs.

Practice Questions

1. Do US drones do more harm than good?
2. What steps can be taken to reduce racial tensions in the US?
3. How can the UN advance women's rights in developing countries?
4. Has India gone far enough in combating rape?
5. What steps should be taken to reduce the gender wage gap in the US?

Topic Area #6: Education

Issues

Not a lot of new issues have developed surrounding education this year, so you should have a pretty good background on any question you draw. A lot of the same education issues will pop up. On the domestic level, you could draw questions on standardized testing, teachers' unions, funding and the Common Core. At an international level, most of your questions are likely going to be about access to primary education in the developing world.

At a domestic level, it is important to note the connection between educational issues. Teachers' unions and standardized testing have become more and more interlinked. Recently, teachers' unions across the country have begun fighting against standardized testing of elementary and middle school students. They have been met with an excellent reception that going a long way towards repairing teachers' unions somewhat damaged reputation. Critics of the teachers' unions campaign claim they are simply trying to avoid assessments that point out bad teachers. In California, four teachers are suing their unions for using dues for political purposes. If they win, it will further damage teachers' unions ability to collect dues from all members. Across the country, there is a growing movement amongst parents to opt out of allowing their students to take Common Core tests. This movement started in New York and has spread to

Colorado, New Jersey and California. What is particularly interesting is parents of all socio-economic groups are choosing to opt their students out of the tests. As more parents opt out, there is nothing schools can legally do to make students take the tests. Thus, opt outs prove a new challenge to Common Core.

At an international level, access to primary education is probably the most important issue. The second Millennium Development Goal decided on by the UN in 2000 was for every child to have access to primary education by 2015. Now that it's 2015 the UN is reviewing the MDGs. Most of the numbers show that the UN is making progress, but the goal will not be reached by the end of year. About 90% of children have access to primary education, up from 83% in 2000. But that means approximately 58 million children are still not enrolled in primary education. The problem is the worst in sub-Saharan Africa. The UN also faces the challenge of students dropping out of school in conflict zones, like Syria and the DRC. Probably the most promising news is that girls and boys are enrolling in primary school at equal rates. Going forward, the UN needs to continue to work to secure funding for primary schooling, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. It also needs to work on educating parents about how important education is. There are still societal and cultural norms in place that keep parents from sending their children to school. Finally, as the number of children receiving a primary education has increased, so has the number of children demanding a secondary and even post-secondary education. Unfortunately, it is difficult for many children to access higher-level education. Thus, the UN needs to develop a strategy to help children continue their learning.

Strategy

The education round is pretty simple all in all. However, no matter what your personal political views are, it is a good idea to side with the common opinion amongst teachers on all education questions. Most of your judges are teachers. Also, try to impact to the children receiving the education and society as a whole. Double impacts that show how important education is to individuals and society will be received very well. Filing Education Week and the Center for Education Reform should help you prepare.

Practice Questions

1. Should states abandon the Common Core?
2. Have teachers' union outlived their usefulness?
3. Would students benefit from less standardized testing?
4. How should the UN reform its global education policy in a post-MDG world?

Topic Area #7: International Conflicts and Civil Unrest

Issues

This round presents great opportunities for extempers to dive into some fascinating issues. Let's begin by looking at the civil war in Yemen again. During the Arab Spring, Yemen ousted its dictator Ali Abdullah Saleh and replaced him with elected president Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. Yemen was looking like it was on an upward trajectory until September of last year when Houthi rebels took over the capital city of Sanaa. The Houthis are a Shiite insurgency allied with Ali Abdullah Saleh and Iran. After failed negotiations, President Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi fled Sanaa and eventually the country. In response, Saudi Arabia began bombing the Houthi rebels. Iran is also involved in the conflict, as Iranian funding is critical to the Houthis' success. As casualties mount, Yemen is on the brink of collapse. ISIS and AQAP are both using the chaos as cover to mount attacks. Thus, Yemen has become another state torn apart in the battle between Sunnis and Shiites.

Syria and Iraq are of course the other states being torn apart by the same battle. Recently, ISIS's leader was seriously injured in an American drone strike. Unfortunately, this hasn't slowed ISIS down. The group immediately replaced Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi with senior official Abu Alaa al-Afri. Al-Afri is said to be smarter, more well-connected and more charismatic than al-Baghdadi potentially making the group even more lethal. It has been reported ISIS has once again begun killing Yazidis in Mosul. As ISIS continues to indiscriminately kill Yazidi men, women and children this means they are not only a terrorist organization, but also a genocidal organization. Meanwhile, Syrian President Bashar al-Assad is getting weaker. Rebel groups have finally decided to stop fighting amongst themselves and start cooperating against Assad. This has resulted in major territorial losses for Assad. As Assad's regime becomes weaker, it increases the likelihood of him agreeing to a negotiated political solution. The problem is the Nusra Front, Al Qaeda's Syrian branch, is part of the new rebel alliance. All of the bad guys in Syria are preventing the US and other countries from intervening in a manner that could save civilian lives and end one of the bloodiest civil wars in recent history.

You are also likely to see questions about Nigeria's battle against Boko Haram in this round. Fortunately, there is good news on this front. In the past few weeks, Nigerian soldiers have rescued nearly 1,000 women and children taken by Boko Haram. The reason so many hostages are being returned is because Boko Haram fighters have fled towards the mountains and it's really hard to hide 1,000 people in the mountains. Not only is it great news and of itself that many of the hostages have been rescued, but this is signal the military's strategy against Boko Haram has been working. Unfortunately, the Nigerian military has also been accused of causing far too many civilian casualties. Thus, Nigeria faces a dilemma; how much force can and should be used to defeat Boko Haram?

You could also draw a question on Mexico's war on drugs, which was looking good, but recently became more violent. Questions about the conflict between Russia and Ukraine could also pop up in this topic area. Not much has changed in Eastern Ukraine in recent months as an uneasy ceasefire has held. You should also be prepared to talk about maritime conflict in Asia.

Strategy

When you are talking about conflict never forget you are talking about people. Make sure you have at least one moment in the speech where you transcend the geopolitics and remind your judge real people are impacted by whatever conflict you are discussing. Also, make sure your numbers, like death tolls, are put in context. If there was ever a time to give a really serious extemp speech that played up pathos hard, this is the round to do it. If you draw a serious question and use humor it could come off as kind of crass. Also, make sure you include a brief history of the conflict in your intro. Don't just assume your judge knows how a conflict started and what each actor wants. On a side note, remember the "international community" and the "US" are not synonymous. If a question asks about the international community, talk about the international community. The US can't solve every problem by itself. Filing the Small Wars Journal, the Long War Journal, the Combating Terrorism Center, the Diplomat, The Washington Institute on Near East Peace, the Americas Quarterly, the Council on Foreign Relations and the European Council on Foreign Relations should help you in this round.

Practice Questions

1. Are Saudi airstrikes in Yemen effective at combating the Houthis?
2. What steps should the international community take to protect minority groups in Iraq and Syria?
3. Is Boko Haram on the decline?
4. Is Mexico winning its war on drugs?
5. What would it take to convince Iran to stop supporting armed groups in Yemen and Syria?

Topic Area #8: International Organizations

Issues

There are a whole ABCs of international organizations (but if you use the IGOs ABC as an AGD I will personally hunt you down and give you 6). However, there are a few that are more likely to be asked about at NCFLs. It is also important to remember that questions about IGOs aren't usually asked in a vacuum. Instead, you can usually link an IGO question to a related current event that has been discussed in one of the previous sections.

The first IGO issue that is likely to come up in multiple questions is the UN. In 2000, the UN created a list of development goals known as the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs were supposed to be met by 2015, however, the United Nations is facing difficulties meeting some of the MDGs. The United Nations is struggling to reach Goals related to poverty and hunger, primary education, reproductive health, environmental sustainability and sanitation. Specific challenges include ending open defecation, providing antenatal care to women, reducing child deaths from preventable diseases and encouraging young women to stay in school. Decreasing official development assistance to the poorest countries and poor access to reliable statistics has held the United Nations back in meeting all of its development goals. On the brighter side, the United Nations has already met some of its Goals on reducing poverty, increasing access to cleaner water, improving life in slums and achieving gender parity in primary schools. It is also on track to surpass its goals on malaria, tuberculosis and HIV. The United Nations is working on taking targeted action to meet the MDGs by their deadline. On December 18, 2014 the General Assembly adopted a resolution to dedicate special attention to meeting the MDGs for persons with disabilities. In May of 2014, UN Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson issued a Call to Action on Sanitation. Sanitation is currently the most behind Goal of all 8 MDGs. Member States are also working to implement the Sanitation for All resolution passed adopted by the General Assembly on July 24, 2013. In addition to new initiatives created to meet the MDGs, Member States are in the midst of a heated debate over what to include in the Post-2015 Development Goals. It appears as though Post-2015 Goals will be more focused on sustainable development and Goals that can be applied to middle- and high-income countries.

The next IGO that is likely to come up is the ICC, or International Criminal Court. Recently, the ICC accepted Palestine as a member. This made Israel extremely angry because Palestine is trying to charge Israeli officials with war crimes. Before Palestine joined, neither Israel, nor Palestine was a member. This made it very difficult for citizens of either party to be tried in the ICC. However, now that Palestine is a member it can legally take Israel to the ICC, even though Israel is not a member. Investigations into Israeli war crimes have already begun and are actually farther ahead than many thought they ever would be. This is in part because Palestine agreed to let the ICC investigate claims of Palestinian war crimes as well. Hamas literally wants Israel to go to court so bad, it is willing to maybe go to court as well. However, even if a trial were to go forward it will likely have a minimal impact in the real world. ICC trials take forever, by the time a trial is completed Israeli-Palestinians relations are likely to have changed dramatically. In addition, if an Israeli official were charged with war crimes it is unlikely any country would turn them over to the ICC to face trial. If no one will turn over Sudan's genocidal dictator Omar Al-Bashir, they're probably not going to turn in Benjamin Netanyahu.

The final international organization that is likely to come up is the European Union. While financial issues in the EU are more likely to come up in the foreign economics round, issues of institutional reform will most likely come up in this round. Right now the EU is at a crossroads where it can either move towards or away from further integration. Most experts agree less integration would be a disaster. It was the fact that the EU is a monetary union with no common fiscal policy that led to the Euro crisis in the

first place. Thus, it is probably best for the EU to put in place more integrated fiscal policies, becoming more of a United States of Europe than it is right now.

Other international organizations that come up include the WHO and the African Union. Most likely, questions about these organizations will be related to institutional reform after the Ebola crisis. You could also draw a question about the Organization of American States. The OAS just elected a new Secretary General, Luis Almagro. Almagro has promised to work to make the OAS relevant again by pushing for increased in democracy and human rights. This is a drastic change from the last Secretary General who disliked US values and US involvement in Latin America. You may also draw the age old questions about the P5's veto on the UNSC and whether or not new countries should be added to the UNSC's list of permanent members.

Strategy

Most of your judges will be at least somewhat unfamiliar with IGOs, simply because the media doesn't often report on their day-to-day functioning. Thus, it is critical you explain the purpose of whatever IGO you are talking about. It is also important if the IGO is more obscure that you constantly remind your judges what the acronym stands for. A good rule of thumb is to say the full name of the organization you're talking about once in your intro and once in every point. If you can fit specifics of how an IGO functions into your analysis, your judges will be very impressed. For this round, it may helpful to file the press releases from the actual organizations. These can usually be found on their websites.

Practice Questions

1. What should the UN prioritize in its post-2015 development goals?
2. What impact will Palestine's accession to the ICC have on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
3. What reforms should the African Union pursue in the wake of Ebola?
4. A more integrated EU: boon or bane?
5. Will Luis Almagro be a force for good in the OAS?

Topic Area #9: Foreign Economics

Issues

Foreign economics is domestic economics cooler, more fun older brother. And there is a lot to talk about in foreign economics.

The first issue that is bound to come up is free trade. Right now there are two major trade agreements in the works. The first is the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or the TPP. The TPP would be a free trade agreement amongst a number of Pacific-rim countries. Right now TPP negotiations include the US, Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, the United States, and Vietnam. One of the biggest problems has been getting Japan on board and the TPP needs Japan on board in order to be successful. Japan has a particularly protectionist bent and farmers were not keen on an FTA with the US. However, it appears as though Japan is beginning to support to TPP wholeheartedly. The other roadblock is Congress. In order to be successful, President Obama needs fast-track authority from Congress for the TPP. Fast-track authority gives the President the authority to negotiate international agreements that can be approved or voted down by Congress, but they can't be amended. Countries are much more likely to sign an agreement with the US when the President has fast-track authority because it means the agreement will stay the same. House and Senate committees have already approved giving the President fast-track authority now it just has to be approved by the House and Senate. It will likely pass in the House, Republicans love free trade. It will probably pass in the Senate too, but

some democrats may challenge it. With Japan and Congress on board the TPP is likely to pass. The other trade agreement is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership or TTIP. The TTIP is an FTA between the EU and US. Right now negotiations are stalled over issues surrounding regulations.

The next issue that is likely to come up is Greece. At the beginning of the year a very anti-EU politician was elected to lead Greece. This led many to fear that Greece would leave the Eurozone creating the ever-frightening Grexit. However, this is looking less and less likely every day. The leaders of the EU and the IMF managed to pull Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras to the negotiating table. Tsipras is resistant to pension cuts and labor reforms, which have slowed the process. However, Greece the EU and the IMF are getting closer to a deal that would help Greece avert bankruptcy. So claims that the Eurozone is spiraling out of control are now somewhat spurious.

The third issue that is likely to come up is low oil prices. The international economy has been heavily shaped by the recent, and unexpected decline in oil prices. At first, low oil prices may seem like a good thing because they decrease the costs of most economic activity, which increases consumer spending. Another benefit of low oil prices is the added economic strain it has placed on Russia, making Russia more likely to bend to Western sanctions. However, low oil prices also have their drawbacks. The first drawback is that energy companies are cutting investments in production and exploration because they aren't making as much money. This means oil prices could soon pop back up. Additionally, alternative energy forms are looking a lot less attractive now that oil is cheap again. Thus, investment in alternative energy has also slowed. Another drawback of cheap oil is that it has hurt the economic growth of oil producing states. This includes states like the US, Russia, Brazil, Nigeria, Venezuela, Ecuador and Saudi Arabia. When these countries having slowing economic growth, the result is slower global economic growth. As far as OPEC is concerned, that fact that the group hasn't been able to organize to drive oil prices back upwards says a lot about how much influence OPEC really has these days.

Strategy

A lot of what was said about domestic economics rings true for foreign economics as well, the simpler you can make your analysis the more you are going to get rewarded. Also, if you can chose a question that allows you talk more about people and less about numbers your judge is going to thank you. In this round, try to choose questions that ask you to solve an economic problem rather than forecast an economic outcome. It is very difficult for a judge to buy your economic predications, simply because predictions are very hard to prove. Finally, this is a great round to use some humor if your question allows for it.

Practice Questions

1. Would smaller countries like Vietnam benefit from the TPP?
2. Will Congress grant President Obama fast-track authority on the TPP?
3. Why is it taking so long for the US and the EU to successfully negotiate a trade agreement?
4. Will Greece leave the Eurozone?
5. Are lower oil prices doing more to help or hurt the global economy?