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## Switch-Side Debating Meets Demand-Driven Rhetoric of Science

Gordon R. Mitchell

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### Abstract

U.S. government agencies are collaborating with outside scholars to untangle disparate threads of knotty technoscientific issues, in part by integrating structured debating exercises into institutional decision-making processes such as intelligence assessment and public policy planning. These initiatives drive up demand for rhetoricians with skill and experience in what Protagoras called *dissoi logoi*—the practice of airing multiple sides of vexing questions for the purpose of stimulating critical thinking. In the contemporary milieu, *dissoi logoi* receives concrete expression in the tradition of intercollegiate switch-side debating, a form of structured argumentation categorized by some as a cultural technology with weighty ideological baggage. What exactly is that baggage, and how does it implicate plans to improve institutional decision making by drawing from rhetorical theory and expertise? Exploration of how switch-side debating meets

demand-driven rhetoric of science not only sheds light on this question, but also contributes to the burgeoning scholarly literature on deliberative democracy, inform argumentation studies, and suggest new avenues of inquiry in rhetorical theory and practice.

## SWITCH-SIDE DEBATING MEETS DEMAND-DRIVEN RHETORIC OF SCIENCE

GORDON R. MITCHELL

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*GORDON R. MITCHELL is Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in the Department of Communication at the University of Pittsburgh, where he also directs the William Pitt Debating Union. Robert Aen's patient and thoughtful feedback sharpened this manuscript, which was also improved by contributions from members of the Schenley Park Debate Authors Working Group (DAWG), a consortium of public argument scholars at the University of Pittsburgh that strives to generate rigorous scholarship addressing the role of argumentation and debate in society.*

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