ISSA Proceedings 2006 – Purpose, Argument Fields, And Theoretical Justification

Twenty-five years ago, a theory of argument fields was one of the most important issues facing argumentation as a discipline. Building on the essential work of Stephen Toulmin, theorists developed a number of different approaches to field theory, including sociological, historical, psychological, and pragmatic perspectives, and focused in detail on laying out a sophisticated theory of how fields function. Other topics included methodological issues related to the best approach to defining particular fields or evaluating the argumentative practices in a given field. Some theorists, notably David Zarefsky (1982), rejected the conventional wisdom and argued that field theory had only limited value. These and other issues were debated in convention programs, at the first and second Alta argumentation conferences, and in journals, notably the *Journal of the American Forensic Association* (now *Argumentation and Advocacy*).

Twenty-five years later, the situation is quite different. Argument field theory has all but disappeared as a contested issue within the discipline of argumentation studies. As Godden noted, "the debate surrounding field theory seems to have reached its peak more than two decades ago" (2003, p. 370). The topic has been noticeably absent in the proceedings of recent conferences, including ISSA and Alta. Nor have field studies or field theory been featured in recent years in argumentation journals. It would appear that the somewhat skeptical judgment of Zarefsky almost a quarter century ago has been proven correct. And yet despite his criticisms of various approaches to field theory as including considerable "conceptual fuzziness," Zarefsky rejected "abandoning the troublesome concept altogether," noting "It is a potential aid to explaining what happens in argumentative encounters, to classifying argument products, and to deriving evaluative standards" (1982, p. 203). In the spirit of attaining those goals, a reassessment of field theory is in order. Surely, Toulmin's fundamental insight that argumentation practices only can be understood in context and that the practices in particular coherent fields best are understood in relation to the

norms of that field, remains a useful and essentially unquestioned principle in the discipline today. If the core idea at the heart of field theory is so widely accepted, a reconsideration of the underlying theory is long overdue.

In this essay, I argue that one reason that field theory is no longer a highly contested issue is that the description of individual fields, apart from the description of a particular argumentative controversy, is not a generally useful endeavor. I then argue that field theory declined as a contested issue because the various approaches that were developed in relation to fields were complementary, not competing approaches. I conclude by arguing that theoretical principles derived from those approaches have important implications for the study of argumentation itself as a field.

1.

At first, it may seem paradoxical, but one major reason for the decline of field theory as an area of contested debate is that while the theory is essential in many domains of argumentation, field studies by themselves are not particularly useful or interesting. Field studies exist at a mid-point between field theory and a case study of an actual controversy. The theory is important because it informs the way that argumentative practices evolve and illuminates the epistemic rules governing any particular domain. Application of those principles to a particular controversy can be enormously revealing, a point that is evident in the many case studies presented at argumentation conferences and published in disciplinary journals. But the middle ground of an analysis of a particular field lacks the generalizability of the theory and the specificity of the study of a particular controversy. This situation helps explain the judgment of Pamela Benoit in relation to research on individual fields that "theoretical development in argument fields has been disappointing" (1988, p. 38), as well as Ray McKerrow's observation that field studies tend more toward detailed description than they do to application of the theoretical terminology found in a given theory of fields (1986, p. 185). A study of a general field, such as the law, is likely to be useful only for the very narrow pedagogical purpose of explaining the overall structure of argumentative activity, a topic of interest to almost no one. On the other hand, careful analysis of a given argumentative controversy can be enormously useful. Such analysis may not apply the terminology of field theory, but it inevitably depends upon that theory to explain particular argumentative practices, practices which always are constrained by norms of the field in which they occur. As Prosie, Mills and Miller note, "Field theory helps argumentation scholars understand practical argument"

(1996, p. 127) in a particular controversy.

An additional reason that field studies have not taken root is that fields exist at so many levels of specificity that description rarely is useful apart from a particular case-study. Take the relatively well-defined field of the law as an example. Of course, any number of specific subject domains are included within the law: criminal law, civil law, constitutional law, appellate practice, and so forth. And these subject domains in turn can be divided into more specific areas. Product liability and medical malpractice are both in the civil law, but their argumentative practice will be shaped by their particular subject matter and the purposes they serve within the sub-field. I made this point twenty-five years ago when I argued both that "there are different levels of field invariance" and that "some larger fields contain smaller more specific fields" (Rowland, 1982, p. 239). What I did not recognize at that point was that this characteristic of field theory meant that descriptive studies of fields would need to be tailored to the specifics of a given controversy in order to be useful.

An illustration of this point can be found in the on-going debate about global warming. A field study of atmospheric sciences would not be particularly useful for explaining the argumentative characteristics that have defined the debate over global warming. Nor would a study of climatology as a sub-field be especially helpful. Instead, a discussion of the argumentative practices in the very particular sub-field related to global warming would be needed in order to describe the evolution of the arguments in the area. It is not that field theory lacks utility in this instance, but that this utility only is apparent in the study of the particular controversy and not in the description of more general argumentative characteristics of larger fields encompassing the disciplines and subject matters at issue in the warming debate.

Thus, as a general rule field studies are not interesting apart from a particular controversy. At the level of a case-study, however, field theory plays a key role in informing the analysis. While studies of a particular controversy may appear to be uninfluenced by field theory, that is in fact not the case. Understanding a particular controversy requires an understanding of the epistemic rules governing what counts for argument in that area. An explanation of these rules is, in turn, grounded in field theory, even if many analysts do not draw this connection. In an odd way, the absence of discussion of fields over the last quarter century is evidence of the enduring importance of field theory. The concept is so central to argumentation that its importance is no longer a matter of debate.

2.

Argumentation theories take many forms. Some theories serve a descriptive aim, describing practices in a particular domain. Others serve evaluative functions or are focused on the pedagogical goal of training students in effective and appropriate argumentation practices. At base, all of these theories, however, rest on an assumption that argument in some sense "has to" work the way that the theory describes. Absent that "has to" statement, the theory merely provides one way of describing or evaluating or teaching argument and there is no way of arguing for its superiority over any other similar theory. Thus, a central question for argumentation studies is "why does it have to work that way?" This question represents what might be called the Archimedes problem. Archimedes famously said that if he had a place to stand and a long enough lever he could move the world. The key to many issues in argumentation studies is to justify a principled place to stand for justifying theoretical positions.

At first, it may seem odd to turn to field theory to answer the Archimedes problem and provide a principled "has to" statement, since field theory inherently focuses on the particular. But the general justification of argumentation as an activity of greater import than reading tea leaves or astrology is based on the accumulation of experience with particular cases in which argumentative answers to problems were superior to answers derived from astrology or tea leaf reading. Thus, the justification of a larger theory has to begin with success in dealing with particular controversies. In that way, the ultimate grounding of all argumentation theories must lie in their utility as applied in particular field-related controversies. Nicholas Rescher was getting at this point when he argued that "available cognitive principles are produced by an evolutionary process that favor the fittest methods" and that "there is certainly no better way of justifying a method – *any method* – than by establishing that 'it works' with respect to the specific tasks held in view" (1977, pp. 97, 108; emphasis in original). Thus, argumentation theory in general of necessity depends upon field theory in order to account for the success or failure of argumentative practices related to the "specific tasks" mentioned by Rescher. Stephen Toulmin's account of how ideas evolve in particular fields in *Human Understanding* (1972) can be seen as an extended example of how an evolutionary approach implicitly grounded in field theory is used to build a larger theoretical description of argumentation practices.

If argumentation theory in general depends upon field theory, why has field theory as a contested issue largely disappeared from the literature? Over the last

twenty years, for instance, there has been considerable debate about spheres of argument (Goodnight, 1982), especially the public sphere, but very little focus on a theory of fields. The answer to this question is that debate about field theory reached a point of stasis roughly a quarter century ago, although that stasis was not immediately apparent to the participants in the debate about fields. In order to develop this claim, it is helpful to revisit the debate about fields that occurred in the 1970s and early 1980s.

The debate was grounded in the work of Stephen Toulmin, who argued beginning in *An Examination of the Place of Reason* in Ethics that "every mode of reasoning . . . will have its own logical criteria, to be discovered by examining its individual, peculiar uses" (1953, p. 83). Toulmin developed the idea of fields in more detail in his seminal work, *The Uses of Argument* (1958), where he famously distinguished between field invariant (the force of argument and general argument form as described in the Toulmin diagram) and field dependent (the type of data and backing, as well as evaluative criteria) characteristics of argument. He continued to discuss field practices, although he did not always use that term, in *Human Understanding* (1972), where he focused upon how academic disciplines define themselves, the goals they establish, the epistemic principles which guide their research, and the processes through which they evolve. He drew a distinction concerning disciplinary types based largely on the presence or absence of "clearly recognized and agreed collective ideals" (1972, p. 379), between compact disciplines, such as atomic physics, which have such ideals, diffuse disciplines, which conform "only loosely to those requirements" (1972, p. 379), and would-be disciplines, such as the social sciences, where there are a "diversity of approaches of a kind unparalleled in physics" (1972, p. 382).

Toulmin's various writings about fields and apparently synonymous terms such as "disciplines" set the stage for the debate about the nature of fields in argumentation. In a sense, Toulmin himself implicitly sketched the breadth of positions that would be taken in the debate. In *The Place of Reason in Ethics* and *The Uses of Argument*, he noted the way that standards for argumentative practice, including evaluative criteria, are tied to field theory. He also noted how argument form and subject matter are determined based on the field of inquiry. In *Human Understanding,* he broadened the approach, focusing upon sociological and psychological factors shaping the evolution of argumentative practices in a particular domain, discipline or field. And throughout his writings he emphasized the way that the purposes of arguers in particular contexts served as the ultimate

grounding for judgments about argumentative efficacy in that context. The evolutionary process that he described in such detail in *Human Understanding* ultimately was grounded in the insight cited earlier from Rescher that the final standard justifying argumentative practices is always a simple test of whether those practices work to solve a given problem. It was perhaps inevitable that argumentation theorists would draw on Toulmin's work in an attempt to provide clear standards for defining boundary conditions for any given field. It also was inevitable that such an approach would fail.

The debate that evolved in the 1970s and 1980s focused on five primary ideas for defining fields. One approach treated fields as essentially subject matter domains. For example, James Klumpp argued that "acceptable forms of argument" vary with "subject matter" (1981, p. 50). A second approach emphasized the importance of audience or community in defining field practices. Ray McKerrow, for instance, focused on social, personal, and philosophical communities of arguers (1981) and Charles Arthur Willard featured audience as one useful approach to field theory when he argued that "one way of characterizing fields is as *audiences*" (1981, p. 24). The third perspective on fields was based in Toulmin's focus on argument practices as defining a given field. From this perspective, fields were best defined as a universe of discourse in a particular context, what Joseph Wenzel referred to as "the propositional context of a disciplined rational enterprise with an epistemological purpose" (1981, p. 4) and Charles Kneupper called "knowledge structures" (1981, p. 81).

The fourth approach treated fields from a sociological or psychological perspective. Perhaps the most developed statement of that view was found in the work of Willard who treated fields as both a kind of personal psychological perspective and as sociological constructs defined by disciplinary bodies (1981, pp. 28, 41). In both cases, the field acted as a kind of terministic device. He argued that the "foundational metaphor [of field theory] is the construing person engaged in role taking and social comparison" (1981, p. 42). Advocates of the sociological/psychological perspective varied to some degree based on whether they saw disciplinary organization (Kneupper, 1981, p. 81; Klumpp, 1981, p. 47) or symbolic structures, what Gronbeck called "collections of communicative rules," (1981, 15) as more fundamental.

The final perspective treated fields as brought into effect by the existence of a shared problem-solving purpose in relation to some problem. This view, which I (Rowland, 1981; Rowland 1982) and to some extent Wenzel (1982) developed, and

which Hanson (1989) later extended, emphasized the way that shared purpose acted as an energizing force to encourage arguers dealing with a given problem to choose a subject matter, develop standards for evaluating evidence and other argumentative forms, establish disciplinary organizations, and so forth. Purpose was not the defining characteristic of fields of argument. Rather, according to advocates of the purpose-centered approach, it was the force that led arguers to construct all other elements of the field. In this view, field practices evolved based on their pragmatic utility in problem-solving.

At first glance, the five perspectives on fields of argument were so different and the debate among advocates of different approaches so energetic (Godden, 2002, p. 370) that the sudden disappearance of field theory from disciplinary discussion is puzzling. What is clear, however, only in retrospect, is that the different approaches to field theory were in fact not all that different; they were complementary. It now seems obvious that one cannot adequately define the field in which a given argumentative controversy occurs without a focus on subject matter, audience characteristics, argument forms found in the area, propositional content, argument models serving as terministic devices to aid comprehension, disciplinary organizations, the evolution of argument practices, and a consideration of shared purpose. All of these characteristics are important, although in particular cases, depending upon the goals of the researcher, one or more of them may require special emphasis. As a consequence, it was not possible to choose among the different approaches to field theory because each provided one aspect of a complete definition of a field of argument.

The commonalities among the different perspectives on argument fields in the 1970s and 1980s were masked by the energetic debate about the concept. In all cases, however, the core principle underlying field theory was an explicit or implicit judgment that effectively solving puzzles in a given area created an evolutionary pressure to find the most useful argumentative tools (defined quite broadly) for achieving those aims. This emphasis on how field practices evolve in order to maximize the chance of solving a given puzzle was quite consistent with the work of theorists, including Toulmin and Rescher, who emphasized a fundamentally pragmatic standard for evaluating disciplinary practices in any given context and also the evolutionary pressures that the pragmatic standard created. In this view, field theory declined as an issue not because there was so much disagreement, but because there was so much underlying agreement. This underlying agreement reduced the evolutionary pressure on argumentation

scholars to discover new approaches to field theory or choose among existing approaches. And thus, the same fundamentally pragmatic pressures that influence field practices in all areas of human endeavor, influenced the development of argumentation theory about such field practices.

The reconsideration of field theory also helps explain other factors that shape the evolution of field practices. It seems quite clear, for example, that where there is not agreement on particular problem-solving purposes served by the field, there will not be a clear evolutionary standard to guide the evolution of argumentative practices in the area. In *Human Understanding*, Toulmin attributed the failure of "would-be disciplines," such as psychology and sociology to develop into compact disciplines, to "the absence of suitable professional organization, so that disciplinary possibilities of the subject are not fully exploited, and the rational purposes of its practitioners are frustrated" (1972, p. 380). I suggest that a more powerful explanation may be that in disciplines such as sociology and psychology there are multiple purposes, not all of which are shared by every member of the profession, and that as a consequence there are multiple lines of evolution operating within the field at any given time and no agreement on which evolutionary line is most important.

A related point can be made when fields serve some sort of purpose in addition to rational problem-solving. For example, while all academic disciplines would prefer to have access to support from governmental or non-governmental bodies, the existence of such support creates a purpose that potentially competes with rational problem-solving. That purpose, of course, is to secure monetary support for research. The existence of the purpose of gaining monetary support may in some instances encourage researchers to choose approaches that are not necessarily adapted to the rational goals of the field, but are adapted to securing funding. The larger point is that the presence of purposes unrelated to rational problem-solving may undercut the evolutionary process that leads to improved field practices.

A final point should be obvious – just as fields evolve based on the evolutionary standards I have identified, so they may simply die. If field practices fail to achieve the essential purposes of the field, eventually the field will decline and die or evolve into a different field. Thus, phrenology was an important field in the 19th century and currently a subject studied only by historians or anthropologists.

3.

To this point, I have argued that the reason field theory ceased being an important and contested issue in argument studies was that evolving theories of fields were in fact complementary and largely solved the argumentative problems they were created to confront. In particular, the focus on how the goal of pragmatic puzzle solving created evolutionary pressures leading field actors to choose argumentative practices in order to advance the evolutionary goal was shared among all of the different perspectives on fields. While field theory may not be a contested issue currently, there are implications that can be drawn from the previous analysis for issues that certainly are contested.

The previous analysis of the status of field theory indicates that the ultimate test of any argumentative theory is its practical ability to solve a puzzle confronting the field. At the core of this judgment lies a consideration of the basic purposes served by argumentation as a field itself. The overarching purpose of argumentation is rational problem-solving. Since the Greeks invented the study of argumentation, the core assumption of field actors has been that strong arguments were more likely to produce useful solutions to problems than were weak arguments. In some cases, this assumption was reflected in theories treating argumentation (or dialectic or logic) as an approach for uncovering true arguments or simply truth itself, while in others the focus was more explicitly pragmatic. But in all cases the goal of argument studies was to find argumentative practices that did a better job of solving problems than other argumentative practices.

Four sub-purposes are reflected in the practices of the discipline, two of which are tied to argument pedagogy and two of which are epistemic purposes tied to problem-solving itself. The two pedagogical sub-purposes relate to the creation of the most effective descriptive and evaluative schemas for the field. These pedagogical theories related to argument description and evaluation in turn must be justified based on their utility for advancing the overarching purpose of rational problem-solving. The ultimate test of a descriptive theory, for example, is whether it provides effective tools that ordinary arguers or those in specialized sub-fields can use to describe argumentative practices, prior to testing those practices through evaluative perspectives. Similarly, the test of pedagogical evaluative theories is whether they help arguers apply useful tests of argument quality in any context.

The epistemic purposes relate to argument creation and argument testing respectively. The test of an inventional theory is whether it helps arguers create

not just new arguments or discover new data, but new arguments or data that help them create solutions to real problems of some sort. In regard to evaluative theories, the same standard applies, with the notation that evaluative theories are heavily influenced by standards of presumption and burden of proof, which by themselves are not so much evaluative principles as they are regulative standards related to the rational problem-solving goal of the activity. Thus, in cases where immediate action must be taken and potential negative consequences of action are relatively less important, such as choosing the best available treatment for a normally untreatable cancer, a very low standard of burden of proof or presumption will be sensible. In contrast, where the consequences of failed action are great, a much higher regulative standard is appropriate.

The analysis of the four sub-purposes served by argumentation as a field, in relation to the previous analysis of field theory, suggests several important conclusions. First, the best means of testing the value of any argumentative theory is through pragmatic application. Rescher was getting at this point when he observed:

Appearances to the contrary not withstanding, however, what is at issue here is *not* the establishment of a factual thesis – such as the regularity of nature – but the validation of a practice. For what matters here is a practice policy: to continue to employ a method that has proven to be successful (i.e., more effective than alternatives) in those cases (of suitable numerousness, variety, etc.) where it has been tried. The issue, accordingly, is not one of establishing a factual thesis but one of validating a practical course of action. (1977, p. 105)

Thus, the test of theories of argument is whether they either directly produce effective solutions to a given problem or whether they teach strategies, models, or other tools that achieve this aim. It is an unfortunate fact that argumentation theorists have been better at laying out theories, models, prescriptive devices and so forth than providing evidence that those materials in fact work for achieving their aim in practical or specialized problem-solving. If the field is to continue to evolve toward improved practices, more emphasis on providing actual evidence that the theories pragmatically work in the sense described by Rescher is needed. The difficulty is that it is much easier to demonstrate the evolutionary success of specific principles or practices found in a sub-field than it is in a broad field, such as argumentation. In the particular sub-field, the principle is justified because it works. In the most simplistic example, the medical researcher validates the treatment by curing the patient. But the "cures" offered in argumentation are

epistemic in nature and require a different sort of evolutionary justification.

There are two primary means that this evolutionary justification can be provided. One method is simply that practical arguers continue to find the principles to be useful over time. Thus, argumentation theories focusing on the importance of principles related to burden of proof, presumption, tests of evidence quality, and so forth have been validated in an evolutionary sense by more than two thousand years of use. A second method would be to blend argumentation theory with social science. Of course, major advances have been made in recent years, especially by researchers working in the pragma-dialectic and informal logic traditions, in using research to validate the pedagogical value of their approaches. An additional step is needed, however. That step is to validate the theories in the context of real-world problem solving, to show not only that the theory helps someone identify argument types and defective practice, but also helps them invent and then test adequate arguments to produce superior decisions in a given context. The ultimate point of argumentation pedagogy, after all, is not only to help students distinguish between theoretically justifiable argument practice and unacceptable practice, but to result in superior decisions that solve real problems. In principle, it should be possible to conduct research which tested the value of a given theory by teaching it to subjects and then testing whether the subjects developed improved rational problem-solving in some particular context relevant to the study.

A second implication of the previous analysis is that too great a focus on cooperation within argument can have problematic effects. Any number of argumentation theorists privilege cooperation as an appropriate norm. In this way, Wayne Brockriede's comparison of arguers to lovers (1972), the pragma-dialectic presumption in favor of cooperation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004), Christopher Tindale's defense of a dialogical not adversarial approach to argument (2004, pp. 89-90), and the feminist critique (Foss & Griffin, 1995) of symbol use that is not invitational in nature, are based on a similar view supporting the value of cooperative principles for argument. In the case of some feminists (Gearhart, 1979), the presumption in favor of cooperation essentially results in a rejection of argument itself.

While no one enjoys an interaction in which reasoned argument devolves into mere bickering, it is important to recognize that the evolutionary process which results in improved practices within any argument field inherently depends upon

newly proposed ideas out-competing previously proposed ideas. It is through this evolutionary process that ideas are tested and the field develops toward superior practices. This same principle applies within argumentation studies. Rescher made this exact point in relation to what he labeled the "disputational model," a model which he said necessitated "a very different stance towards conflict and controversy" (1977, p. 123) than was present in cooperative models. In relation to this stance:

It now comes to be a mark not of malignancy but of health that competing schools of thought should endeavor to argue for conflicting theories by the most powerfully supportive reasonings they can marshal. Rivalry, competition, and conflict must now be see not as unhappy aberrations, as deviant and regrettable manifestations of a human perversity that impedes the smooth progress of science; rather, they become a natural and requisite component of the ongoing process of scientific advance. (1977, pp. 123-124)

Thus, it is essential for the development of argumentation as a discipline to support norms that encourage rigorous debate among the competing perspectives on any issue. Of course, nearly all theorists would prefer that argumentative interactions be cooperative and person-respecting in every way. One danger with such an approach, however, is that the emphasis on cooperation could compete with the rigorous dialectical testing that Rescher and so many others have noted is essential to the evolutionary processes that produce improved argument practices. The danger is that the cooperative norm may discourage arguers from rigorously challenging the other side. In the debate on global warming in the United States, for example, global warning deniers have used very strong language in attacking the theory, while the advocates of the theory largely have responded in the restrained cooperative language of science. The result has been to obscure to some extent the overwhelming scientific consensus on global warming. The larger danger is that a focus on cooperation may encourage politeness and passivity, and reduce the rigor of dialectical testing.

It is also important to recognize that while a cooperative argumentative interaction based on the good will of all the arguers involved is certainly preferable to a non-cooperative exchange, such purely cooperative argument is not needed for the evolutionary testing of ideas that drives the field forward. In the rough and tumble of debate in both the public sphere and many specialized fields, a spirited competition is quite common and an argumentative practice meeting the standards set out by advocates of cooperation, such as Brockriede, relatively rare. However, that spirited competition still can produce evolutionary

advance in an intellectual sense, as many advocates of the free marketplace of ideas, perhaps most notably John Stuart Mill (1963), have noted.

Of course, the potential negative effects of competitive models of argument are well-known. In fact, those same negative effects in some cases can be inconsistent with the evolutionary rational problem-solving aim of the field, since they can result in situations in which conflict overwhelms the rational purposes of the field. Thus, while methods of minimizing or eliminating the negative effects of conflict are needed, some level of competition is simply an evolutionary requirement for the field of argument studies to progress. Contrary to Rescher, this required conflict can be viewed as regrettable, but it cannot be avoided in a productive theory of argument.

A third implication of the revised view of fields is that the postmodern critique of argumentation theory is not so much wrong as it is irrelevant. As I have argued elsewhere (Rowland, 1995), any number of postmodern critics (Thomas, 1997) have challenged argumentation theory essentially by arguing that principles of that theory are not universal. The pragmatic approach to argument fields and to argumentation itself as a field is in full accord with this judgment. Obviously, no single principle or practice in argumentation results in the production of a useful solution to a problem in every instance. Rather, all of the tools presented by argumentation theory must be judged based on their capacity to produce useful solutions to some sort of problem more often than their competitors. Against that view, the postmodern critique has no possible response. It is simply undeniable that a wide variety of principles of argumentation theory are more useful in helping people solve problems than principles associated with fortune-telling or some other ancient art. The key point is that principles of argumentation theory have proved their utility in an evolutionary contest. Thus, from the perspective on field theory developed here, the most appropriate response to the postmodern critique is to accept the premise, but observe that it is simply irrelevant to a field in which theories, models, and all forms of practice are justified by evolutionary success in solving problems. Viewed from this perspective, the postmodern critique is simply an evolutionary dead end, which future scholars will analyze as part of the fossil record of the discipline.

4.

Since the Greeks invented the study of argumentation, theorists have been making what I referred to earlier as "has to" statements about the field, often

justifying those statements with essentialist claims about the nature of argumentation as a discipline. It now seems clear that the essentialist defense of the field will not do. Rather, the ultimate justification of field theory and of argumentation studies itself as a field must be found in an evolutionary standard based on success in achieving field purposes.

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