The decade of the 1970s further entrenched the socially progressive values that came to the U.S. cultural forefront in the 1960s. Investing in such activities as the Women’s Movement and Vietnam War protests, college students became increasingly vocal about social issues. Those speaking up on such topics included the interstate orators who crafted the IOC speeches of the 1970s. In order to analyze the speeches presented at the Interstate Oratorical Contest between 1970 and 1979, the first part of this paper will explore how this socially important historical time period influenced the speeches themselves. The second section will address the language style and organizational patterns the students employed in their oratories. Finally, the third section will focus on logistical issues, including the locations, demographics, and changing administrative details of the tournament.

The Context of History

The University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire recently celebrated its centennial. Although few buildings, academic majors or organizations remain the same as they were during the inaugural year of 1916-1917, the school’s administration recognizes a university-wide call seeking to identify and celebrate any programs on campus which shared the University’s centennial birthday. UWEC forensics answered that call after discovering an article in the school’s 1917 yearbook which listed the first year the Eau Claire Normal School’s forensic program ventured into Oratory. The article stated:

The first year of oratory and debate at Eau Claire has shown that our school is going to make a strong record in these activities. In fact, we entered into competition with other normal schools of the state in the State Intramural Oratorical League. Misses C. Towne and Misses D. P. Van Dyke won the state championship in this league.

1970 - 1979:

Investigating the Interstate Oratorical Contest During the ‘Me Decade’.

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