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The National Forensic Association is devoted to both education and competitive excellence in intercollegiate speech and debate.

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Editor's Note

In our new roles as editors of this journal, we express our gratitude to our immediate predecessors, R. Randolph Richardson and Kathy Brittain Richardson. We begin our journey with the final challenge they issued in their "Editors' Note" in the Spring of 2016. A little over a year ago, they reminded all of us that "as programs face funding challenges across the country and as full-time faculty appointments become less common, it is imperative that we continue to demonstrate that the field of forensics is one integrally tied to teaching, learning and the creation of knowledge." Indeed, the need to demonstrate the value of forensics to the larger academic community (and the world in general) has never been greater. As budget cuts slice ever-closer to the bone, as students are tempted to invest their available time in newly diverse options, and as the value of a college education itself comes under increasing attack, it's crucial that we understand what our activity has to offer. It's not enough to offer programs that are just "fun" or "collect lots of trophies" or "have P.R. value." We need to demonstrate that we have something substantive to offer. We need to understand ourselves, and be able to explain to others, the transformative power of our activity. Doing so can equip us to defend our programs to those who would put them on the sidelines. Doing so can enable us to respond to the call to assess ourselves and demonstrate valuable learning outcomes. Doing so can energize our community by reminding us of why we're doing what we're doing, and why all the hours we invest in forensics are "worth it."

The essays in this journal all contribute to this quest. Karen Morris, the current president of the National Forensic Association, offers a frame for this issue by providing a "State of the Organization" overview. In addition to outlining recent changes, she also highlights some crucial ways in which the organization continues to express its distinctive identity, including its dedication to forensics pedagogy in the hands of forensics educators.

The emphasis on pedagogy is at the heart of our lead article, an outstanding longitudinal study conducted by Rogers, Freeman, and Rennels. As the latest fruit of a research effort begun in 1997, they assess the long-term benefits of participation in debate. In addition to providing a useful and detailed review of the research done by others, they employ the quantitative-research approach to argue that people now fifteen years out of college continue to demonstrate the transformative power of debate in their lives. Their data, which compares debaters to non-debaters, connects participation in debate to higher levels of social responsibility, psychological adjustment, cultural tolerance and understanding, positive moral/ethical commitments, improved professional life and career choices, and long-term benefits to society. This research equips us with statistical support for our oft-asserted claim that forensics really does change lives.

Building on the theme of forensics changing lives, White employs a different research approach (autoethnography) to explore a different set of learning outcomes: the humanistic values associated with participating in Individual Events. In the process of exploring the impact of our activity on the personal growth needs of our students, White argues (among other things) that our activity can help students to learn self-authorship, gain increased self-confidence, and shape the direction of their lives. While in the past forensics researchers have tended to talk about various forms of cognitive learning, White draws our attention to the importance of affective learning as well.

An emphasis on affective learning continues in the exploratory analysis of Young, Henry, and Koch. They explore the relationship between competing in Individual Events and learning emotional competence, and challenge us to find ways to collect more data and do further analysis in order to learn more about this link. Again, pursuing research efforts that query the accuracy of commonly held perceptions is a path we must tread in order to better defend our activity.

We close with an essay by Richardson which is both inspiring and cautionary in its exploration of the role of the forensics educator. Given that our students are engaged in an activity that can and does change their lives, we need to recognize the power of those potential transformations at the same time that we respect the individual integrity and personhood of those students we are helping to transform. As both Spider-Man and the Supreme Court remind us, “with great power comes great responsibility.”

Finally, we also express our great appreciation to Alexander Pabon, formerly a student at North Central College and now a student at the University of Kentucky Law School. Alexander served as the editorial research assistant for this issue of the journal, and we deeply appreciate his painstaking, detail-oriented, and cheerfully completed work.

Dr. Richard E. Paine
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National Forensic Association: An Update from the President

Karen Morris

University of Wisconsin – Eau Claire

If we want things to stay as they are, things will have to change.

–Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa

As I begin my third year as president of the National Forensic Association (NFA), I am in awe of the vast amount of work we have done as an organization in the most recent years. Every three weeks, the National Council convenes on a conference call that usually lasts for an hour and a half. At the end of the agenda for these meetings are both a list of items that we have completed that day and a list of items we have yet to tackle. I am motivated by how we continue to move items from the “to do” list to the “now done” list. In completing the long list of tasks set forth for both the council and the community as a whole, the goal is not to make changes to the organization for change’s sake, but instead to make sure the NFA continues to meet the organization’s purpose in an ever-changing world.

As stated in the NFA Constitution (art. II, § 1), “the purpose of the association is to promote pedagogy, scholarship, and competition in intercollegiate forensics and to sponsor the annual championship tournament in Individual Events and Lincoln-Douglas Competition in Intercollegiate forensics.” At the heart of promoting pedagogy (teaching), scholarship, and competition is the overriding theme that I believe encompasses the NFA: the concept of inclusion. What I mean by inclusion is that the NFA is an organization that welcomes all, no matter the size of the program, coaching philosophy, region-based differences and/or competition goals; we strive to promote the concept of communication as a productive sharing of ideas and argumentation. As the National Championship Tournament is only a portion of what the organization does, the NFA encourages active participation from individual members and institutional member programs who both attend and do not attend the tournament. And so, as I recap the vast number of changes occurring in the most recent years within the NFA, my hope is to show that change has not been radical, but rather in line with the organization’s vision of inclusion in teaching, scholarship, and competition.

Teaching/Pedagogy

With such a time-intensive activity as forensics, it comes as no surprise that the coach burnout rate is high. We have witnessed, especially in the last ten years, a rise in the number of young coaches who briefly shine in this activity and then depart as quickly as they came. If they view forensics primarily through a competitive lens, it is so very easy for young coaches to become myopic in their view of the activity and focus solely on the success of their own teams. In doing so, the wins and losses take a toll over a very short amount of time.

The NFA realizes we are doing a disservice to our young professionals when we treat them merely as coaches. We realize we should be training and mentoring forensics educators. A forensics educator is one who comprehends the activity beyond their own

team and its competitive successes. Forensics educators become advocates for the forensics community. The NFA mission is to mentor forensics educators and we have been pushing toward this vehemently for at least the past seven years. This push began with the NFA Pedagogy Report in 2010. Under the Direction of NFA Tournament Director Dr. Brendan Kelly, several members of the National Council created a document establishing learning outcomes for forensics activities. This forward way of thinking concerning forensics and the creation of shared outcomes across the activity for all programs highlights the NFA's burgeoning commitment to forensics education. Training these educators can occur at any level of experience and it can begin by encouraging coaches to serve the greater forensics community. Past NFA President Larry Schnoor has for many years been providing this type of leadership mentoring in intercollegiate forensics by appointing and training a variety of the NFA tournament directors and *National Forensic Journal* editors, in addition to mentoring the NFA council members, and then graciously allowing others to take the reins while continuing to quietly offer advice.

In the last few years, the makeup of the NFA committees has shifted from being mostly comprised of directors of forensics to a mix of directors, assistant directors, graduate students, and even undergraduate students. The last email distribution list identifying the current slate of NFA committee members included the addresses of 59 participants, all volunteers who stepped forward as willing to serve the general activity. The creation of five new ad hoc committees in conjunction with the nine standing committees allows NFA forensics educators the opportunity to become active in creating the future of the NFA and the activity. A recently-created ad hoc committee which focuses especially on leading the activity as a whole is the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee which has been excellent at keeping its eyes on the world as a whole and teaching the community about issues in this current environment.

The newest ad hoc committee is one we are really excited about, as its membership is comprised of only undergraduate students and chaired by the two student representatives to the council. This ad hoc committee, whose duty is to oversee the student narrative project, is charged with creating an archive of student stories from current competitors who speak to the value of forensics on the intercollegiate level. These stories will be shared with our sister organizations so that high-school students from all backgrounds can be exposed to the narrative of intercollegiate forensics outside of the recruitment venue. Making the activity more accessible for all is the goal of the forensics educator, and the ongoing work and diverse membership of these NFA committees is moving toward changing forensics coaches into forensics educators.

Scholarship

Promoting scholarship and encouraging the sharing of forensics research has always been central to the core of NFA. Although the NFA leadership has constantly been supportive of and in attendance at the Developmental Conferences on Individual Events, the last few conferences (2008, 2010) were inundated with the NFA leadership and the NFA members as promoters, organizers, facilitators, and attendees. The last two Developmental Conferences uniquely promoted attendance by graduate and undergraduate students alike in order to encourage inclusion of all forensics educators

whether at the beginning or ending of their careers. Currently, the planning of a long-overdue Developmental Conference is in the beginning stages, being discussed by many of the NFA leadership as we continue to try to create opportunities to share forensics scholarship and research with the wide forensics community. The Developmental Conferences are few and far between, but the annual opportunity to share forensics research is promoted by the NFA-sponsored sessions at the National Communication Association (NCA) National Conference. These paper and panel discussions are some of the most well-attended forensics panels at each year's gathering.

In addition to the organization's support for Developmental Conferences and NFA-sponsored NCA panels, the strong presence of the *National Forensic Journal (NFJ)* speaks clearly to the identity of the NFA as more than just an organization who hosts a national tournament. The *NFJ* has been in existence since the spring of 1983 and has produced 34 distinct issues under a variety of editors, all of whom have adhered to the stated purpose of the journal: "To facilitate systematic discussion among forensic educators and students in order to improve the quality of the educational experience." The *NFJ* leads the way in forensics scholarship. As a peer-reviewed journal, the publication speaks to what the previous editors, Drs. Randy and Kathy Richardson (2016), referred to in their closing editorial: "In a field bound to adjudication, the willingness to engage in the peer review process demonstrates that we as forensic educators practice what we preach to our students and colleagues" (p. 3). In trying to encourage as many forensics educators as possible to take advantage of sharing their research by publishing in the *NFJ*, the current editors, Dr. Richard Paine and Dr. Emily Cramer, have created a new website for the journal. Not only does this website spell out the submission process, but it also provides all past issues of the *NFJ* to both NFA members and non-members alike. Open access to NFA research clearly reiterates the NFA mission of inclusion.

Although the NFA is working towards mentoring forensics educators, the mentoring of forensics scholars is a bit more difficult. The challenge is creating the desire to publish. Even though the forensics community is thoughtful and active in the planning and preparation of presentations at conferences, we are not as actively engaged in the process of subsequently guiding those conference presentations forward through the rigors of seeking and securing their publication. The difficulty that the most recent and current editors of the journal are encountering is the community's general lack of motivation, and/or time, and/or energy, and/or desire to publish. Towards this end, the NFA research committee has been charged with developing avenues for encouraging young forensic educators to write, research, and publish their forensics works. The current and future changes in the manner in which the NFA approaches scholarship are exciting as we strive to more fully engage forensics scholars across the activity.

Competition

Probably the most discussed changes occurring within the NFA involve recent adjustments to the National Championship Tournament. These changes are noteworthy in that they are, for many of our members, the most visible. The distinguishing feature of the Championship Tournament had, for many years, been the fact that there were four preliminary rounds, quarterfinals, semifinals and finals. The presence of four preliminary

rounds, along with the lack of Dramatic Interpretation and Program Oral Interpretation, have traditionally been what some said distinguished the NFA National Championship from the American Forensics Association National Individual Events Tournament (AFA-NIET). But these distinguishing features have changed. In 2008, Dramatic Interpretation became the NFA Championship's tenth event; in 2016, students competed in only three preliminary rounds; and in 2018, it seems likely that Program Oral Interpretation will be added as the 11th event.

So how is the NFA National Championship distinct from the AFA-NIET? As this question seems to arise quite a few times in online discussion posts, here are just a few of the items that make the NFA National Championship distinct:

- Lincoln Douglas Debate
- Students can enter Pentathlon and the top 15 placements are recognized
- Team Sweepstakes Awards (Open, Presidents I, II, III, and Community College)
- Octafinals
- Four patterns of events
- No restriction on entries per student
- No restriction on entries per team
- Novice Finals
- States affiliations (not districts) are used to limit judge use in out-rounds
- General business meetings for all members to attend and participate in discussions
- Each member school has a vote
- Committees comprised of members and not just elected officials
- Graduate Student Representative on the National Council
- Distinctive seeding process in out-rounds
- Sweepstakes points earned in out-rounds
- Impromptu prompts vary year to year
- Distinctive qualification procedure (based on the number of schools present, number of entries in the event and the number of times placing in out rounds)

All of these specific items make the NFA National Championship a uniquely different tournament from any other national tournament and specifically distinct from the AFA-NIET. The Championship Tournament has always been one that promotes team effort, encourages extended student participation, awards programs of varying sizes and focuses on member input. The most recent changes to the Championship Tournament, namely replacing the fourth round with an octafinal round, offering novice finals in all events, and awarding the Community College Sweepstakes, are all adjustments to the Championship Tournament that have been made in order to promote inclusion in competition.

Additional Inclusion Measures

Membership in the NFA does not require participation at the National Championship. There are two membership categories for the NFA, as seen below.

Individual Membership or Patron Membership

Receives *National Forensic Journal*

Receives all mailings and newsletters

Receives NFA Final Round video links

Can serve on NFA committees

Can serve on National Council (must abide by school conflict restraints if applicable)

Institutional Membership

Receives *National Forensic Journal*

Receives all mailings and newsletters

Receives NFA Final Round video links

Receives voting rights (the designated voting delegate for the institution will receive ballots)

Registration fee waived for NFA National Championship

NFA has always had individual members and institutional members who do not attend the NCA Conference and/or the NFA Championship tournament. In the past, since organizational business has been voted on at the general business meetings hosted at these venues, members who were not in attendance were not able to fully participate in the business of the NFA. In order to better include these non-attending members, we have recently made some changes. In 2016, we began uploading the recordings of the final rounds of the Championship Tournament onto YouTube and providing that educational link to our members. With this new practice, the number of schools becoming members who did not attend the National Championship Tournament began to rise. In order to ensure that all members would have access to discussions and votes, 2017 brings electronic voting, Facebook discussion groups, and streamlined election of officers to the NFA. These new practices ensure that we include all member schools in the decision-making process for the organization they have chosen to support.

We have witnessed quite a bit of transformation in the most recent years in the NFA. However, I believe wholeheartedly that the changes are in line with the NFA philosophy of inclusion in pedagogy, scholarship, and competition. I am proud of the direction we are moving in as an organization. Ultimately, it is the same direction we have always been moving in, perhaps just with some adjustments for organizational growth.

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Where Are They Now(?): Two Decades of Longitudinal Outcome Assessment Data Linking Positive Student, Graduate Student, Career and Life Trajectory Decisions to Participation in Intercollegiate Competitive Debate

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This monograph is the conclusion of an empirical, longitudinal research project reporting statistically significant differences between debate and non-debate study populations linking undergraduate debate participation with positive correlated relationships in five areas: *academic success; social responsibility; psychological adjustment; cultural tolerance; and, moral/ethical commitment*. Over the two decades, the positive associations between debate participation and post-graduation skills has been consistent. A further extension of the original research—outcomes and skills that are targeted towards more long-range benefits to self and society—is reported. The study concludes that there is strong empirical evidence to document the link between participation in forensics programs and the host institution’s achievement of its educational mission.

In his critical review of behavioral research within the field of debate participation and resulting student outcomes, Kenneth Anderson (1974) observed: “In an age of educational accountability, the forensics community is and will increasingly be called upon to tell what it seeks to do, how well it accomplishes its goals, and what other effects it has. Surprisingly, there seems little interest in such research at this time” (p. 155). Despite this observation, and the advancement of rigorous models with which to develop credible forensic research from a valid behavioral perspective from early critics (Anderson, 1974; Baird, 1950; McGlone, 1974), the vast majority of published research continues to rely on anecdotal evidence or quasi-statistical analysis most often based upon single “snap-shot in time” self-reports with dubious validity when relied upon to make comparisons over time to more generalized forensic student populations. For example, though many articles credit competitive debate with teaching critical thinking, Hill (1993), Horn & Underberg (1993), and Greenstreet (1993) all conclude that empirical evidence to support the claim is slight, at best. The impact of this lack of empirical research is advanced by Billings (2011) who laments: “[I]t is possible that the dearth of scholarly investigation in the area (forensics) hinders arguments to maintain forensic programs at a time of declining financial support for higher education” (p. 111).

In 1997, Rogers (2002, 2007) launched an ambitious cohort-based study to specifically measure student outcomes from forensic participation with direct, empirical comparisons between a debate and non-debate group over an extended period through college, graduate school, professional careers, and life-trajectory decisions. This monograph offers a continuation of those earlier studies in order to provide almost two decades of empirical performance data and outcomes. In order for the reader to place the current study in context, it is helpful to review a brief update of the applicable literature and a brief explanation of the previous two studies before attempting to interpret new data.

Review of Literature

A thorough analysis of 682 forensics books, articles, conference proceedings and convention papers was conducted by Rogers (2002, 2007) looking for consistent themes reported within the literature that supported student outcomes from participation. Several themes emerged. Probably least surprising was evidence of enhanced critical thinking skills (Beckman, 1957; Brembeck, 1949; Colbert, 1987; Cross, 1961; Gruner, Hussman & Luck, 1971; Horn & Underberg, 1993; Howell, 1943; Husman, Ware & Gruner, 1972; Jackson, 1961; Rowland, 1995; Williams, 1951; Williams et al, 2001). Forensic participation was credited with increasing public presentational skills (Colbert & Biggers, 1985; Millsap, 1998; Stenger, 1999; Williams et al, 2001); teaching public advocacy and social responsibility; (Bartenan, 1998; Brand 2000; Brownlee, 1978; Derryberry, 1998; Williams et al, 2001), and offering excellent professional training (Colbert & Biggers, 1985; Hill, 1983; Schnieder, 1984; Spangle & Knapp, 1996). It also increases knowledge, self-confidence, poise, and a wide range of skills necessary for academic success (Bartenan, 1998; Colbert & Biggers, 1985; Derryberry, 1998; Hill, 1983; Jones, 1994; Williams et al, 2001).

Pundits argue that debate teaches social responsibility and advocacy (Bartenan & Frank, 1994; Freely, 1996; Hollihan & Baaske, 1994; Jones, 1994; Rowland, 1995) and enhances a student's academic and professional abilities (Carleton, 1949; Colbert & Biggers, 1985; Derryberry, 1998; Hill, 1983; Jones, 1994; Level, 1957; Pratt, 1990; Schneider, 1984; Spangle & Knapp, 1996; Stenger, 1999; Stenger & Roth, 1998; Walker, 1971; Williams, et al 2001). In addition, researchers (Bartenan, 1998; Derryberry, 1998; Millsap, 1998) have concluded that debate teaches important leadership skills. As Bartenan, (1998) concludes: “[debate] fosters leadership skills of reflection, connectedness and advocacy. Forensics programs are valuable models of learner-centered pedagogy and underutilized resources for diversity education on the liberal arts campus” (p. 1).

A cursory review of the current literature seems to both echo and reinforce earlier research claims. Research by Kuyper (2011) identifies and supports both academic student outcomes (critical thinking, discipline knowledge and skills, communication competency, and integrity / values) and humanistic student outcomes (competition, team dynamics, and experiential education). This view neatly divides the current research into two general themes: 1) outcomes and skills that are immediately of use to the student in a practical day-to-day context; and 2) outcomes and skills that are targeted towards more long-range benefits to self and society.

First, on the immediacy of skills, Lux (2014) observes that forensic participation enhances future job skills, critical thinking, leadership, communication competency, teamwork, and an enhanced worldview and understanding of world events. Quenette, et. al. (2007) report enhanced academic success for forensic participants. Jensen and Jensen (2006) argue convincingly that participation in forensics enhances communication competency in the areas of mentoring, cultural communication, and conflict management.

Second, several researchers have begun to research and report on the value of forensics in teaching more long-range skills that create a sense of what Freeman and Rogers (2013) regard as the “whole person” and the resulting benefits to society. Morris (2011) further expands on the “whole person” effect by arguing that forensics plays a role

in teaching our students to not only be “good competitors” but “good human beings” who – through our assistance – “will be better equipped to be of service to their families, their communities, their culture and the world” (p. 1). Farmer (2014) would add a sense of identity and empowerment that gives participants the will, skills, and self-concept necessary to succeed in a wide variety of life tasks to include civic engagement and advocacy. Freeman and Rogers (2013) argue forensics engenders: “hope for more positive long-term benefits to the self and society as we educate our forensic students to [be citizens]” . . . and observe “many argue that forensics teaches social responsibility and advocacy on behalf of the less fortunate” (p. 4). They conclude with the suggestion that: “the pedagogic value of inclusive communities intentionally mentored to effectively pursue public service and social advocacy is a critical strategy for achieving our goal of teaching and reinforcing skill sets that extend beyond the competitive weekend and into the post forensic world” (p. 13-14). Grace (2011) advances these potential impacts by observing: “[the implementation of] service learning into forensic programs provides another way to show administration that students are learning outside the walls of the classroom and are connecting with the community . . . and [increases] the visibility of our teams, gains approval from the administration, and teaches students valuable life skills in the process” (p. 3-4). Briscoe (2009) perhaps sums it up best by arguing that teaching leadership through forensics participation: . . . “alongside co-curricular competition, promotes civic education and enhances the standard curriculum by helping students explore myriad topics from multiple angles and find the truth in each, fostering civic participation, advocating civic engagement, promoting authentic discussions on issues of real importance, and emphasizing the principles that are essential to a liberal democracy” (p. 49).

Though Rogers (2002, 2007) reported strong empirical evidence to support the immediate student outcomes and began to both identify and support the “whole person” concept through social advocacy and political participation, it would be interesting to see if evidence could be found that would better support real world outcomes of forensic participation as high impact, service learning opportunities now that the study cohort has been out of college for 15 years. Therefore, the following research questions are proposed:

- RQ1: What significant differences remain between debate and non-debate student populations in the four critical outcomes: social responsibility; psychological adjustment; cultural tolerance; and moral/ethical commitment?*
- RQ2: After almost two decades in the work force, how do the debate and non-debate groups differ in terms of demonstrating long term, positive outcomes in their professional lives?*
- RQ3: How does the data support the statement that participation in debate reinforces high-impact service learning opportunities, which result in significant differences between debate and non-debate participants in terms of long-term benefits to society?*

In order to understand the current study and place it in context, it is important to understand both the history and structure of the original studies.

Study 1

In 1997, 28 directors of forensics (DOFs) were contacted and asked to participate in assembling a cohort of debate and non-debate students for a comprehensive, longitudinal study. “The traditional difficulty in interpreting this type of research is the question of whether differences are effects or causes. Do they result from the debate experience (debate enhances critical thinking), or do they merely predict who debates (critical thinkers like to debate)?” (Rogers, 2002, p. 8). In order to address this concern, 760 first year students were identified and biographical data collected. In order to make the two groups as homogeneous as possible, and thus, isolate debate participation as independent a variable as possible, data were collated and manipulated keeping in mind the original parameters of the inclusion criteria. Based on the intake survey, comparison groups of debaters and non-debaters were constructed based on the goal of minimizing all demographic, academic, extracurricular, and social differences between the two groups. Of the original pool, 100 debate and 100 non-debate students were selected for participation in the four-year study. The comparison of the study groups is reported in Table 1 (p. 24).

Next a survey instrument was constructed by identifying 56 positive outcomes through a thorough analysis of the literature. Babbie (1992) suggests using focus groups to narrow the themes (for a full discussion see Rogers, 2002). Five themes emerged: (a) academic success; (b) social responsibility; (c) psychological adjustment; (d) cultural tolerance; and (e) moral/ethical commitment. The focus-group members submitted questions that they felt would measure each of these themes. An 84-item, Likert-scale instrument was developed. Surveys were collected at the conclusion of year one and a principle components factor analysis followed. Factors with an Eigenvalue of greater than 1.0 were retained as an independent factor by the MINEIGEN program. After the Eigenvalues were derived, the five-factor solution was confirmed by using orthogonal factor analysis with varimax rotation and then subjecting those factors to ordinary least squares confirmatory factor analysis as described in the work of Hunter and Cohen (1969). As a result, the survey instrument was validated.

The data set was divided into two groups: debate and non-debate. Once divided the scores in each of the five critical outcome areas were averaged and compared using paired *t*-tests, which is similar to a one-sample *t*-test on differences ($H_0: d = 0$ v $H_a = 0$). The higher the number of comparisons made, the greater the risk of a Type 1 error. To protect the integrity of the process, Bonferroni’s approach to multiple comparisons was used (.05 divided by 2 times the number of comparisons (154) = $\text{Prob} > |T| = .0002$). As a result, any comparison where $p < .0002$ was considered statistically significant. SPSS was used to analyze and manipulate the data set. Those results are reported in Table 2 (p. 25).

Data were collected from the debate and non-debate group at the conclusion of each of the four years (1998-2001). An analysis was performed looking for statistical differences between the groups. At the close of the four-year study, the conclusions for this study population were clear: in almost every case, in almost every area examined, participation in debate had significant positive outcomes. Even in those areas where no significant differences were found, those results were not necessarily negative. Participation in debate was not shown to significantly impact debaters’ ability to graduate

on time, stick with their major, maintain significant long-term interpersonal relationships, respect the truth, or become involved in cross-cultural relationships or activities. To the contrary, students engaged in debate participation seem to have adjusted to the social and interpersonal aspects of college life without significant exception when compared to their non-debate peers. It could be inferred that the stereotype of the maladjusted, debate nerd pining away at the extreme edge of college life was unfounded. Debaters were often better adjusted than their non-debate peers with lower rates of depression, anxiety, and feelings of being overwhelmed under pressure in addition to higher feelings of self-confidence in both their social and academic abilities.

The positive outcomes of debate participation are overwhelming for the study group, and include greater political and social awareness and participation; an increased awareness of and tolerance for intercultural differences; increased involvement in professional internships, acceptance to graduate programs, job offers at graduation; a deeper understanding and respect for ethics and the proper evaluation of evidence; and, stronger, healthier personality profiles. Debate participation, in this case, was significantly correlated with positive outcomes.

Study 2

The second study continued to collect data from the debate and non-debate cohorts at the conclusion of each of the first four years after graduation (2002-2005). Non-graduates were eliminated from both groups and natural attrition brought the *N* down from 200 to 119 who continued to participate (debate = 68; non-debate = 50).

Four of the critical outcomes remained relevant for all respondents: (a) social responsibility; (b) cultural understanding and tolerance; (d) moral and ethical issues; and, (e) psychological multipliers. Therefore, all respondents' data were included, as before, in those comparisons. However, the critical outcome of (c) academic success was only relevant for those respondents who had continued their academic careers into graduate and professional schools. Therefore, only those respondents who continued their academic careers were compared under critical outcome (c) academic success (*N* = 66 successfully completed a graduate degree by May 2005: debate=46; non-debate=20).

As in Study 1, the responses of each group for each of the critical outcomes were examined using Pearson correlations. The resulting analysis was significant. Though Study 1 reported significant differences in all five critical measures for the debate group when compared to the non-debate group, it also reported no statistical differences between groups in a few key areas. Study 2 found that four years later, most of these areas had demonstrated a significant change. There were statistically significant differences in the debate group's post-graduation experiences. The debate group reported an increased propensity to engage in cross-cultural relationships and to hold membership in cross-cultural organizations, to matriculate on time through graduate and professional programs, and to maintain long-term relationships. Debate respondents were also less likely to distort the truth or to believe in situational ethics. Therefore, Study 2 concluded that, again, in almost every case, in almost every area, forensic participation during the subject population's undergraduate experiences had led to sustained, significant positive life outcomes beyond graduation.

In addition to replicating the study looking for validation of the five critical areas, Study 2 added an additional research question focused on measuring differences in performance in their career paths and/or post-graduate education. The comparative results between the debate and non-debate cohorts are reported in Table 3 (p. 25).

The data suggests that, as was concluded in Study 1, participation in forensics during the study population's undergraduate experience is strongly correlated with increased positive outcomes; in this specific case, beyond graduation. During the additional four years of study, the debate group maintained every positive academic, social, and behavioral edge reported during the initial study period.

Additionally, there does seem to be at least some evidence that participation in forensics during a student's undergraduate experience leads to differences in performance on the job. Debate respondents reported more positive evaluations by superiors, slight increases in the rate of pay raises and promotions, and the ability to move voluntarily from one job to another. Also, those with debate experience tended to be involuntarily separated from a job less. While these findings needed further research and support, it seemed safe to conclude that at least for this study's subjects undergraduate debate participation had led to increased professional benefits during the four-year period following graduation.

Current Study

A decade-and-a-half has passed since the study cohort graduated from college, and a decade since data were collected outlining the results of their professional and career choices. In an attempt to collect current data for comparisons measuring long-term, life outcomes from their debate participation, study cohort participants were contacted. Natural attrition (invalid contact information, loss of interest, and sadly, in six cases untimely deaths) has resulted in an overall *N* of 86 participants (debate = 49; non-debate = 37) willing to continue with their participation.

Data from the 86 surveys were entered and partitioned into debate and non-debate groupings. As the survey instrument was previously validated, the statistical analysis of the data was replicated using paired *t*-tests: the identical approach used in Study 1 and Study 2. Again, to protect the integrity of the process against Type 1 error, Bonferroni's approach to multiple comparisons was used (.05 divided by 2 times the number of comparisons (154) = Prob > |*T*| = .0002). As a result, any comparison where *p* < .0002 was considered statistically significant. SPSS was used to analyze and manipulate the data set.

Results & Discussion

Research Question #1

Four of the original five critical outcomes were examined for statistically significant differences between the debate and non-debate cohorts. The critical outcome academic success was dropped due to its current irrelevance to the study population and their outcomes. The results are reported in Table 4 (p. 26).

Table 4 does not report correlated relationships, but simply significant differences in the way the subject groups responded to the statements measuring the four critical

outcome areas. The obvious differences in perception are interesting. Once again, significant differences between the groups were confirmed. For ease of interpretation by the reader each of the four critical areas is reported separately. For exact definitions of the critical outcomes and the intent of the subareas, outcomes and skills that each cluster of questions targeted refer to Rogers (2002).

The first critical area examined was *social responsibility*. As in the previous studies, the debate group maintained significant positive differences in all four of the measures. Debaters were much more likely to vote, to participate in social advocacy, and to volunteer to serve in social programs. Non-debaters slightly closed the gap between the two groups in these three areas, but not significantly so. Debaters widened the significance gap in the area of their propensity to volunteer for political campaigns and movements; but again, not significantly so. In this case, what is of note is that even after another ten years had passed, debaters continued to be significantly more engaged in the area of social responsibility than their non-debate peers. Those results are reported in Table 5 (p. 26).

The second critical outcome the authors addressed was *cultural tolerance and understanding*. The debate group not only maintained significantly higher scores in all three measurement areas, but continued the trend reported by Rogers (2012) further widening the gap between themselves and their non-debate peers. Participants with debate experience were significantly more likely to maintain cross-cultural relationships, maintain active membership in cross-cultural organizations, and to reject classical definitions based upon social norming reflecting a significantly deeper appreciation and commitment to cultural understanding and tolerance of differences. Those results are reported in Table 6 (p. 26).

Psychological multipliers was the third outcome analyzed. The debate group maintained its significant dominance in exhibiting positive outlooks and behaviors that assist in coping with the everyday challenges of life. Both groups reported increases in their rates of feelings of depression or anxiety. However, those with debate participation in their backgrounds reported significantly lower-rate increases than their non-debate peers. Some of these feelings could be attributed to the changes within the lives of both study groups. With an average age of 39, life has become more complex with spouses, children, mortgages, and careers. The debate group members were significantly more likely to express feelings of confidence in their communication skills and their ability to maintain long-term relationships than their non-debate peers. Three areas of growth, where the debate group continued to widen the gap between themselves and their non-debate peers, were in expressing feelings of confidence and maintaining a positive outlook, maintaining flexibility (seeing things from a number of perspectives), and confidence in their ability to communicate effectively. Those relationship are reported in Table 7 (p. 27).

The final critical outcome examined was *Moral / Ethical*. Again, the debate group maintained significant differences in each of the four subscales. Both the debate and non-debate groups reported slight increases in their belief in using situational ethics, though debaters remained significantly less likely to do so. Debaters widened the gap by reporting themselves as being significantly less likely to distort the truth than their non-debate peers. Non-debaters slightly narrowed the gap on their debate peers in the area of ignoring conflicting evidence, though again, debaters were significantly less likely to do

so. Both groups were less likely to maintain a belief in the just society tradition when compared to previous outcomes; however, debaters remained significantly more likely to maintain their belief. Table 8 (p. 27) highlights the differences between groups.

In summary, Tables 5 through 8 report significant positive differences in each of the four critical outcomes measured. Thus, Research Question 1, what significant differences remain between debate and non-debate student populations in four critical outcomes: social responsibility; psychological adjustment; cultural tolerance; and moral/ethical commitment(?) can be addressed. For the past 18 years, the data confirms that the positive outcomes of debate participation are significant and persistent for the study group. They include: greater political and social awareness; a stronger commitment to, belief in and willingness to take an active part in the process of socio-political change; an increased awareness of and tolerance for intercultural differences; a deeper understanding and respect for a personal code of ethics and the proper evaluation of argument and evidence; and stronger behavioral coping mechanisms which resulted in healthier personality profiles.

Research Question #2

More than a decade has passed since the cohort groups were first asked to provide insight into their career and professional choices. Though the debate group had initially reported a more positive foundation as reported in Table 3 (p. 25) above, would they continue to demonstrate more measurable positive outcomes as compared to their non-debate peers in their professional life? As in Study 2, respondents were asked to complete the same survey with slightly different wording. Where the original survey asked for information related to “how many times since graduation ...,” the newer version asked for the same information, but with the wording “how many times within the last ten years.” The differences were interesting and reported in Table 9 (p. 28).

The differences reported in Table 9 would seem to reflect that those who had participated in debate continued to benefit from measurable positive outcomes in their professional careers as compared to their non-debate peers, thus answering research question number 2. Respondents from the debate cohort reported a significant increase in their ability to make voluntary employment moves, increased promotion rates, an increase in the frequency of pay raises, and a higher overall sense of happiness with their career choices as compared to their non-debate peers. Both groups reported an increase in involuntary employment changes, with the debate group experiencing approximately one involuntary change in the last ten years as compared to slightly over three involuntary changes for their non-debate peers. Employer/supervisor evaluation comments were similar to those made a decade ago, though debaters added “project outcomes” and “leadership” as consistent comments in the positive notations while their non-debate peers added “work product” and “teamwork” to their evaluation comments. It is interesting to note that further investigation of this phenomena might lend insight into the current types of positions and work that each group is performing. Those with former debate participation seem to be leading projects while their non-debate peers are producing work products as members of teams.

In summary of the area of *professional choices*, for those study participants with debate participation in their undergraduate experience, the conclusions from the data seem clear: over the past decade, the debate cohort has further widened the gap between

themselves and their non-debate peers in terms of positive outcomes and professional opportunities in terms of better pay increases, a greater ability to make voluntary job changes, higher promotions rates, and greater happiness and satisfaction with their career choices.

Research Question #3

How does the data support the statement that participation in debate reinforces high-impact service learning opportunities, which result in significant differences between debate and non-debate participants in terms of long-term benefits to society? In their systematic literature review, Robinson and Clemens (2014) conclude that numerous sources (Berman, 2006; Britt, 2012; National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2011; Levesque-Bristol, Knapp, & Fisher, 2010; Walker, 2011) lend credibility to the observation that there is a strong case to be made for the link between service-learning and forensics because it offers students a structured and academically rigorous way to engage in community betterment. While there is no question that debate is a high-impact educational experience or that there is an increasing trend among forensic coaches and professionals to incorporate service-learning into their pedagogic approach to forensic participation (see Briscoe, 2009; Farmer, 2014; Freeman & Rogers, 2013; Grace, 2011; Morris, 2011), the question remains: is there empirical evidence that debate participation fosters lessons that lead to long-term benefits to self and society as a whole? We would argue that this longitudinal study lays a foundation for tentative support and warrants further analysis.

For the past 18 years, the data confirms that the positive outcomes associated with debate participation are significant and persistent for the study group when compared to their non-debate peers, which include: (a) a greater political and social awareness; (b) a deeper and broader world view; (c) a stronger commitment to, belief in, and willingness to take an active part in the process of socio-political change; and, (d) an increased awareness of and tolerance for intercultural differences. These attitudes and behaviors were reflected through their increased propensity to: attend political and social meetings; to vote even in minor, local elections; become involved in socio-political issues and causes by volunteering their time and donating resources to political and social advocacy campaigns; seek and maintain membership in cross-cultural relationships and organizations; and a deeper understanding and commitment to social issues and the complexities of diverse opinions. The debate group also demonstrated a deeper understanding and respect for a personal code of ethics than their non-debate peers as they reported less dishonesty in their dealings with others on a personal and professional level, less belief and support for situational ethics, and a significantly stronger belief in working towards a more just world. These outcomes are specifically linked through empirical, longitudinal data over an 18-year period directly to participation in intercollegiate, competitive debate. Members of the non-debate control group were significantly behind their debate peers in almost every category at every data collection point in the study from year one through year 18.

Limitations

As with any research of this nature, relying on self-report data when comparing two populations may lead to some limitations. For example, the tendency towards a self-serving bias might lead one to expect the subjects to be more forgiving of their personal distortions of the truth; and thus, report higher levels of honesty than are true. Similarly, the subjects may be tempted by the self-report nature of the survey to inflate both their commitment to and the hours contributed towards social and political advocacy. This is somewhat mitigated by the anonymity of the research. However, in both cases, even if the researchers assume some degree of self-serving bias from the debate and non-debate groups, it is interesting to note that there remains a significant difference between the groups that maintains consistency over almost two decades of research. For the two groups, their perceptions and self-reported behaviors and attitudes remain profoundly different.

Additionally, it should be noted that the two groups may represent a population of high achievers for members of both groups. The selection criteria for inclusion in the debate and non-debate study populations conducted in Study 1 was quite rigorous. Participants were selected from among 760 applicants. An intake survey was constructed with the “goal of minimizing all demographic, academic, extracurricular and social differences between the two groups . . . attempted to address any significant differences between the two groups of student participants which addressed demographics, high school academic, extracurricular and social backgrounds” (Rogers, 2002, p. 7). One-hundred participants were selected to represent each group. Rogers (2002) advised caution regarding the potential bias of the directors of forensics who were responsible for selecting and nominating potential study participants. That same caution is advanced here when making more generalized comparisons to other collegiate populations. The students originally selected for inclusion represented high achievers. Both groups continued to be high achievers when compared to their peers. Forty-six of the original 100 debaters and 40 of the original 100 non-debaters completed a graduate degree or advanced professional education. This is high when compared to the general population. In their U.S. Census Bureau publication, Ryan and Bauman (2016) reported approximately 12% of the U.S. population held graduate degrees. They noted: “educational attainment [varies] by age, sex, race and Hispanic origin, nativity, and disability status” (p.1). Given that the survey participants were selected in 1998, when the demographics of debate participants reflected a more significant bias towards white males, further caution is advised when making comparisons and assumptions for current populations of either debate or non-debate students which would reflect more diverse debate and student populations. Further research, therefore, is needed that would bring this type of longitudinal study into more contemporary focus.

Conclusion

This study reports two decades of empirical research that provides significant, correlated relationships between debate participation and positive long-term outcomes for both the individual and society. In an age where administrators find themselves forced to make programmatic decisions due to dwindling financial resources and commitments from state and federal legislative bodies, strong empirical evidence is absolutely critical to informing their decision making. As we advance the argument to maintain and expand

forensics programs, we must be able to articulate the strong demonstrable link between participation in forensics and the satisfaction of the institution's educational mission. We have an obligation to inform them of the critical link between their primary purpose for existence and what we teach and achieve through competition. Participation on speech and debate teams offers an opportunity to teach not only discipline-specific skill sets within the curriculum, but to uniquely extend education beyond the walls of the classroom in high-impact learning experiences that teach and foster a life-long commitment to the understanding of the self, others who may reflect diverse backgrounds and opinions, and our role as citizens through social responsibility and advocacy. The impacts to the self and society are potentially world changing.

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Tables

Table 1
Study Group Comparisons

Category	Debate (<i>n</i> = 100)	Non-Debate (<i>n</i> = 100)
Gender		
Male	63	60
Female	37	40
Ethnicity		
White	71	70
Black	9	13
Asian	12	10
Hispanic	7	5
Other	1	2
High School		
Public	75	73
Private	25	27
ACT	23.6	24.1
SAT	1126	1120
GPA	3.14	3.21
Income	\$63, 587	\$69,117
Major		
Liberal Arts	28	37
Science	17	22
Business	11	24
Pre-Professional	34	17
Hours Pursued	17	18
Employment		
Part-time	41	53
>Part-time	7	11
Scholarship/Financial Aid		
Partial	47	53
Half	71	73
Full	88	80

Notes: ¹Average yearly household income; ²Pre-Law, Criminal Justice, Pre-Med; ³Reported as total numbers: read as 47 received at least partial scholarships or financial aid, 71 received at least half-time (of which those 47 would be included); 88 received full-time financial assistance (of which the 71 would be included).

Table 2
Response Comparisons for Statistical Significance, 1997

Critical Outcomes	Debate (n = 100) Comparison, p value	Non-Debate (n = 100) Comparison, p value
Factor 1: Academic success	+1.675, 0.0001	+0.997, 0.0001
Factor 2: Social responsibility	+1.315, 0.0001	+0.436, 0.0001
Factor 3: Psychological adjustment	+1.876, 0.0001	+0.195, 0.0001
Factor 4: Cultural tolerance/underst.	+0.963, 0.0001	+0.651, 0.0001
Factor 5: Moral/ethical issues	+0.539, 0.0001	+0.139, 0.0001

Notes: All values represent means. Positive values equal positive relationships.

Table 3
Career and Professional Choices

Question	Debate (n = 100)	Non-Debate (n = 100)
Did you have a job offer in your field after graduation?	75%, 51/68	55%, 28/51
How many times since graduation have you:		
Changed employment voluntarily?	2.2	1.7
Changed employment involuntarily?	0.5	1.3
Been promoted?	2.3	1.8
Experienced an increase in pay?	2.6	2.1
Have you been evaluated by a superior in your job?	92%, yes	94%, yes
Was the evaluation positive?	73%, yes	61%, yes
According to the evaluations, what factor(s) contributed most to a positive evaluation?	Communication skills Ability to think and analyze	Work product Social
Was the evaluation negative?	25%	40%
According to the evaluations, what factor(s) contributed most to a negative evaluation?	Social Deadlines	Social Poor work product Communication skills
Overall, how would you rate your happiness with your career choice?	7.6	6.1

Notes: Social, in the negative sense, meant that the respondent had some difficulty getting along with a co-worker or superior. Social in the non-debate positive sense meant that the respondent was praised for being a team-player or for getting along well with co-workers. Happiness was rated on a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being low and 10 being high.

Table 4

Response Comparisons for Statistical Significance, 2005 and Current Study

Critical Outcomes	Debate (<i>n</i> = 100)	Non-Debate (<i>n</i> = 100)
	(Comparison value 2005) Current study, <i>p</i> value	(Comparison value 2005) Current study, <i>p</i> value
Factor 2: Social responsibility	(+1.517)+1.697, 0.0001	(+1.231)+0.991, 0.0001
Factor 3: Psychological adjustment	(+0.911)+2.004, 0.0001	(+0.391)+0.983, 0.0001
Factor 4: Cultural tolerance/underst.	(+1.445)+1.817, 0.0001	(+0.513)+0.583, 0.0001
Factor 5: Moral/ethical issues	(+1.190)+1.583, 0.0001	(+0.489)+0.397, 0.0001

Notes: All values represent means. Positive values equal positive relationships.

Table 5

*18-year Consolidated Comparison between Debate and Non-Debate Groups:
Social Responsibility*

Critical Outcome	Study 1		Study 2		Current Study	
	Undergrad 1998–2001		Grad + Beyond 2002–5		Debate	Non-Debate
	Debate	Non-Debate	Debate	Non-Debate		
Propensity to vote	+0.617	+0.113	+0.760	+0.121	+0.918	+0.541
Propensity towards social volunteerism	+0.237	+0.198	+0.311	+0.175	+0.487	+0.271
Propensity towards political volunteerism	+0.818	+0.101	+0.762	+0.079	+0.801	+0.141
Propensity for participation in social activism	+0.837	+0.459	+0.812	+0.215	+0.832	+0.310

Table 6

*18-year Consolidated Comparison between Debate and Non-Debate Groups:
Cultural Tolerance and Understanding*

Critical Outcome	Study 1		Study 2		Current Study	
	Undergrad 1998–2001		Grad + Beyond 2002–5		Debate	Non-Debate
	Debate	Non-Debate	Debate	Non-Debate		
Enrollment in cross-cultural coursework	+0.259	+0.193	+0.357	+0.226	NA	NA
Maintain cross-cultural relationships	No significant difference		+0.259	+0.131	+0.417	+0.205
Involvement in cross-cultural organizations	No significant difference		+0.352	+0.210	+0.687	+0.236
Reject classical definition of social norming	+0.817	+0.391	+0.739	+0.219	+0.894	+0.310

Table 7

*18-year Consolidated Comparison between Debate and Non-Debate Groups:
Psychological Multipliers*

Critical Outcome	Study 1		Study 2		Current Study	
	Undergrad 1998–2001		Grad + Beyond 2002–5		Non-Debate	
	Debate	Non-Debate	Debate	Non-Debate	Debate	Non-Debate
Propensity for depression/anxiety	+0.097	+0.413	+0.141	+0.488	+0.114	+0.316
Feeling overwhelmed under pressure	+0.011	+0.211	+0.107	+0.310	+0.252	+0.513
Feelings of self-confidence/positive outlook	+0.799	+0.700	+0.691	+0.544	+0.699	+0.378
Confidence in communication skills	+0.873	+0.417	+0.889	+0.579	+0.981	+0.501
Maintain long-term relationships	No significant difference		+0.496	+0.276	+0.512	+0.331
Propensity for flexibility	+0.537	+0.336	+0.504	+0.417	+0.612	+0.500

Table 8

*18-year Consolidated Comparison between Debate and Non-Debate Groups:
Moral/Ethical Outcomes*

Critical Outcome	Study 1		Study 2		Current Study	
	Undergrad 1998–2001		Grad + Beyond 2002–5		Non-Debate	
	Debate	Non-Debate	Debate	Non-Debate	Debate	Non-Debate
Propensity to distort the truth	No significant difference		+0.100	+0.236	+0.071	+0.317
Belief in situational ethics	No significant difference		+0.317	+0.439	+0.338	+0.501
Propensity to ignore conflicting evidence	+0.113	+0.817	+0.217	+0.781	+0.286	+0.681
Belief in the just society tradition	+0.870	+0.596	+0.787	+0.459	+0.661	+0.217

Table 9
Consolidated Comparison of Career and Professional Choices

Question	2005 Data		2015 Data	
	Debate	Non-Debate	Debate	Non-Debate
Did you have a job offer in your field after graduation?	75%, 51/68	55%, 28/51	N/A	N/A
How many times since graduation have you:				
Changed employment voluntarily?	2.2	1.7	3.7	2.1
Changed employment involuntarily?	0.5	1.3	1.1	3.0
Been promoted?	2.3	1.8	4.2	2.5
Experienced an increase in pay?	2.6	2.1	4.6	3.7
Have you been evaluated by a superior in your job?	92%, yes	94%, yes	100%, yes	100%, yes
Was the evaluation positive?	73%, yes	61%, yes	78%	65%
According to the evaluations, what factor(s) contributed most to a positive evaluation?	Communication skills Ability to think and analyze	Work product Social	Work product Project outcome Leadership Communication	Work product Teamwork
Was the evaluation negative?	25%	40%	22%	35%
According to the evaluations, what factor(s) contributed most to a negative evaluation?	Social Deadlines	Social Poor work product Communication skills	Social Work product	Social Work product Communication skills
Overall, how would you rate your happiness with your career choice?	7.6	6.1	8.5	6.7

Notes: Social, in the negative sense, meant that the respondent had some difficulty getting along with a co-worker or superior. Social in the non-debate positive sense meant that the respondent was praised for being a team-player or for getting along well with co-workers. Happiness was rated on a scale from 1 to 10 with 1 being low and 10 being high.

The Humanistic Value of Individual Events Participation

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Forensic educators have long struggled to communicate the value of forensic participation to those not familiar with the activity. Drawing from literature in the field of counseling and student personnel, this paper argues participation in individual events is beneficial because it allows students to engage in what Baxter Magolda (2001) refers to as self-authorship among good company. Using interviews and autoethnographic methods, I investigate how participation in competitive forensics helps students meet personal growth needs. I conclude with suggestions for how forensic educators can communicate the student development goals achieved through forensic participation.

I can say with absolute confidence that my participation in competitive forensics as a member of my college's Individual Events team fundamentally shaped my professional and personal life. I am not alone, as many former competitors argue their experience with competitive forensics was the most influential aspect of their college education. Despite the intensity with which activity alumni make this claim, little has been done to formally document our experiences, specifically with respect to participation in individual events rather than debate. The majority of recent academic efforts to justify the value of competitive speech competition have been directed at developing formal assessment measures (Bartanen, 2006; Copeland, Stutzman & Collins, 2015; Kelly, Paine, Richardson, & White, 2014) and presenting student self-reports of enhanced academic and professional skills (Lux, 2014; Quenette, Larsen-Casselton, & Littlefield, 2007). Although there is a collective agreement among forensic educators and participants that forensics matters, "[t]he fact that forensics has never achieved consensus regarding why it exists and what its value is beyond the epistemic is simultaneously both its greatest strength and most profound weakness" (Bartanen & Littlefield, 2014, p. 12). Members of the forensic community intuitively know what we do has value and impacts students' lives, but we are often too immersed in our own activity to articulate this clearly to others. The consequence of this neglect is isolating ourselves from colleagues who could be our allies.

Kuyper (2011) argues one reason we have failed to effectively justify our worth to colleagues and administration is we shy away from sharing evidence of one of the activity's most valuable impacts. Participation in forensics helps students self-actualize. Simply put, forensic educators value the teaching of communication skills, but many are far more interested in supporting overall student growth and personal development. Kuyper explains:

I would encourage us to take the conversation one step further to embrace the humanistic outcomes of forensic participation, as well. We are certainly teaching our students (or at least, allegedly so) a vast body of knowledge—how to argue, how to persuade, how to deliver a composed speech, how to analyze literature, how to step into the skin of a fictional creation—but we are also teaching a different and complementary set of skills: how to graciously accept both goals met and hopes dashed, how to

be a good teammate, how to place the needs of the group before those of the individual, how to take constructive criticism, how to be a good person. (Kuyper, 2002, p. 22)

Although Aristotle argued for the importance of ethos and Quintilian believed good speakers must also be good people, forensic educators are wary of claiming character development as a primary justification for the activity. Yet, most institutions continue to include a liberal-arts-based general education component for all degrees because of the belief that earning an associate's or bachelor's degree is about personal development and not just skill acquisition. Some kinds of learning and growth are not easy to measure empirically. This, however, does not make them less valuable.

Student personnel professionals have long understood the significant personal growth students undergo while attending college. Much of this growth happens outside the classroom and depends heavily on the relationships students build with peers and faculty. Research shows the more engaged a student is in their college education through the development of relationships with faculty, the more likely they are to stay enrolled and excel (Baxter Magolda, 2001, Chambliss & Takacs, 2014; Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Soria & Stebleton, 2012; Strayhorn, 2012). Forensic programs are an ideal high impact engagement program. Like other engagement opportunities, forensics allows students to learn not just information and skills, but about their own values and identity. As Chambliss and Takacs (2014) argue:

Knowledge and skills count, but so do relationships, attitudes, standards and habits of work and thinking, and membership in broader communities, all less easily acquired later in life. One invaluable potential outcome of college is the motivation to continue learning, supported by a remembered community of fellow students and teachers. (Chambliss and Takacs, 2014, p. 157)

Participation in forensics provides this "remembered community of fellow students and teachers" and is one of the reasons forensic alumni reference the activity as the most influential aspect of their college experience. Braskamp, Trautvetter and Ward (2006) explain, "The cocurriculum environment is where issues associated with character formation and developing a sense of purpose beyond that of promoting individual successes are often directly manifested" (p. 145).

The purpose of this paper is to document some of the "humanistic outcomes" of forensics Kuyper (2011) describes. I am fortunate that I regularly wrote in a personal journal while I was a college student. The ways forensic participation shaped me are recorded in these personal reflections. Therefore, I will offer some of these journal entries as autoethnographic evidence supporting my observations. Ellis (2004) defines autoethnography as "writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness" (p. 37). Using an autoethnographic approach allows me to reference my own experiences as I seek to understand the ways forensic participation fosters student growth. In the following pages, I will provide a brief review of research discussing college student growth needs, describe the interviewing and autoethnographic processes I

used to investigate how participation in competitive forensics helps students meet these needs, identify themes that emerged from my analysis and finally discuss ways forensic educators can communicate the student development goals achieved through forensic participation.

College Student Growth Needs

Although felt more profoundly by traditional aged students, college can be a time of extensive personal growth. Even older students, who have developed independence from families and a firmer sense of personal identity, find their beliefs and values shift and change as a result of seeking a higher education. Evans (2011) argues most college students progress through several stages of development during their time as students. Referencing the work of Chickering and Reisser (1993) on vectors of development, Evans suggests college students are working through seven levels of development which include: gaining competence, managing emotions, increasing interdependence, building mature relationships, establishing identity, finding purpose and, developing integrity (p. 172). Baxter Magolda (2001) describes this process of identity development as “self-authorship” and believes one achieves self-authorship by passing through four stages: following external formulas, crossroads, authoring one’s own life, and internal foundation.

Initially, Baxter Magolda explains most students, especially those of traditional age, arrive at college *following external formulas*. These formulas are typically provided by friends and family and have guided a student’s beliefs and behaviors since childhood. Political opinions and religious beliefs are often directed by these formulas and students will begin processing their studies through the lenses they were provided. For example, I was raised in a conservative Christian environment and this religious frame shaped how I processed much of what I read and learned during my first year of college. I attended a religiously affiliated private liberal arts college, and was required to take a religion course my first semester. My journal during fall 1987 is full of entries processing what I was reading. On September 23, I wrote:

I was so disgusted with my religion reading. Change the bible to inclusive language. I’m sure. The Bible is a sacred thing. Not only is it inspired, it is literature. Heck, we might as well rewrite Shakespeare because his work is sexist. Don’t people realize that God loves both male and female. God my Father.

That first semester of college, my perspective was still firmly entrenched in the teachings of the church of my youth. I was not ready to try new formulas of thinking.

The next phase of self-authorship, according to Baxter Magolda (2001), is the *crossroads*. She describes this stage as the point at which students begin feeling dissatisfied “from ignoring their own internal needs and perspectives” and begin looking “inward for self-definition” (p. xviii). The stability of my own external formulas started to crack as my first semester of college came to a close. My journal entries during the spring semester reveal many moments of questioning and frustration. On January 25, 1988 I asked myself, “How literally should the Bible be taken? It contradicts itself so

many times. People go crazy over a few verses. Yes it is God's word, but how does it apply now?" By May 9, I admitted, "I am still striving to discover who I am spiritually. Me—I cannot accept what my church has taught me. It is too narrow. I feel lost however, because I feel caught in between doctrinal beliefs. I stand alone." This entry shows I am moving into Baxter Magolda's third phase of self-authorship "*becoming the author of one's own life*" which is when one is "deciding what to believe, one's own identity, and how to interact with others" (p. xix). Fortunately for me, this corresponded with my choice to join the speech team during my second year of college after I failed to be selected for the college choir. In high school, much of my identity had been tied to vocal music. My success in this area had defined my sense of self. When it was gone, I felt lost and knew I needed to find a new direction. On September 8, 1988, I wrote:

[N]ow one dream is broken. Failure hurts. It hurts a lot, but it is inevitable to those who pursue. ...To abandon music and go find my slot somewhere else is painful. To not be in choir for the first time in 6 years. I'll miss it so much. I need a new dream.

I went to my first speech tournament in November that semester and thus began a path in life I am still following.

This third stage toward self-authorship is a lengthy one. Baxter Magolda (2001) suggests for many it encompasses college and the decade following. She suggests a college approach well creates opportunities for students to engage in the process of "self-authorship among good company". Her concept of good company is consistent with other scholars (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014; Strayhorn, 2012) who argue an additional growth need of college students is a sense of belonging which, as established by Maslow, is essential to self-actualization. "Good company" includes those faculty, staff and peers with whom a student is able to build meaningful relationships.

Participation in forensics provided me the "good company" I needed to help me reach Baxter Magolda's final phase of *internal foundation* which is when one feels internally grounded. Certainly, we continue to experience disruptions to our identity after reaching this phase, but in general once one has developed an internal foundation, these are less dramatic. Although I still had identity work to do following my college graduation, I was on my way toward developing my internal foundation. On the airplane coming home from my final national tournament in 1991, which had far surpassed my competitive expectations, I reflected on my next stage in life:

I sit here on the plane to the Cities next to a woman whose ball knuckles reveal her limited time. She eats in a cautious manner. A tentative nature which reminds me of a baby deer taking its first steps, or a child who carries a glass of water without spilling it. She is slowly edging into a final phase. Careful not to spill or make error. Turns to me to help her move her seat, fasten her seatbelt and even open the plastic silverware. A woman whose reluctance to risk is evident now. She sits next to me. My terrified self who understands that in order to justify reluctance at her age I must allow the change now. I must close my eyes and pull near me what is

familiar. Store it as my resource and then move on to develop new sources.

Forensics provided me, and countless others, the experiences necessary to teach me to leave my comfort zone and to break free of external formulas and author self.

Forensics provides a context in which self-authorship is encouraged and thrives. Baxter Magolda's (2001) research revealed environments that supported self-authorship tended to create contexts that "respected students, shared authority with students, guided the exchange of knowledge among learners, engendered trust among learners and educators, and included diverse styles of participating in mutual construction of meaning" (p. 229). The constant polishing and revising of events based on input from peers and educators helps forensic participants understand that building knowledge is a process, even knowledge of self. This shared construction of meaning among "good company" is what Chambliss and Takacs (2014) argue is the key factor in supporting a successful college experience for a student. They state:

When like-minded people gather around shared topics or interests, they can become energized around those people. Once a person belongs to an energized group, she has an incentive to remain and to stay on good terms with other members. ... Students work hard in order to demonstrate their membership, maintain their relationships, and live out their identity. (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014, p. 79)

Participation in forensics provides students a context in which they can work toward self-actualization. Curricular based outcome rubrics cannot measure this kind of learning, but forensic participants are adamant this intangible benefit is crucial to their success.

Gathering Stories

Documenting one's journey toward self-authorship is difficult. Even as an avid journal writer in my late teens, twenties and early thirties, there is much related to this journey I left unexpressed. Often, we are too busy living our lives to fully reflect on how we are changing and growing. Therefore, gathering evidence of Kuyper's (2011) humanistic benefits of forensics required depending on self-reports of former participants. In addition to collecting my own journal entries related to my competitive speech participation, I also conducted seven in-depth interviews with former individual events competitors asking them to reflect on the ways forensics shaped their personal and professional lives. I coded the interview transcripts and journal entries to identify common themes related to how forensic participation impacts one's personal development.

Working through my personal journals yielded 160 entries that addressed my experiences related to competing on my college speech team. The entries begin to appear fall 1987 when my public speaking professor, who was the director of forensics, approached me about joining the team. However, it took me a year before I managed to commit to the team and travel to a tournament. I stopped gathering the entries in August 1991, as this was the point I shifted from my role of student and began coaching as a

graduate assistant. I have always handwritten my journals, so for ease of the coding process, I typed the entries into one document which rendered 30 pages of data.

I conducted the in-depth interviews in June 2015 while attending a forensic alumni reunion weekend event. The reunion planners utilized a social media site to communicate with attendees. I posted my call for participants on this social media page. The reunion hosts provided me with a quiet space on the university campus in which to conduct the interviews. Although all the participants had competed for the same individual events program, their years of participation spanned three decades. None of the participants is still involved in the activity. Each of the seven interviews lasted approximately 25 minutes. I audio-recorded the interviews and used a pay service to transcribe the recordings. The interviews provided over two hours of recordings and nearly 50 transcribed pages.

Following coding procedures outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), I first worked through the interview and journal transcripts using open coding strategies, or a close line by line review of the data identifying concepts. This process yielded 66 initial codes. Next, using axial coding, these initial codes were pulled together to form five focused codes. These codes provide the following themes illustrating the humanistic benefits of forensic participation: a sense of belonging, the importance of mentors, gaining a life direction, enhanced self-confidence, and appreciation of process. The themes reveal the way participation in competitive speech offers humanistic benefits by providing good company during the process of self-authorship.

Good Company

Initially, my own journals and the interviews include several references to the importance of relationship building through participation in forensics. Consistent with Chamblis and Takacs' (2014) findings, "two or three good friends and one or two great professors" is the key to success for many college students (p. 21). The social connections gained by participating in forensics create the presence of "good company." The themes of a sense of belonging and the importance of mentors emerged as examples of humanistic benefits gained through forensic participation related to the concept of good company.

Sense of Belonging

Strayhorn (2012) argues a sense of belonging is crucial to the educational success of college students. He describes this sense of belonging as "students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the group (e.g. campus community) or others on campus (e.g. faculty, peers)" (p. 3). For many forensic participants, the need to belong is what drew them to the activity. After failing to make my college choir my second year of school, I was struggling to find not only a new artistic activity through which to express myself, but also some group to which I could belong. I knew I did not want my college experience to consist only of studying during the week and socializing on the weekends. I wanted a richer experience. My journal entry from November 19, 1988, reflecting on my first tournament experience reveals that seeking social connections was a goal. I wrote, "As far as people go, I felt like a left out

geek sometimes, but all in all people treated me well and I felt a part of things. Give it time.” By the end of my three years of competition, my connection to the community was solidified. In the same lengthy entry written on the plane ride home from my final national tournament, I considered the impact of this community:

The people I have come into contact with over the past 3 years are the most amazing individuals. Diverse, yet united in an off way I don't find other places. For a competitive activity, we are awfully supportive. I feel like I need to say something of thanks to these people to let them understand how much impact they have had on who I am becoming. Who I am. I will never see many of these people again. This year's group of seniors is too close and this break doesn't sit right. I don't want to let go. I do not want to lose contact. These are people I have respected so much. Role models and friends. I'm ready to give back what I have learned.

That I am still deeply connected to the forensic community shows how significant this sense of belongingness was, and still is, to my life.

Although none of the interview respondents are still active in forensics, many reflected on the importance a sense of belongingness found in forensics had on their personal development. One interviewee stated:

Having the chance to interact with people that I admired, that I considered enormously successful as humans as well as competitors and having them just kind of accept me, not necessarily as a friend, but as someone who belonged there. I mean, clearly I belonged there because they didn't throw me out. Yes, it helped me grow and become a confident adult. (1001)

Later in the interview she added:

The connections are like the connections of any other group... but unique to Forensics unlike, say, for example, the athletic teams, which have the exact same characteristics. In forensics, the people come from everywhere. They're short, and tall, and fat, and thin, and stupid, and intelligent, and ambitious, and unambitious, and just it really is culturally a more ... It was culturally, for me, a very interesting group. I think that the learning experience is magnificent. (1001)

This interviewee recognized how a sense of belonging among a diverse group helped enrich her academic experience during college. Other interviewees commented on how the relationships they made while members of the forensic team continued to stay relevant in their personal lives. One interviewee explained, “I think just the experience of being on the team and getting to know the people and traveling with them every weekend impacts your life in the way ... those are your friends and your family forever” (1004).

Creating and maintaining a sense of belonging takes effort. Several of my journal entries reveal struggles I had navigating interpersonal conflicts with teammates. The competitive environment can introduce unique tensions into the group. Learning to

navigate these tensions to maintain a sense of belonging is an additional benefit gained through forensic participation. As one interview participant eloquently explained:

You spend a lot of time together. You have ups and downs. You have good times and bad times. You're happy for each other when you're doing well. You're supporting each other when you're doing poorly. You have a lot of feelings that you work through together. (1004)

As this interviewee reveals, a forensic team provides a supportive community on campus where a student feels a strong connection to other students. This sense of belonging is something they are willing to work to preserve. The result is life-long friendships and improved interpersonal skills.

Importance of Mentors

A key premise in Chambliss and Takacs' (2014) research is "what really matters in college is who meets whom, and when" (p. 16). The ability for students to find a faculty mentor is a significant factor in determining their success. Mentors may be the most important good company students find while they are attending college. Chambliss and Takacs reveal the best mentor relationships emerge from "frequent working interactions" and "activities that blur the distinction between professional and personal concerns" (p. 56-57). Forensics provides an ideal context for mentor relationships to emerge. Coaches work numerous hours with students helping them perfect their events and travel blurs professional and personal boundaries. Many of my fondest speech team memories are the meaningful conversations my teammates and I had with our coaches during a late-night van ride. The opportunity to process my evolving belief systems with adults outside of my family was an important aspect of my growth.

My journal entries make some mention of my coaches. In them, I am expressing frustration at being pressured to complete my work or I am processing my feelings of shame when I believed I had let my coaches down by not meeting a deadline or performing well at a tournament. However, by the end of my final year of competition, I realized the reason my coaches had been hard on me the previous year was because their goal was to make me self-sufficient. Hour after arduous hour of writing, editing, and rewriting paid off and by my senior year, I primarily needed help only with cutting my speeches to meet time limits. My coaches were also quite patient with my self-righteous rants, gently, and sometimes not so gently, redirecting my energy in more positive ways. On the eve of my first day as a graduate coaching assistant, I wrote in my journal:

It all starts tomorrow. I feel prepared and fairly confident. I want to be as much of an influence on my students as others were on me. I want to be a positive influence on them—an instructor, mentor and friend. Such big shoes to fill. Basically it is H. and J.'s philosophy. Go give to others what has been given to you. Well 10 hours before I start to teach and I'm wondering if I have what it takes to do this. (August 25, 1991)

Now over 25 years into this journey, I guess it is safe to say I do have what it takes. This, however, is only due to what my own mentors taught me.

All seven of the interview participants claimed their forensic coaches were valuable mentors while they were students. The following statement captures the appreciation all expressed for the coaches who took the time to mentor them:

They were there for me with some tough times with my personal life. They never asked questions. They were always good listeners. They gave good advice. I think also the fact that they're willing to pour so much into the activity really spoke volumes to me about this is the type of leader/mentor that I want to be when I get older. If I'm ever in a position where I have to mentor people, I want to do it like they did it. They cared so much for this activity, and they still do. I think that that all the lives that they've touched, they probably don't even know, and they would never brag about it because they're humble people. I think what they've given to this activity, and to the students that have gone through their program is just awesome. Maybe someday they'll be able to fully realize how much they've impacted people, but I don't think I will ever be able to thank them enough for what they did. (1003)

My commitment to coaching speech evolved from the care and guidance of my own mentors, and my continued passion to stay involved is due to the rewards I now experience as a mentor. As Braskamp, Trautvetter and Ward (2006) assert, "In their cocurricular interactions with students, faculty play an important role in helping students bridge the public and the private (i.e. the interior and exterior) aspects of life" (p. 131). Participation in forensics provides faculty and student interaction opportunities that far exceed what can be developed in a classroom setting. Within this context of good company, students feel supported to engage in self-authorship. Baxter Magolda's (2001) research reveals, "An important characteristic that helped participants develop the sense of self so necessary for authoring their own beliefs and participating in mutual construction was respectful professors" (p. 216). Mentoring is the bridge between good company and self-authorship.

Self-Authorship

Palmer (1998) observes the power of effective mentoring is in a mentor's "capacity to awaken a truth within us" (p. 21). He adds, these encounters "awaken a sense of self and yield clues to who we are" (p. 29). The role of mentors in supporting the process of self-authorship is distinct. The amount of high-quality mentoring provided by forensic educators is, I believe, a reason former forensic participants indicate the activity helped them author self. The themes of gaining a life direction, enhanced self-confidence, and appreciation of process all emerged as evidence of how forensic participation supports the process of self-authorship

Gaining a Life Direction

All seven interview participants were adamant that their experience as individual events competitors had a significant influence on helping them find a meaningful career path. Two participants are currently college professors in the field of communication.

One stated, “I entered academics as a result of being encouraged to go to graduate school by my coaches” (1001) and the other claimed “Literally it put me on an entirely different career path. I would never have found this if it weren’t for being on the team” (1007). Additionally, a trial attorney admits, “I think forensics, especially the limited prep, and having me think on my feet, and prepare things spontaneously was that extra push I needed to go into law” (1003). Further, a participant who works as a web content developer for a public-library system claims, “Had I not done forensics, no, I would not be in the field I am in. I don’t think I would have the creative and strategic fulfillment that I do in my job” (1005). Others could not isolate a specific vocational influence, but were certain their time as a member of the individual events team shaped the direction of their life. One acknowledges, “It literally has been one of the shaping factors of my entire life” (1006) and another remarks, “It’s really hard to put into words. I’m 100% sure that being on the forensic team determined the entire course of my life” (1004). These are powerful statements regarding the influence a co-curricular activity had on shaping the future paths of college graduates. Chambliss and Takacs (2014) stress, “Human contact, especially face to face, seems to have an unusual influence on what students choose to do, on the direction their careers take, and on their experience of college” (p. 4). The formula seems simple, yet some students pass through their college experience without meaningful mentor or peer contact.

My own professional path was shaped due to the relationships I built through forensics. The summer prior to my senior year I struggled with the decision regarding if I should go to graduate school, and as a double major in English writing and communication, if so, which of my areas of study should I pursue. I made the decision to pursue graduate study in English. Although my passion was writing, I lacked confidence in my skills and thought literature programs were the safer bet. My faculty mentor in English believed in me and encouraged me to apply to several top programs. This was a mistake. I was rejected from all seven programs. A communication professor with previous experience coaching forensics was leaving my college to start a new position as director of forensics at a different university. He knew about my situation and approached me about applying last minute to this university where they were still looking for graduate assistants to work with the speech team. Having previously struggled choosing which discipline to pursue, this second chance to focus on communication was a gift. I processed this failure and new possibility in my April 1, 1991 journal entry:

I’ve realized now that I made the wrong choice and I’m back at square one again. I’m a wreck. I have so many feelings. I’m humiliated for failing and everyone knows it. I’m pissed for wasting so much money on application fees. I’m terrified of telling people I failed—was rejected so many times. I’m angry at S. for telling me I could do this—for beefing up my hopes. I’m angry at everyone who said I’d have no problem getting assistantships. I feel cheated—that everything I have done and worked for is meaningless. I’m angry at myself for thinking I could actually do this literature stuff. I’m angry I didn’t apply to some communication schools. I’m frustrated because I don’t know what I want. I’m—confused—so lost—no direction. I’m intrigued by the Communication idea at Kansas, but I don’t know if that is a result of my terror. When I made my decision

to not do communication I was coming off a bad year. This year, however, I'm much more involved in speech and I enjoyed rhetorical criticism.

I hate being so inconsistent and confused. I have no idea what to do. I hate the fact I have wasted so much time, money and effort making the wrong choice. It was a very expensive failure and a very expensive lesson.

Eight days later I was notified of my admission to Kansas State University and had accepted an assistantship to teach and coach their individual events team. A door closed and then the forensic community embraced me back with open arms and I have never looked back. This was exactly the right path for my life. I needed my community of good people to help show me the direction my life would take.

Enhanced Self-confidence

Since forensics is a competitive activity, those who participate in it will most certainly encounter struggles processing success and failure. My journey into the world of competitive forensics was motivated by a failure to succeed in vocal performance. The last month of my time as a forensic competitor was punctuated with the failure to gain acceptance into graduate school, but also a highly successful national tournament and a new professional direction in life. One of the greatest humanistic benefits forensics provides is increased self-confidence that comes from taking risks. In his eloquent defense of the intrinsic benefits of the competitive side of forensics, Hinck (2003) emphasizes:

A competitive season simulates life situations requiring adaptation to changing circumstances, recommitment to achieving one's goals, coming back from a disappointing experience, and hard work without guarantee of success. Preparing for competition provides instruction in important values that serve students throughout their lives. (Hinck, 2003, p. 62)

The trial and error accompanying the steady growth in skill and competitive success helps students build self-confidence.

When I first started competing, I diligently tracked in my journal the ranks I received each weekend. When I eventually started advancing to finals I also started recording those placings. I was aware the road to success was a long one and I had much to learn. Documenting my progress helped me stay focused. Several times during my first year of competition, I made comments about watching, learning, and gaining experience. In my core, I knew I would eventually see success in the activity, but I understood it was going to take work. A year after my first tournament, I returned to the same campus and had a much different experience. I described this in my November 4, 1989 entry:

It was very special for me to be back at SDSU. For me that is where this all started. I remember watching teammates accept their awards and I wondered to myself if I would ever be there. I vividly remember the excitement and anticipation I felt. I dreamed of one day also experiencing success in speech. This year I returned a much more confident competitor.

I had a year of experience and it showed. I was more poised and relaxed. Fluency comes much more naturally. It was difficult for me to hold back my tears as I realized how much I've grown. How much progress I've made. I was in two final rounds this year. My informative took first and my poetry sixth. My first time breaking 2 events and my first 1st place. I achieved a goal. I also received my first individual sweepstakes award. I placed 5th in the triathlon. Unbelievable. Hard work and dedication pay off. I'm learning and my skills are being developed. I still miss singing but I find some of the same satisfaction in speaking. However, through speech not only have I found a talent, I've also found some truly wonderful friends. For everything there is a time.

While reviewing my journals for this project, I made the realization that around this time of increased self-confidence in speech, I also started showing a stronger sense of self in my own personal life. I was well into Baxter Magolda's (2001) third phase of self-authorship and was becoming the author of my own life. My increased self-confidence explains why over Thanksgiving break that same year I was finally able to sever ties with a romantic interest who had long treated me poorly.

Even when experiencing failure, the self-confidence I was gaining through speech competition helped me to productively process this failure. My junior year I qualified for Interstate Oratory and everyone expected I would qualify again as a senior. However, I became flustered in the State final and lost my fluency. I placed third. I processed this in my February 16, 1991, entry:

I placed 3rd in persuasive (2-2-5). Yargh! I'm not sure what I feel. Sure it would have been nice to go to Florida and be a 2 time state representative. I worked really hard for it. I guess what bothers me is that I lost my concentration in the final. I'm not sure if I would have finished any higher, but I know. I felt awful about it when I got done. What pisses me off is that I'm a hell of a lot more mature and better than that. I shouldn't have lost it and I'm so angry with myself because I did. Oh well. I had my opportunity.

I had a similar experience during my final nationals when I lost concentration during preliminary rounds in two of my best events. I still had a great tournament, but my journal reflections are realistic about my strengths and weaknesses. I understood my lack of high school experience meant I wasn't well equipped to manage the pressure of that level of competition. I was appreciative of what I had achieved, but understood I could have achieved even more. I was not bitter or angry. I knew what I was capable of doing and self-aware enough to understand I didn't make it happen. Speech participation provided me the competitive environment I needed to build confidence in my abilities and to accept myself when I fell short.

Interview participants also commented on the way participation in forensics helped them build self-confidence. One woman indicated this was gained both through competition and also through her relationships with others on the team. She admitted:

I had a lot of self-confidence problems that whole time from the time I entered college as a freshman up to the time I finished my master's degree and went out to work. At some point, the fact that I learned how to do this, and could do this, and it affected my ability to relate to people with confidence even if I didn't feel it. Eventually, I grew into it. The skills that I had developed, I became probably ... By the time I was in my middle 30s, I had probably grown into the communication skills that had been the groundwork.... I slowly gained enough confidence in the people I was interacting with, my friends, the other competitors, to start expressing some of that. Every time I expressed something negative about myself like the feeling that I was stupid, or didn't have skills, or had no place, I would be met with usually uncomprehending stares. A few people saying, "I just don't see that that's true." People who were competitors said things that people who I admired who were older than I was said things to me that got me thinking differently about my skills and abilities. (1001)

The capacity to honestly assess one's abilities is an important part of the self-authorship process. Forensic participation provides students with numerous opportunities to test themselves and, in the presence of good company, reflect on what they have learned.

Appreciation of Process

Participation in individual events involves numerous experiences of trial and error. Revision and practice are constant. Experience in forensics provides an appreciation for process. Self-authorship is also full of progress and missteps. I argue this is why many forensic participants are able to embrace the process of self-authorship. As Baxter Magolda (2001) concludes, "Self-authorship is not selfish or self-centered; it involves careful consideration of external perspectives and other's needs, but this consideration occurs in the context of one's internal foundation" (xix). Doing forensics well requires reflecting on both your own and others' assessments of your performance.

When I first started working through my journals to collect entries related to my speech team participation, I was initially annoyed by how many pages of my journals were filled with me bemoaning how stressed I was. However, I realized many of those entries were not just for whining. Rather, I was using my journal entries to make sense of my tasks and plan my work. I was documenting the process of creating and polishing my events. In fact, in the week before I attended my first tournament I literally made a list of what I still needed to do to revise my speech:

14 November 1988

My speech festival was a success. The speech is fine for SDSU but I need to revise.

1. Vary wording of oral paragraphing
2. Focus solutions
3. Practice Practice Practice
4. Wording
5. Slow down

If the above are accomplished I'll have a pretty good speech.

On November 17, 1988, the night before we left for my first tournament, I wrote, “I am looking at this weekend as strictly a learning experience. I have to start somewhere. Don’t strive for perfection on the first try. Work up levels. Start at the bottom and move up.” Even at the very start of my forensic journey, I understood this would be a process. The following year when I attended nationals for the first time, this appreciation of process was still evident. On April 7, 1990, I reflected on the first day of competition writing:

I think I have the talent to be equal competition with these people, but right now my topics and my information are not in depth enough. My speeches just don’t seem to be on the same level. Competition is so tough. It is great to see though because it really motivates me to work next year. At least now I know what real competition is.

The beauty of fully committing to forensic competition is the knowledge that nothing is ever finished. There is always room for more learning and growth.

Several of the interview participants also mentioned an appreciation of process as something they gained from their time involved in forensics. One person explained that forensics taught him that, “There are no problems that can’t be solved. Everything has a solution to it” (1003). Another concurs stating:

It gave me freedom to say that nothing is a failure. It gave me the release to say, “I can just keep refining, keep evolving, keep practicing, keep changing.” That gives me a lot of strength as a self-employed person. To say there’s no such thing as failure, there’s just retooling your speech. (1002)

She added that what sustained her in the activity when she was not achieving her goals was assurance from her coaches that “If I changed it that it could get better. I believed that, that if you can tackle a problem, it’s not impossible” (1002). This appreciation of process is what Baxter Magolda (2001) calls “learning as mutually constructed meaning” (p. 191). She found a “[m]utual exchange of knowledge with others led to active engagement in learning, useful frameworks for discussion and analysis, new insights from peers, and learning to discern and defend one’s position” (p. 219). This approach to learning is essential for promoting self-authorship.

Interview participants also indicated an appreciation for process with respect to their own personal and social growth. One participant reflected on the presence of norms that frustratingly often guide forensic practice. However, his perception was the presence of these norms teach valuable lessons about the process of succeeding in the real world. He argues:

Whereas, these are certain things that if you create a routine out of them, if you realize that there are certain rules that people play by, and if I play by those same rules, then I can do whatever else I want with this space that doesn’t have those rules attached to it. It helps you realize that you need to

focus on what's really important to you. If you have to follow a few norms in order for everybody to see that, that's what needs to be done, but if that message is really important to you, then why not. Why not give it its best shot at being heard by the largest audience it possibly can be? (1006)

Learning to work within a system to ultimately express your core beliefs is an important piece of the self-authorship process. This kind of learning, however, can be exhausting, but students who open themselves to the experience will gain the rewards. When asked to share any bad memories connected to speech team participation, one interview respondent shared:

There are a bunch of other bad memories, but I will say this that every single bad memory that I had was a learning experience I bounced back from very quickly and it almost always pointed me in a much better direction than where I made that wrong decision. I checked myself, the person I wanted to be. Often the answer to that question is, "Do you want to be that answer?" "No. I want to be a better person than that." In a lot of ways, those lessons learned in forensics helped me be a better person. (1005)

This comment exemplifies the fundamental humanistic benefit of forensic participation. If embraced as a meaningful process, forensics provides students with the good company needed to achieve self-authorship.

Embracing Our Humanity

Participation in competitive speech helps students meet fundamental personal development goals. How then can forensic educators communicate this benefit to those not familiar with the activity? I believe the answer is found in not losing sight of our humanity as we learn to speak the language of our institutions. To accomplish this, we must embrace the humanistic value of the activity, frame forensics as an engagement program and finally stress excellence in mentoring.

Initially, although learning outcomes and assessment rubrics are important in measuring the valuable academic gains our students make, we need to also champion the humanistic value of the activity as revealed through the remarkable personal growth our students undergo while involved in forensics. Over the course of four years we spend literally hundreds of hours with a single student. In some cases, we know them better than their own parents. Baxter Magolda (2001) writes, "A large part of our being good company is understanding students' journeys—listening carefully to hear students' perspectives on their experience and progress" (p. xxii). Being good company for our students includes more than helping them meet learning objectives. Being good company involves listening to a student's fears, celebrating a student's successes, being the person they seek for support when their mother loses her job or their father dies unexpectedly. Being good company is supporting our students as they confront all the messy confusion life throws at them. We know our students' stories of growth and should be proud to share these as evidence of the educational value of forensics as an engagement program.

One way forensic educators can document student growth is by encouraging students to engage in reflective writing exercises. Consider having students complete written reflections about their self-authorship process at least three times each academic year. Baxter Magolda (2001) believes students experience three dimensions of development. The epistemological dimension relates to what one believes, the intrapersonal dimension is connected to how one views self, and the interpersonal dimension is how one builds relationships with others. The process of self-authorship involves growth in each of these areas. Ask students to reflect on how they see themselves as changing and developing in each of these dimensions. Students who are willing could provide coaches with copies of these reflections when they graduate. These reflective writings would serve as documentation of the growth process experienced by forensic students.

Next, forensic educators need to begin defining their programs as student-engagement-based co-curricular programs. Student engagement is currently the hot topic for administrators concerned with student retention. Studies show those students who participate in such programs experience a stronger sense of belonging which “positively influences academic achievement, retention and persistence” (Strayhorn, 2012, p. 9). Strayhorn (2012) explains engagement programs are more formal and thoughtful than involvement activities. He describes campus involvement as being what students do with their time, whereas engagement is a more mindful process that helps students link their academic efforts to overall success. Attending campus events and participating in intramural sports would be considered involvement. Participating in a residence life learning community, engaging in undergraduate research with a faculty mentor, or participation in competitive forensics are all engagement activities that yield unique benefits. Chambliss and Takacs (2014) believe:

[C]ollege works by selecting certain people, putting them in one place for a few years, and giving them a regular framework for routine meetings, formal and informal, centered on academic topics. The arithmetic of engagement is about placing people to maximize the odds that any given student will meet friends and encounter good teachers, with all the benefits that can result. (Chambliss & Takacs, 2014, p. 77)

If this sounds familiar it should. Forensic programs have been creating this environment for decades. One could argue forensics is one of the original academic engagement programs. As we articulate the value of our programs we need to integrate the current academic language to frame our arguments.

Finally, when we tell our success stories, we must stress the excellent mentoring provided by forensic educators. When forensic colleagues are feeling discouraged, I encourage them to map “their forensic family tree.” I do not remember who suggested I do this years ago, but the exercise is powerful. Begin the tree with your own forensic mentors on the top. Then add yourself and a “branch” for all the students you have mentored in your role as a coach. If some of those students became coaches, add their “offspring” to your tree. Anyone who has coached for at least a decade will produce an exceptionally large family tree. Those of us who qualify as “lifers” in the activity may need multiple volumes. This tree represents your good company.

Forensic educators do many things well. We are often strong classroom teachers, skilled administrators, and active in campus service. However, where most of us truly excel is mentoring students. That many leaders in the communication discipline are former forensic participants is not a coincidence. Nor is it a coincidence that forensic alumni are often leaders in whatever field they have chosen. Chambliss and Takacs (2014) admit a “small proportion of faculty have vastly disproportionate influence on students... A single professor, if made available, can help thousands of students—even tens of thousands—during his or her career” (p. 156). The good company found in the forensic community has for years supported students in the process of self-authorship. On the path to finding their internal foundation, forensic students graduate well prepared to take on the challenges they will face. Perhaps this, even more than training excellent speakers, is our legacy.

When I began regular journal writing as a first-year college student, I envisioned myself as being a solid but not excellent student, focused on a career in human resources with a future of vocal music accolades ahead of me. I still identified myself as a conservative Christian and my early voting record looks nothing like my current political beliefs. College was an intense period of growth for me. As a highly introspective person, I imagine I would have engaged in this process of self-authorship even if I had not found the forensic community. However, I am certain that the richness of this journey was profoundly impacted by my experience in forensics. As with many others, my current commitment to the activity is guided by a personal conviction to pay it forward as a way to honor those who taught me to be good company.

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Why Forensics Matters: The Development of Emotional Competence in Competitors

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Academic scholarship outlines several benefits to participating in competitive speech and debate activities. The most frequently cited perks, generally in this order, include improvements in critical thinking (Allen, Berkowitz, Hunt, & Loudon, 1999; Bellon, 2000; Billman, 2008; Colbert & Biggers, 1985; Fine, 2001; Minch, 2006; O'Donnell et al., 2010;), communication competency (Billman, 2008; Colbert & Biggers, 1985; Fine, 2001; Minch 2006), college and employment prospects (Billman, 2008; Colbert & Biggers, 1985; Fine, 2001; Minch, 2006; O'Donnell et al., 2010), and teamwork and relational skills (Billman, 2008; Fine, 2001; Minch, 2006). We do not dispute that forensics activities likely enhance students' development of these abilities. However, we find that these reports of the activity's benefits all too often frame them in traditional argumentative terms that privilege logical rationality and displace or ignore the activity's potential emotional and rhetorical reasoning benefits (Aden, 2002; Jarman, 2011). There are two reasons why scholars most likely overemphasize the benefits of logical rationality over emotional expression: (a) our activity's foundation in Aristotelian theory, which heavily privileges logos over pathos (Garrett, 1993; Sutton, 1986); and (b) the centrality of debate and oratory in our early justifications of the activities.

Perhaps the most glaring example of this problem is found in the discussion of critical-thinking benefits. For instance, frequently cited studies about critical thinking gains such as Colbert and Biggers (1985) and the 22 studies reviewed by Allen et al. (1999) in their meta-analysis of the link between forensics training and critical thinking skills, use the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal (1952), a multiple-choice instrument that measures abilities to deduce, identify assumptions, evaluate arguments, and make inferences. While these are important reasoning skills, they do not encompass the entirety of critical thinking. Increasingly, scholars are recognizing the importance of students' proficiency in understanding and using emotion as an important critical thinking and decision-making ability (Elder, 1996; Jarman, 2011; Ketrow & Arnold, 2002; Micheli, 2010; Miller & McKerrow, 2001).

To explicate our justification for the value of competitive speech activities, we contend that participation in forensics develops critical emotional competencies in students. Although the development of traditional logical skills remains an important benefit of these activities, we argue that coaches, participants, and scholars should acknowledge how forensics may enhance emotional competence, empathy, and interpersonal sensitivity. These skills are noteworthy because several cognitive,

neurological, and psychological studies have demonstrated that overdependence on rationality and factual data can hamper effective decision-making (Jarman, 2011). Additionally, we cannot truly understand argumentative processes without fully appreciating emotion's role within our reasoning. As Ketrow and Arnold (2001) note:

Privileging only the rational ... simplifies theorizing about argument, but drops out crucial chunks that shape interpretation and meaning... . The significance of studying emotion, particularly what has been termed emotional competence and underlying abilities and skills, in relation to argumentation is that we cannot comprehend or describe argumentation fully without doing so. (p. 305)

To recognize the potential of competitive speech training in the development of emotional competence, empathy, and interpersonal sensitivity, we begin this essay by defining and outlining several dimensions of emotional competence and its related skills. This discussion is followed by an examination of how certain competitive speech activities develop affective reasoning skills. These claims are supported by narratives from competitors and event-training materials, both found at the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) website.

The narratives used in this study were part of the NSDA's efforts to create materials that would introduce various individual events to beginning competitors. In 2016, through its Instagram account, the NSDA asked high school competitors to comment on a post about why they chose to compete in their individual events. The NSDA identified the best 12 responses and then interviewed those students. The interviews explored why the students wanted to compete in their events and what made the events unique and challenging. The organization purposely did not select national champion competitors for these interviews, as it wanted the information to be accessible to beginners (A. Reisener, personal communication, October 6, 2017).

Out of these 12 published interviews, we selected five that dealt with oral interpretation and oratory events. The other narratives were about three types of debate, two types of extemporaneous speaking, informative speaking, and student congress. We analyzed these narratives, but they discussed traditional critical thinking skills and are not included in this essay.

Although we use materials from the NSDA, a high-school organization, our primary audience is the college forensics community. We use these narratives because nothing comparable exists at college national forensics organizations' or teams' websites. While there are several competitive norm differences between secondary and post-secondary forensics activities, the skill sets we examine in this essay are common for both levels. Moreover, even if both high school and college speech competition develop similar skills, we argue that these emotional intelligence skills may matter more for college students as they are more independent and facing several life challenges for the first time that require advanced emotional competencies (Strauss, 2014). Thus, while we use a convenience sample of data from high school students, we believe that they illustrate the potential that further research beyond this exploratory essay can have in examining the connection between post-secondary forensics training and emotional competence.

We fully acknowledge that our sample size of five interviews limits the conclusions that this essay can make. The aim of our work here is to explore if a connection exists between the theoretical construct of emotional competency and forensics training. We are unaware of any previous scholarship making a similar connection. Our intent is not to provide conclusive evidence of the link. Rather, our work is tentative and we demonstrate how this heuristic can aid our future assessment work. In doing so, we outline some of the variables and skills sets that might be useful in future scholarship that explores this relationship. These efforts should utilize a more rigorous qualitative or quantitative research process and we would encourage the forensics community to strive to publish more first-person accounts of the processes involved in developing and performing pieces in individual events.

After examining how signs of emotional competence appear in the sample interviews, the remainder of the essay outlines some of the ways that this connection between emotional competency and forensics training could be used to justify forensics competition. We conclude with recommendations about how future scholarship can build on our exploratory work to benefit assessment and justification efforts. As part of our conclusion, we contend that we need more public data like the kind found at the secondary level to aid our future assessment work at the post-secondary level.

Emotional Competence Defined

Derived from concepts first outlined by psychologists John D. Mayer and Peter Salovey (1990) and later made famous by psychologist and *New York Times* science writer Dr. Daniel Goleman in his top-selling 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence*, emotional competence is defined as a “learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance” (Goleman, 1999, p. 19). Goleman (1999) outlines three personal and two social competencies. Personal aptitudes include (a) self-awareness (being cognizant of one’s emotions and the consequences of those feelings); (b) self-regulation (personal control over and responsibility for one’s emotions); and (c) motivation (understanding how emotions direct us to strive for excellence). The two social competencies are: (a) empathy (an understanding of other people’s emotions and needs) and (b) adeptness in managing relationships. While there are scholarly debates about the precise definition of emotional intelligence and our ability to measure it (Jones, 1997), we can use Goleman’s (1999) schema as a basic template to discuss how competitive forensics activities enhance students’ emotional skills in ways that foster better decision-making.

Forensics Training in Emotional Competence

To discover and become a different character requires a combination of several emotional competencies. For example, students must understand their own feelings (self-awareness), the affective state of the characters that they will depict (empathy), and how those feelings differ from their own emotions. By taking on the persona of a character, students must learn to recognize how to identify and portray several emotions in various situations, assisting students in understanding how they might react in similar moments (empathy and self-awareness). Further, the students must acknowledge their own feelings

towards the situation, subject, and various characters found in their performance (self-awareness). Understanding their own emotions then allows students to separate their emotions from the characters' emotions, which is an example of self-awareness and control.

Studies on the importance of roleplay on children's development have explored the effects of acting on emotional development. As Dr. Thalia Goldstein (2015), an assistant professor of Applied Developmental Psychology at George Mason University, suggests, student actors "decide what is appropriate given a certain set of circumstances, and then [they] mold which parts of [their] personality and emotions [they] express, which [they] hold back, etc." Overall, students' ability to identify and understand a range of possible emotional reactions to life situations that they have experienced only through a performance allows them to better "understand themselves, others, and the world around them" (Littlefield et al., 2001). Thus, performance as another character promotes a better understanding of self as students must recognize, explore, and separate their emotional reactions from those of the characters they portray.

Rachel Rothschild (2016), a Dramatic Interpretation competitor featured among the NSDA interviewees, explains this process: "The challenge of DI will always lie in the struggle to morph into a new persona. Speakers must separate themselves from their character, distinguish all the little details about the role they are going to take on, and finally, blend themselves into this new personality." Program Oral Interpretation (POI) magnifies this challenge. Because his event combines multiple types of literature into a singular performance, POI competitor Jeremiah Brown (2016) suggests that it is very challenging to take multiple characters from different backgrounds and texts and sort them out during the performance. To be successful in this event, competitors must clarify the motivations and emotions of several characters who do not exist in the same narrative universe prior to the performance.

Rothschild (2016) further notes how empathy is a challenging talent to master because "our characters have faced difficulties that most of us will never come close to in our lifetimes. As a result, we must experiment with different ways to approach our roles." Based on this account, interpretation requires higher-order critical thinking skills, like analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. For instance, the ability to explore a character to understand its emotions and motivations requires critical analysis skills. Similarly, students' skills in differentiating the emotions of the characters from their own personal moods involves both analysis and evaluation skills. Further, students' abilities to decide how to portray various emotional responses to situations that they have not experienced before require important evaluation skills.

Even an event like humorous interpretation requires complex emotional self-awareness, self-control, and relational adeptness. For instance, competitor Jordan Singer (2016) explains the pleasure involved in understanding and emotionally connecting to his audience in stating, "[Humorous Interpretation] not only allows me to express myself, but allows me to fill a room with laughter and happiness." Like many other forensics events, humorous interpretation requires students to be highly adaptive to understand their own emotions, their characters' feelings and motivations, and the audience's perspective. As Singer (2016) further contends, "Interp pushes you to constantly grow and think outside the box. The ability to change, as well as open-mindedness, are definitely the most necessary skills to an interper." This creative and flexible problem-solving in response to

interpersonal situations utilizes both the personal and social skills Goleman (1999) describes as important decision-making abilities.

One area of emotional competency not specifically noted in Rothschild and Singer's narratives is the intellectual work necessary to understand the interaction of feelings and drives in situations involving more than one character. While this requires the use of self-awareness, self-control, and empathy, it also requires an aptitude in critically analyzing relationships and their dynamics. One event that heavily depends on this kind of adeptness in understanding these affective exchanges is Duo. For example, in its description of Duo, the NSDA (2016) explains this aspect of the event: "Using offstage focus, competitors convey emotions and environment through a variety of performance techniques focusing on the relationships and interactions between the characters." Additionally, Duo competitor Julie Thompson (2016) notes the collaborative nature of this analytic work:

A lot of that relies on the team dynamic and partners need to have trust. They must be able to discuss what looks good and what doesn't, and to build each other up. Partners need to be prepared to work together on all aspects of the piece.

Thus, interpretative events train students to utilize several emotional competencies, including empathy, motivation, relational adeptness, self-awareness, and self-control.

Yet, interpretative events are not the only ones that require expertise in these competencies. Oratory and public-address events require affective critical thinking skills as well. For example, contestant Lia Thayer (2016) explains that she chose to compete in oratory because it "seemed like the event through which I could express myself the most.... I get to speak directly from my heart. The topic I chose for my oration is something I'm very passionate about ..." Thayer's comments demonstrate that oratory requires students to understand their own emotions and motivations to channel them into their topic and inspirational and pathetic appeals. Due to its purpose to encourage or persuade, oratory may be the event that best trains students in the emotional competency of motivation. Thayer (2016) suggests this in saying, "Every Orator I've met is encouraging, excited about their topic and their speech, and wants to change the world someday." In its description of the event, the NSDA (2016) further notes that oratory, more so than other events, emphasizes the use of both logical and emotional appeals, reflecting the kind of balance that we contend is important in producing strong critical thinkers and decision makers.

Importance of Emotional Competencies Beyond Forensics Activities

Students have a great deal to gain from improved emotional reasoning competencies. First, as Goleman (1999) maintains, occupational and personal performance, especially in decision-making, improves through enhanced affective talents. Second, in our current political context, an education in both emotional and logical critical thinking skills may allow students to best navigate the current political terrain. For example, public confidence in traditional sources of public argument of fact such as the government, news media, and science are at all-time lows, making it difficult to rely on common knowledge as a basis for logical appeals (Klumpp, 2006). Further, people

tend to stay within “echo chambers of information” that expose them to information that only confirms their existing beliefs (Manjoo, 2016). This causes partisan people to deflect appeals to fact-checked information, which undermines the power of logical and fact-based appeals. Worse, attempts to correct factually incorrect arguments can cause a “backfire effect” that reinforces those opinions (Ignatius, 2016).

Rather than use these findings as a reason to abandon all hope for logical argument by claiming we are in a post-argument world or rigidly insisting on more fact-checking, we argue that we likely exist in a time where persuasion, rather than argumentation, dominates our culture. Obviously, persuasion involves the use of logic and reasoning. However, neglecting the development of strong pathological appeals within argumentation also undermines effective reasoning, according to Ketrow and Arnold (2001). Very few activities in academia reward students for deploying both logos and pathos in constructing an argument; forensics is one of those pursuits. A student with strong skills in empathy, motivation awareness, and self-control likely is better equipped to avoid a backfire effect that is triggered when people feel attacked within an argument. This is possible because these students better understand which appeals can trigger certain emotional reactions and what best motivates others to act. Thus, we maintain that the under-appreciated impact that competitive forensics activities have on developing students’ emotional competencies should be foregrounded as a justification for the activity within our current political climate.

Recommendation

Based on our tentative exploration of the utility of understanding competitive speech activities as training in emotional competence, we finish this essay with one key recommendation for both forensic organizations and individual collegiate teams. As we note in the beginning of this essay, there are no easily attainable narratives written by collegiate competitors that compare to the ones present at the NSDA website. We contend that these “what-to-expect-in-x event” or personal accounts of the craft of self-exploration and portrayal of characters at the collegiate level would be very valuable. These documents could serve as useful recruiting tools that illustrate what skill sets are involved in competing in intercollegiate individual events.

Perhaps more importantly, these accounts can aid in our assessment efforts to demonstrate the value of our activities. Increasingly, higher education institutions expect collegiate forensics programs to conduct assessment of program outcomes to “justify [programs’] funding and resource streams” (Kelly, 2010, p. 131). As both national collegiate forensics organizations and individual programs confront growing assessment demands, it would be highly useful if the community had access to publicly-available interviews or narratives from competitors that provide us with qualitative data about the logical and emotional critical-thinking skills promoted by individual events. Having evidence of the many critical-thinking outcomes of intercollegiate forensics training, programs can justify their existence and resources by pointing to a broad range of logical and emotional critical-thinking results. As we argue, emotional competency skills are important life skills that are increasingly needed by today’s college students (Strauss, 2014). We should promote ourselves as equipping students with these critical thinking skills as we justify the need for collegiate forensics programs.

Conclusion

Based on our limited exploration, we contend that forensics competition has the potential to train students in important emotional competencies. Participation in interpretative and public-address events may teach students to be proficient in affective skills such as self-awareness, self-control, empathy, motivation awareness, and relational adeptness. We argue that these cognitive benefits of forensics may be just as important as the logical critical-thinking skills that we most often promote, especially in a time when factual argument and rational appeal perhaps may be less effective than in the past. The findings of our work here justify further scholarship that seeks to measure the relationship between forensics training and affective competence.

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Reflections on Forensic Practice and Civic Education: What Are We Teaching? What Are We Learning?

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In October of 1978, I boarded a van with teammates and competed in a forensics tournament at Auburn University. Every fall since, I have loaded up and geeked out – the last 27 I was “sprung from cages on Highway Nine, chrome-wheeled, fuel-injected and steppin’ out over the line,” blaring the Boss with Rome, Georgia in my rear-view mirror. In the fall of 2016, I traveled nowhere. After 38 years it seemed that a bit of good ol’ career-type educational assessment might be due. I realized I may want to get out while I’m young...

“*Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road...*” These words from Walt Whitman’s *Song of the Open Road* commenced my first coaching session as a grad student at Wayne State University. I was in the woods, somewhere far outside of the comfort and safety of my new home, Detroit. Camp Tamarack, a Jewish summer camp, surrounded me. I was shuffled off to the I.E. boys’ cabin with a new kid, who I’ll call Harold because he sort of looked like the “gentle” French herald in Kenneth Branagh’s *Henry V*, sporting longish brown hair and slightly pale in complexion with a wonderful tinge of Yiddish nasality in his dialect. Harold had summered at Camp Tamarack and was happily explaining the color-coding of the plates in the dining cabin to this ignorant Hoosier goy on our journey cabin-ward. Dusty mattresses and a 60-watt bare bulb hanging from the ceiling defined our stage. Harold awkwardly pried open a well-worn copy of *Leaves of Grass*, and began, “*Afoot and light-hearted, I take to the open road...*”

And he did. He visualized the road before him, internalized the exuberance, even crafted subtle, nuanced builds as he sallied forth. The reading was magnificent. I experienced that wonderful sense of narrative transformation that accompanies interpretation done well, a feeling that would visit so rarely in the decades to follow. Oh sure, there were problems: some awkward movements, a slightly Yiddish dialect that might not fit the character, and it was Whitman for God’s sake, even a rookie coach like me knew that you could never win with Whitman. And so began the deconstruction of gentle Harold.

My exclusion of Whitman from competition consideration represents an internalized community norm. It gives rise to the question: “What are we teaching?” Notice the shift from my own personal coaching to the communal “we.” Even though there are certainly differences between all coaches, the community standards are expressed in various ways: by what wins, by what endures, by what is constantly present on ballots, by what shrinks and fades away, and by what we applaud. Whether we like it or not, the ballots we receive at tournaments represent our teaching. We have chosen to place students in the position to receive comments from the forensic community. When community values are skewed, then so is our pedagogy.

In regards to civic engagement, what are we teaching? In light of the well-documented erosion of public civic discourse, the decline of democratic values and the annihilation of the credibility of the institutions that undergird our culture and civilization, what are we teaching? The quick and easy response to this question highlights how extemporaneous speaking involves students in contemporary issues, how persuasive speaking solves social problems, and how rhetorical criticism contemplates the very subject of political rhetoric. Beyond this, thanks to virtually every round of interpretation, our students are certainly more aware of issues involving race, gender and sexual orientation. And every four years most citizen-students vote exactly how our particular program has programmed them to vote. How can we not take credit for positive civic engagement? Exposure to significant social and political issues certainly ranks among the greatest benefits of forensic activity.

However, if recent elections are an accurate indication of the state of public discourse, then forensic professionals and communication educators have little to celebrate. Perhaps it is time to reevaluate the subtle lessons being taught about public communication through forensic activity.

As the academic year unfolds, I take note of all of the experiences I miss. Having assumed new job responsibilities in a new place this year, I missed giving my opening speech to a forensics team this year. When a new team gathers I like to make them aware of the privilege of forensic activity. It goes something like this: You get to pack on a van with friends, free of charge, see places you've never seen, and talk to audiences about the most significant issues of our day. Some of you will challenge them to take action on things that really matter. Others will analyze words and symbols that humans employ to persuade. Some will simply get to make 'em laugh. Many get to join in participative art-partnering with great authors, poets and playwrights to deliver literary, artistic performance. It is not like a static painting on a wall, you get to become a part of the art that comes to life and exists in the moment – only that moment. And you will practice, and research, and learn more than you ever have, and practice some more. You will become a better communicator than you thought you could ever be. You will know the satisfaction of doing your very best, of being your very best. And one day, in the midst of another life, you will look back to these days proudly and shout "I did that." Some day you will look back wistfully and whisper, "I did that." Make the most of your opportunity.

Along with the privilege of forensic activity for students comes the faculty obligation of nurturing that development. The things we teach matter. We are teaching the brightest and best, a subset of students in American colleges who want to excel in communication arts. We are impacting leaders. The communication lessons taught should be the standard for communication education. Intercollegiate forensics should be a place that the world can look and see communication done right. We should represent the ideal. We should define the ideal.

I tried to force Harold into the forensic suit that never quite fit him right. As a trade-off, I allowed him to do the Whitman if he would try other events. Harold had a rough freshman year. Finally, late in the winter at a tournament in Ohio his name finally showed up on a finals posting...it was Poetry.

This past spring, before leaving Georgia, I had the good fortune of teaching an honors course in political communication. I was amazed at the student disdain for both

candidates. While Trump's shortcomings were well-documented, the comment that repeatedly surfaced about Hillary Clinton was that she was too "robotic." In discussing the debates with students in Pennsylvania months later, the first comment made was that Clinton seemed like she was "memorized." The same critique, miles apart, not prompted in the least. As one student remarked about Trump, "at least he's real." Apparently, what social critics and a few philosophers have been saying about this generation is true, their defining value is authenticity. Something must appear to be genuine to be accepted in the least. This certainly explains the negative classroom reaction to final round NFA tapes and DVDs I have endured over the years. Students would actually laugh at the delivery styles of many of our top speakers. Our pedagogy needs to reflect the social context. Students simply don't laugh at TED talks the way they do at forensic students. We must abandon the role of forensic technician with its overemphasis on delivery minutia. Robotic, overly-polished delivery is being rejected in the public forum and has been for years, since the days of the elocutionists.

I just happened to overhear one of the judges as he exited the final round of Poetry that Harold managed to get into that long-ago winter in Ohio. This was a judge that had been around a while, and someone whose opinion I valued greatly. He exclaimed to a colleague, "You won't believe what I just heard in the final round of Poetry. Some kid was reading Whitman (gasp), Song of the Open Road...and it was amazing."

The total irrelevance of credibility in the recent presidential campaign was almost astonishing. Anything could be argued, affirmed or denied without any attribution whatsoever. Perhaps we have entered the age of "post-credibility." It is a good thing we hold their feet to the fire in forensic competition. Don't bring that argument without sources, or rather, the appearance of sources. When a study conducted just a few years ago on finalists in NFA Persuasion found that half of the source citations were misleading, mis-cited or non-existent, how did the community react? How did the organization react? One student in the round did not cite a single accurate source. What are we teaching when we look the other way?

Harold took last place in his Poetry round, going 1-6-6. He appeared to be fairly happy with his accomplishment, at least for the evening. I wasn't surprised when he drifted away the first semester of his sophomore year. Journalism seemed a better fit. Last I saw he was editing a newspaper somewhere in Michigan's lower peninsula.

One lesson rings loud and clear through the pedagogy of the ballot. Own the room. This round is all about you! The speaker as the center of the universe has become the dominant forensic mode. "Methos" has replaced ethos. From this way of viewing the world, social issues become significant only as they can be employed for the speaker's gain. Real social activism is encouraged in speeches, even mandated, but the mere appearance of action is all that is required from the booming voice at the front of the room. The appearance of civic engagement becomes another important item on the rubric of successful forensic persuasive speeches. And how can we blame politicians for this behavior when we are training the next generation of leaders in the same way? The bottom line: say whatever is necessary to win. Here is where the worlds of Donald Trump and contemporary forensics converge.

I regret little about my 34 years as a forensic educator. I suppose my greatest misgivings are associated with times that I chose the role of coach over educator, times when I knew that the narrow prescriptions of the game did not reflect the communicative

truths of the larger world. Forensic education can be a bridge to the larger world, an invaluable means of civic education, or it can stand as a wall, imposing on students to focus only on themselves, their trophies, their next round.

It was my second year in Detroit, and shortly after midnight there was someone pounding on my door. I opened the door to find Harold, tears streaming down his cheeks. He needed a place to stay for a few nights. As the story goes, Harold had fallen in love with a nice Muslim girl, from Lebanon I think. So, after being expelled from his own house by his father, Harold was attacked by the girl's two brothers. He fled, boarded a city bus and ended up at my place. Sometimes we bring our students to the world, and sometimes, they bring the world to us. If we just listen, we can hear the needs of our world knocking on the doors of some of our most blindly cherished forensics conventions—calling on them to open up and change to meet the needs of a larger world.