My experience in debate leads me to believe that change in our policy debate community functions in something of an organic process. As one model is introduced it grows and interacts with previously existing practices. Sometimes they can cooperate and sometimes one model overtakes or fundamentally alters the other. At our current moment it appears that several conflicting models of argumentation are in play and I enjoy the creativity that this provides. Here are my thoughts on how attempt to adjudicate when the ways we debate are argued in front of me. Keep in mind that although I have been involved in our squad’s argument construction and practice rounds I have only judged at a few tournaments.

Importance of the resolution (and side division)
I am willing to suspend typical norms of argument construction and standards of proof as long as the exchange is framed by the resolution and the divide it imposes on the two sides, particularly the affirmative. I believe this provides each team with the flexibility to explore new ways to ‘make an argument’ even as it creates a framework for competitive equity. The flip side of this approach is that I do believe that the affirmative needs to make a presentation that supports the resolution and I am willing to vote against affirmatives that do not make this connection regardless of their potential benefits as academic enterprises. For the negative, the burden becomes responding/clashing in some ways with the affirmative’s project. My experience has been that the further this model collapses the harder it is to adjudicate the debate – regardless of what standards of evidence or methods of delivery are used.

Importance of competitive equity
For me, a great number of debates centered around theoretical conceptions ultimately ask the question, “Does a particular practice provide for competitive debates by both sides?” This may relate to the legitimacy of dispositionality, conditionality or any other such approach or it may relate to the legitimacy of permuting an opponent’s advocacy. I find it easiest to resolve these debates when teams explore the implications of such practices as general norms of debate, in addition to the impact in this particular round. I also find that teams under-employ the opportunity to reciprocate a potentially abusive practice. If another team has skewed argumentative ground in the debate, instead of merely assails its legitimacy, why not provide a measured response that gives you the same argumentative flexibility?

Speaker Point Scale
I think there is a general agreement that the scale is not very large. I applaud the efforts by JP Lacy and others to openly discuss their point scales because I hope it allows a community-based discussion of the norms inherent in our point scales and maybe even as a starting point for reforms. I use 27 as the baseline for an average presentation. My range utilizes 27 to about 28.5 on a regular basis. Particularly compelling (or not compelling) performances may cause a number on either side of that range, but in many debates your points will be from that scale.

Good luck to everyone. Enjoy the wonderful opportunity provided by debate in general and this tournament in particular!!