**Some Merit**

**Hoffman**

**Online deliberation in the AGORA network**

The present project has developed out of the PIs interest in what he has called Logical Argument Mapping, which emerged from the idea that graphical visualization of arguments facilitates the teaching and development of skills in argumentation. AGORA: Participate-Deliberate is a web-based development of this approach; the present project seeks to expand and develop the AGORA software into a "deliberation infrastructure" which, if I understand the goals, would generate two-dimensional argument maps to visually represent the arguments and counter-arguments of networked participants in a give task. The contemplated activities for this proposal cover development, promotion, and assessment of the computer supported argumentation visualization software.

Apparently CSAV can be traced to the merging of argumentation visualization (from law and philosophy) with computer generated graphics. It has been used as a pedagogical tool to teach logical reasoning and as a practical tool to work through real-life tasks of deliberation and conflict (disagreement) resolution. The key difference of AGORA-net as compared to other CSAV software applications is the ability to function as a network in a shared web environment. Thus the PI claims that "AGORA-net provides an online-infrastructure in which everybody can develop arguments for positions, recommendations, or theses, or can contribute to debates with further arguments or counterarguments" leading to a "World-Wide Argument Web".

Whether or not CSAV is effective in promoting logical reasoning among students or in creating an environment for the resolution of real-life arguments and deliberations is perhaps open to debate, but it is not at the core of the following comments. The concerns that follow raise issues that should be considered in funding.

Assuming that CSAV software can assist teaching and learning in certain branches of philosophy (those concerned with logical reasoning and argumentation) and in areas such as law "in which the construction of arguments plays a crucial role" a further question is how applicable CSAV software will be to other areas, particularly academic collaboration among researchers. It may be that "philosophers all over the world, and eventually everybody who needs tools for individual and collaborative construction of justifications" could use it. But I am not sure who, within the Humanities and Social Sciences might use this software in collaborative ventures. That is, given its formalism I do not see AGORA or other CSAV-type of application as a tool for collaborative research and writing though it might be used in a network manner to resolve more formally structured issues of disagreement (e.g., in a business or legal setting). Indeed, it seems that many of the case studies in Visualizing Argumentation by Kirschner, Shum and Carr focus on collaboration, legal argumentation, deliberation, and industrial environments, not the Humanities beyond use in particular classroom settings.

The project will take CSAV software from web-based to network and thus faciliate work in a non-face-to-face environment. Beside this the strengths seem to like in the traditional areas in which CSAV has been used: philosophy and law in the academic disciplines and deliberation and accord in non-academic settings. My personal experience in large-scale interdisciplinary collaboration is that there is certainly a problem in communication and deliberation. Often these take the form of continual emails that quickly tangle into a web of messages with no clear progression. However, this same type of deliberation is hard to formalize into argument structure. Thus I see AGORA-net more as a pedagogical tool for non-face-to-face learning in very specific fields or for non-face-to-face deliberation again, in particular and limited domains.

Overview

Intellectual significance: The creation of CSAV software for network application is interesting and potentially important.

Impact on research and technology: The greatest impact will apparently be in pedagogy.

Innovation: The technology is a continuation of existing software into a network environment.

Proposal development: The proposal is well presented and argued, though again it seems that the potential users might be more limited than claimed.

Feasibility; Highly feasible.

Qualifications: Excellent qualifications of the PI.