

Autoethnography as an Ethical Practice

Kristi Gerding Scholten, Truman State University

Over the years the *National Forensic Journal* has been concerned with facilitating discussion related to the instruction, practices, development, critique, and research of speech activities. Included in its stated goals is that scholarly discussion needs to include forensic educators, administrators, and students; that this examination of educational and competitive practices occurs at all levels. As Chouinard and Kuyper point out in their submission, there is no better way to engage all levels of forensic participants than with the very tools this association privileges—those of performance. Autoethnography is such a performance.

In writing about identity, Laing argues (as cited in Bochner & Ellis, 2006) that our communicative acts always embody projections of the self, even if at a subconscious level. We are performing our selves, every time we critique a poetry program, perform an informative speech, or write a research article; and that self, while nebulous and always in-process *says something* about the forensic culture. In this edition, author White references Berry (2008) as a justification for her research, stating, “We are not distanced, uninvolved persons who examine communication and cultural life, but rather subjective beings *whose experience makes possible* the understanding of these and all research topics” (p. 156, emphasis mine). Why is it, then, that we don’t privilege the personal experience as a legitimate way of knowing OR of research? We research the effects of forensic competition on communication skills, and we analyze ballots to uncover judge preference and the outcome of certain performative choices. We talk about the forensic system as an organization experiencing various paradoxes. We research potential gender

biases in certain competitive events, and so on. Yes, we concern ourselves with thinking theoretically and systematically about potential outcomes of the choices we make, but rarely do we research the sort-of pre-requisite to all of those choices. We do not often take the time to deliberately and conscientiously reflect upon the experiential process; to perform our selves boldly, consciously, and with an eye for critique. We certainly don't privilege the personal as a form of evidence. While biography, and autobiography has a long and privileged history in other disciplines (see Okley, 1992), in forensics it is at best ignored and at worst laughed at. Art Bochner, one of the forerunners of autoethnography in the communication discipline, argues for the importance of such self-reflection:

Autoethnographies show people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles. *That's why I consider autoethnography an ethical practice.* People want to do the right thing, the sensible and helpful thing. (Bochner & Ellis, 2006, p 111, emphasis mine)

Further, Bochner argues that communication research can get bogged down and, ironically, become non-communicative. The ultimate goal of communication research is to invite readers into a conversation, to be accessible to ordinary people, "to show or enact communication as a living, breathing, active process" (Bochner & Ellis, 2006, p. 112). Thus, I ask, if we aren't inviting people into our conversations about ourselves—are we meeting our stated goals? I would say that we aren't, not fully and to the best of our ability. We are doing ourselves an injustice by not examining the way we write ourselves and our audience into the ongoing narrative of forensics, the way it writes us and the right and wrong, good and bad of these narratives.

In this journal, by reflecting upon their experiences as graduate students and beginning forensic coaches – Chouinard and Kuyper invite readers into their experiences of inhabiting new and confusing roles in the forensic world. They argue that such a reflection can only help beginners in any discipline recognize that there are just some shortcomings inherent in being a beginner. At the other end of the spectrum, White reflects upon challenges she has faced as a well-established director. She acknowledges both etically and emically that reality is created by the perceptions and enacted identity or communicative acts of the communicator. Both pieces give us a glimpse into the ways that people in the forensics’ arena position themselves and are positioned by forensics culture. These pieces highlight why doing autoethnography is an ethical practice:

All of our communicative acts are expressions or representations of the meeting place of self and culture, of what is inside us and can be made visible to outsiders, and what originates outside us yet eventually circulates within us. (Bochner & Ellis, 2006, p. 113)

Self-reflection brings to the forefront of our minds such questions as; what kind of personal characteristics have I enacted and with what results? What kind of personal characteristics would I have to enact in order to be treated well by this group? Is that right or fair? Where do such beliefs about “correct” behavior originate? How are my own actions ethical or not? Is there even a way to ensure fairness? The list of such questions could go on – but the point is, if our selves are co-written, made of our own agency as well as the cultural tools we are given, what do such selves say about the culture they are embedded in?

When I put out the call for this special edition of the National Forensic Journal I was disappointed with the response – not by the quality of the submissions I did receive, but by the sheer lack of submissions overall. So, I thank those who were willing make themselves vulnerable (in the words of Berry, 2008 as cited by White)—to go through the harrowing process of self-reflection so that we might identify and learn from their experiences, a sort of long-distance mentoring, if you will. I also challenge those of you reading this to think of other ways that autoethnography and forensics can go together. If you don't want to conduct autoethnographic research, then I challenge you to think of other forums where this type of knowing can have a voice. I ask you to ponder: how narrative ways of knowing and self-reflection can be used to critique or promote forensic activity. How can we begin to conceptualize using personal knowledge as evidence—in our scholarly research or our forensics performances? Rather than writing off personal evidence because it doesn't conform to tests of rational argument/evidence, are there alternative ways to judge its credibility? What are the typical and not-so-typical experiences of those who have participated in forensics, at all levels, and, again, how might we give these experiences a legitimate expression? Can we better articulate ways to use autoethnography in our communication pedagogy? Might we conceive of personal storytelling or autobiographical informative as an experimental event? These are just some of the questions that come to my mind when I ponder directions for future research and the articles presented in this special edition not only begin to help us formulate answers to such questions but also give us resources to help us navigate our own self narratives. The following examples of autoethnography encourage us – to examine the ethics of our performative choices, to reflect upon how we are always simultaneously

audiences and are audiencing others (in the words of Corey, 2006 as cited by Chouinard & Kuyper). This can only help us grow—individually and as a culture. In a culture that thrives on performance, performing our selves autoethnographically should be a piece of cake...or maybe humble pie?

References

- Bochner, A., & Ellis, C. (2006). Communication as autoethnography. In Shepard, G., St. John, J., & Striphas T. (Eds.), *Communication as...perspectives on theory* (pp. 110-122). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Okely, J. (1992). Anthropology and autobiography: participatory experience and embodied knowledge. In Okely, J., & Callaway, H. (Eds.), *Anthropology and autobiography* (pp. 1-28). New York: Routledge.

It All Goes In the Dryer Together: An Autoethnographic Performance Exploring the Experiences of First-Year Graduate Forensic Coaches

Michael Chouinard, Florida State College at Jacksonville

Chad Kuyper, Florida State College at Jacksonville

Introduction

Preparing this paper has not been unlike preparing for our journeys as forensic educators. We find ourselves devoting considerable time to worrying about what will happen and questioning whether or not the end result will be successful. How will the forensic community receive our work? Will we succeed in accomplishing our own goals for the project? As relatively new communication scholars, the task at hand is

audiences and are audiencing others (in the words of Corey, 2006 as cited by Chouinard & Kuyper). This can only help us grow—individually and as a culture. In a culture that thrives on performance, performing our selves autoethnographically should be a piece of cake...or maybe humble pie?

References

- Bochner, A., & Ellis, C. (2006). Communication as autoethnography. In Shepard, G., St. John, J., & Striphas T. (Eds.), *Communication as...perspectives on theory* (pp. 110-122). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Okely, J. (1992). Anthropology and autobiography: participatory experience and embodied knowledge. In Okely, J., & Callaway, H. (Eds.), *Anthropology and autobiography* (pp. 1-28). New York: Routledge.

It All Goes In the Dryer Together: An Autoethnographic Performance Exploring the Experiences of First-Year Graduate Forensic Coaches

Michael Chouinard, Florida State College at Jacksonville

Chad Kuyper, Florida State College at Jacksonville

Introduction

Preparing this paper has not been unlike preparing for our journeys as forensic educators. We find ourselves devoting considerable time to worrying about what will happen and questioning whether or not the end result will be successful. How will the forensic community receive our work? Will we succeed in accomplishing our own goals for the project? As relatively new communication scholars, the task at hand is

simultaneously daunting and exciting, both a mountain and a molehill. Surely, this work will not be the opus of our professional careers; yet, presently, it is a significant undertaking. Quite simply, we lack experience, an acknowledgment that is familiar to—though, perhaps not commonly verbalized by—beginning forensic coaches everywhere.

Opening with an admission of this sort serves two primary functions: It establishes the tone for this piece, which at its core, is about the ups and downs of inhabiting new roles, and it acknowledges the inherent shortcomings of beginners in any discipline, which will hopefully counteract the negative perceptions of newcomers held by some more established forensic professionals. We will begin by offering a theoretical justification, explaining our motivation in developing this project. From there, we will share an autobiographical performance script detailing our transitions from forensic competitors to coaches, and we will conclude with a brief reflection on some of the emergent themes within the performance script.

Justifications

To begin, taking on a new role within any culture can be a difficult task, particularly when transitioning to a position of greater or lesser authority. The transition from forensic competitor to coach exemplifies this challenge, which is common to graduate student coaches. Elton (1989) appropriately sums up this period as an “emotional and intellectual rollercoaster” (p. 55). As we can attest, graduate forensic coaches are often embroiled in a complex, sometimes painful, process of identity negotiation. Not yet full-fledged members of the academy, but no longer undergraduate students, they must provide mentorship to others while seeking mentors of their own.

Just as ethnographers must place their research subjects within a social and cultural context, so must autoethnographers situate themselves. We discuss the finer points of our backgrounds in the script itself, but for now, suffice it to say that both of us put the bulk of our energy as undergraduates into forensic competition, and in grad school, toward coaching. We both found ourselves very close in age to our student competitors, which presented its own thorny process of identity negotiation. We wrote and re-wrote new identities for ourselves, trying to figure out how best to play the role of friend, while maintaining the position of “boss.” We certainly had a number of choices in how we portrayed our identities as coaches. White (2005) demonstrates the various models of mentorship a coach can use to guide students through their forensic experience. The friendship model “views mentor and mentee as peers who are equal” (p. 90), and does away with any sense of hierarchical superiority on the part of the coach. Graduate coaches are often very close in age to the competitors they coach (and sometimes younger!), making this the most likely relationship they will forge: “the closeness of age makes these coaches uniquely suited to the advantages of the friendship model. An element of cohesion often exists between students and younger coaches that an older coach cannot fully access” (p. 91). As the chronological gap between coach and student narrows, the friendship model of mentoring seems to become more and more inevitable. However, this type of bond is not without its pitfalls:

The loss of authority one may experience by eliminating any sense of professional hierarchy could make it difficult for a coach to maintain control over his/her team. Chaos could erupt if students feel that all decisions are open for mutual negotiation. (pp. 90-91)

The balance between coach and friend can be difficult to navigate, not only for young coaches, but for their students, as well.

There is another statement about graduate forensic coaches in forensic literature that we feel must be addressed. Morris (2005) writes of the difference between “evaluator judges” and “critic judges.” The former prioritizes herself in writing a ballot, evaluating a performance based primarily on her own social connection with the student performing, her perceived knowledge of the history of forensics, and her own opinions about how events “should” be performed. The judges most likely to commit these sins, according to Morris,

are those who have just recently completed their years of competition...

These “experienced competitors-first judges” evaluate performances instead of critiquing them. As directors, we have created a monster and it’s called the fifth year student judge or the first year graduate student. (pp. 75-76)

While we agree that student competitors would benefit more from critique than evaluation, as defined by Morris, this hardly seems like an issue that is isolated to the demographic she describes. Furthermore, with all of the other pressures facing first-year coaches and judges, comments like these only serve to further isolate and discourage these individuals, especially when they come from someone so widely admired and respected. The insular nature of the forensic circuit heightens the sense of the personal, whether through words of praise or discouragement.

Morris’s claim shows that while many graduate coaches receive invaluable support from their advisors and mentors, they must navigate the waters of identity

negotiation against a strong counter-current of discouragement from some members of the community. In the face of such negative feedback from established members of the academy itself, the graduate coach enters into a process of acculturation. Amaya (2007) argues that this process can be considered a performance in and of itself. He claims that the heart of acculturation lies in how a newcomer answers the question: “‘What kind of personal characteristics ought I have to be treated ethically by others?’ This question moves ethics away from normative ideas of morality and suggests an ethics centered on the self and on performance” (p. 2). With some in the forensic community treating the graduate coach with disdain, this question becomes even more important to the coach as he/she performs their identity within his/her new forensic culture. Similarly, Amaya treats his identity as a text and examines how and why he was obligated to “rewrite” himself. To accomplish this, the new member of a society decides which social mores to treat as normal, which ones to transgress. To guide this choice, the new arrival must convey a new set of semiotic cues that others will (hopefully) evaluate as worthy of normal, good, moral treatment. In doing so, the newcomer begins to “rewrite the self” (p. 195).

Performance and Autoethnography

So, why performance? Couldn't we have constructed a stand-alone narrative without donning coordinating suits and digging through bookshelves for our old black books? Certainly. However, Spry (2000) establishes a direct link between the practices of autoethnography and performance, arguing that the latter can dramatically enhance the former. She discusses autoethnography as a means of sharing one interpretation of an identity in constant flux, leading to a performance in which “I” becomes universal,

identifiable, and relative: “I believe I exist somewhere amid the sociopolitical narratives written on my body. I hover, duck, and dodge to resist a reifying surface/body politic of mother, daughter, woman, white, heterosexual” (p. 84). In using performance as a method of autoethnographic inquiry, we connect with every other graduate student coach negotiating the twists and turns of their own nascent identities: “The autoethnographic ‘I’ becomes a plural pronoun with the constant refraction of selves in disparate locations” (p. 85).

Much has been written about performance as a tool for creating shared identity. In autoethnographic performance, the narrator serves as both dramatist and historian, pulling the past into the autobiographical present and allowing both performer and audience to re-experience it. Alexander (2000) argues that the autobiographical perspective can have an equally significant effect on both the performer and the audience, noting that:

... the highly aestheticized recreated self in the text, serves as both a magnifying glass for the performer—who is studying, exploring, and presenting the self—as well as a refracting mirror that allows [the audience] points of access and an occasion to reflect upon [our] own past.
(p. 97)

By examining the spaces lived in by the performer, we can use a generative approach to create our own scripts based on the identifiable moments found in the work of others. When this occurs, the performer has become an activist, imploring the audience to consider the various issues at hand and further justifying the significant link between performance and lived experience (Corey, 2003).

Furthermore, Denzin (2006) contends that by putting past experiences into the autobiographical present performers are able to insert themselves “into the past and create the conditions for rewriting and hence re-experiencing it” (p. 334). This step is critical in providing a common ground where the audience must consider the reality of a situation. Through critical self-reflection and first-hand awareness of power dynamics within a given cultural setting, researchers are able to present issues relevant to the marginalized other, and navigate the complex “interrelations of self/other/bodies/language” (Spry, 2006, p. 345).

Ultimately, we can see that performance fills a pedagogical role by instructing readers about how the author sees a particular situation, and perhaps, how they too should view it. Denzin (2006) argues that autoethnographic performances are not only performative in nature, but pedagogical and political as well. They reveal the varied lenses through which individuals interpret the world, and then challenge these perceptions by evoking critical self-reflection: “The pedagogical is always moral and political, by enacting a way of seeing and being, it challenges, contests or endorses the official hegemonic ways of seeing and representing the other” (p. 333). As a form of textual engagement, then, performance ethnography offers the possibility of the understanding of a people through the analysis of cultural acts engaged in the context of audience; an understanding of audience, how we audience ourselves, audience each other, and audience cultural change; and an understanding of cultural change as lived experience” (Corey, 2006, p. 332).

“What is autoethnography?” Ellis (2004) playfully asks in *The Ethnographic I*. She replies:

My brief answer? Research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political.

Autoethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection, portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot. (p. xix)

Dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot? Sounds like a duo! We stand with other autoethnographic scholars about the compelling power of story to provide just as much enlightenment as any other theoretical framework (Wall, 2006). So with Spry (2000) encouraging us to perform, that's just what we do. She describes autoethnography as "a narration signifying at least one interpretation of ever-fluctuating identity" (p. 84). With our performance, we portray these shifting identities by slipping back into one that we know very well—that of interper, complete with little black book. It is our hope that the following script will resonate with other graduate coaches, students who have worked with graduate coaches, and all members of the forensic community. While our experiences are unique, they are real, and they have directly impacted the forensic community in ways even we may never fully understand. Admittedly, this performance is only a start in the direction of a more constructive dialogue, the first thirty seconds, if you will. But, perhaps more than anyone, ours is a community which understands the importance of a strong beginning.

It All Goes in the Dryer Together

A few quick notes on the performance: You will notice our minimalistic approach to staging and blocking directions in this script. We understand and respect the artistic

liberties performers take with various texts, and trust readers to supply their own imagined blocking and performative choices within the various scenes. It is our belief that detailed description of our own decisions regarding performance—while effective in many scripts—would draw away from the overall experiences being presented, particularly when dealing with the subjectivity of oral interpretation within competitive forensics. In other words, we do not want readers to feel forced into accepting the performed reality which we originally designed for ourselves; rather, we want you to feel welcome to interpret the text in your own way so that you may more readily identify with the script itself and the message it holds.

With the exception of the performers and the head coach we were working under, names have been changed and details omitted to help protect student confidentiality.

*Script is performed by two coaches, Chad and Mike. Lines are read out of black interp books, and page turns are indicated by “***”. Voicemail sections are read by one performer hidden behind the other to simulate a voiceover effect.*

VOICEMAIL 1

beep

You have two. New. Messages. Message one. One. Seventeen. AM.

Heeeeeeeeeeeeeeee! CHAD! Chad. Chaaaaaaad. You have to come down

here.....we're WASTED! Why aren't you down here anyway!? EVERYone is here!!

Anyway, I just...I.....I love you. You're a wonderful coach and fabulous person and

KELLY! KELLY COME OVER HERE!! I'M ON THE PHONE WITH CHAAAA-

beep

Message two. One. Thirty-seven. AM.

Chad. It's Alex, and you have to call me back right now. It's an EMERGENCY. As SOON as you get this, OK? Call me, right away. Right. AWAY.

Chad: [dials phone]

Mike (as Alex): Chad! Hi!

Chad: Mmhi. Alex, what is it? What's the emergency?

Alex: OK. Two things. Number one: how do you tell when milk's gone bad?

Chad: [pause] What.

Alex: How do you tell? Like is it a smell thing? Or.....appearance?

Chad: [sigh] Well, viscosity, I guess. Although with milk any time there's something suspicious, you're best just throwing it out.

Alex: OK, cool!

Chad: Alex, I fail to see how this is an emergen-

Alex: Question number two: OK. So I'm doing laundry, and I know I'm supposed to separate out the clothes, right? Right?

Chad: Yeah.

Alex: But, do they all go in the DRYER together?

Mike: DOING YOUR LAUNDRY. STEP ONE. GET DIRTY CLOTHES TOGETHER.

Chad: Surrogate parent. An aspect of the job that I was not, in any way, anticipating. I chuckled to myself when I saw on a prominent DOF's Facebook page the words

“surrogate parent” listed under current jobs. I guess I thought that duty was reserved for someone who had been in the activity for decades, a papa bear type, a father figure. Someone with enough years between him and his students to be able to adequately play the role of dad. You know...someone old.

Mike: I felt young. Almost too young. I was only two to four years older than most of the students on the team, and I had competed against half of them the previous year. It was one of the things that both drew me to my graduate school and made me cringe at the thought of being there. What could be better than coaching students who already knew me from the circuit, who had seen me as a competitor and saw me as a friend, their equal? Oh gawd, I thought. What could be worse?

Chad: I fell into forensics coaching after a two-year stint in a graduate-level English program. I had dreams of becoming a high school English teacher, but in order to accomplish that, I had to become certified to teach Speech first, a “detail” that resulted in an extra year of communication courses. Courses I came to prefer over my English ones. So I received an MA in English with a desire never to return to the field and a teaching and coaching assistantship for the following year in the Communication department of the same university.

Mike: I went to my undergraduate university *for* speech. I got a scholarship to compete and didn’t even bother applying anywhere else. While there, I also had the opportunity to be in several theatre productions and sing in the choir. But speech stayed at the top of my

list. Somewhere along the way, it occurred to me that four more years in forensics were not going to be enough. I hadn't put this much time and effort into the activity only to walk away when I ran out of eligibility. I needed more. I was a "lifer." So in the spring of my senior year, I began playing the grad school game. Now, if you were me (which you're not, so I'll explain), the decision to attend graduate school was obvious, but the decision about *where* to go was much more complicated. It was not unlike my relationship to food—of course I'm going to eat *somewhere*, but please don't make me decide where that somewhere is. And even when you do finally settle on a restaurant, you still have to choose between a table and a booth, you have to pick your meal, what kind of potato you want, what you're going to drink, whether you want dessert, and at the end of this big hot mess, how you're going to pay. I was what you might call a cautious consumer. I had been on the losing end before. I once ordered the McChicken at McDonalds on accident, expecting the Crispy Chicken. The difference? One tastes like deep fried chicken, the other tastes like deep fried leftover chicken pieces. I pictured beaks breaking out of the ground-up confusion and pecking me in the eyeball. You can only imagine the thoughtfulness (and trepidation) with which I approached the grad school application process. Yet the question remained: what the hell was a vita?

Chad: Now I was no stranger to forensics. I had competed throughout most of my undergraduate career. I had made forensics my official "thing" in undergrad, the activity that I spent the most time on, had the most friends in...the one I liked the most. I loved that, if I wanted to, I could take a road trip from Moorhead, MN to Fairfax, VA and have a friendly face and a couch to sleep on in nearly every major city I passed through. And

frankly, after being out of the activity for three years, I kinda missed it. I worked as a de facto coach on the MSU team for a semester in my English program, which was just long enough to re-ignite my passion for the activity. However, I couldn't really anticipate what it would be like on the other side of the fence. A mentor, a teacher...a coach.

Chad [at a team social function]: Hi, I'm Chad! How's it going?

Mike (as Kyle): Good. I'm Kyle.

Chad: How's college going?

Kyle: All right. My roommate's a tool. It's OK, I guess.

Chad: Yeah, roommate situations are tough. They can make or break the whole college thing.

Kyle: [silence]

Chad: So, you excited to compete?

Kyle: [backing away] Yeah. Should be....fun.

Chad: Yeah. [pause] How's your hot dog?

Kyle: I gotta go.

Chad: Hi, I'm Chad! How's it going!

Mike (as Ashley): It's good! Hey guess what I was talking to my mom and she said that my little sister has strep throat and I shared a straw with her this past weekend when I was home and then last night someone lit a door on fire in the dorm and I was outside for like two hours without a coat on so now I'm definitely going to get sick and I'll probably miss the first tournament. Hey, wanna try my smoothie?

Chad:so I used to be in the English department, but that's how I ended up here.

[pause] I'm sorry, I've monopolized this whole conversation. Tell me about yourself.

Mike (as Chelsea): Don't ask me that question. I hate that question.

Chad: [beat] Doooo.....you have brothers and sisters?

Mike: STEP TWO. WASH. ONE LOAD AT A TIME.

Chad: It's hard to describe how I felt about my first months of coaching. Bizarrely enough, I think George Orwell might have hit closest to the mark with his concept of *doublethink*, or the ability to hold two contradictory ideas in your head at the same time. I felt both competent and ready to start coaching (I'd been in outrounds at AFA! I could interp! I could memorize a PA! Organize and research one, too. I did limited prep without vomiting down the front of my suit!) and supremely unqualified. It's one thing to have the internal tools to dig subtext out of a complex poetry selection, it's another to use them, and it's quite another to teach somebody else how to do it.

Chad: All right, Tim. You ready to start?

Mike (as Tim): Yeah, man! It's gonna be great! This is my favorite movie ever!

Chad: All right, let's see what you got.

Mike: Seven minutes later.

Chad: OK, Tim. Let's.....start at the end. First of all, if the main character is in a boxing match, the line that establishes this shouldn't be the one at the end. The one that says, "Dad, I just won the boxing match." Next, not all boxers sound alike. More specifically....they don't all sound like Rocky. So...be sure to articulate!! And then...you [painfully] can take it to the tournament. Nnnngnggg.

Chad: People like Tim were obviously the extreme cases. However.....how do you teach someone to do something that just came naturally to you? "Just....do it...ya know, good?" What's more, how do I learn to do this? Nobody taught me. All I wanted was a goddamn manual. Any undergraduate will be able to cite examples from their general education courses illustrating the idea that just because you studied something for a long time, that doesn't make you qualified to teach it. Did the fact that I competed for four years make me qualified, for that reason alone, to tell someone how to do it, especially since no proof was REQUIRED of me to, you know, show that I was capable of showing someone how to do it? Was I more of a screw-up than I thought?

Mike: I know I was. Especially in extemp.

Chad: [agreeing, recreates a moment from judging a tournament][Chad furiously writes a ballot, glances at stopwatch, stops in horror. Cringes, holds up two fingers to signal two minutes remaining. Mouths "sorry."]

Mike [on phone]: Hi Leah [Mike and Chad's DOF]! Yeah, the tournament's going great: yeah, the kids are in high spirits, and the drive was real easy. Yeah, so...um....funny story. I thought...ha! I THOUGHT that the entry fee only applied to our UNCOVERED slots, not....ALL....of....our slots. So, um, we have a little bit of money yet! Like....50 dollars. So...as long as we don't EAT anything...

Chad: [driving the van full of students] You guys in the back are hungry? OK....there's gotta be a turn off here pretty soon. [waits] OK, there's gonna be something here. [waits] OK, we can do better than Marge's Pizza Shack. [waits] OK. Next stop is 43 miles. Who has granola bars??

Mike (as Rachel): Hey Chad!

Chad: Hey Rachel! [notices stacks of books] Um, ILL much?

Rachel: Yeah, I got wasted with my friends from Applebee's last night, and then I got all these emails from the library saying I had books in. I think....I just ILL a lot of shit when I'm drunk.

Chad: I love you.

Chad: Rachel was my senior. The majority of kids I coached were freshmen and sophomores, ones that were just learning the ropes of the activity. Rachel was my veteran, the one who played the role of leader for the others. Rachel had yet to break at a national tournament, and was already hip deep in applications for coaching assistantships around the nation. Though neither of us explicitly talked about it, she and I both knew the

pressure she felt to break to outbounds in order to prove her “worthiness” as a coach. She was pretty much universally loved by our team, exhibiting a blend of playfulness and professionalism that others found magnetic.

Chad: Hi Krista!

Mike (as Krista): Hi. So I found a piece I really like.

Chad: Yeah?

Krista: Yeah.

Chad: Do you...like the language?

Krista: Not really.

Chad: The character.

Krista: You could say.

Chad: So...

Krista: I get to be a big slut.

Chad: I'm so proud of you.

Krista was tough to get a read on. The kind whose nonverbals betray absolutely no information. Part of me believed Krista's facial expressions would look the same whether she was telling you she just got engaged or that her house burned to the ground. But, while others in the team got caught up in he-said/she-said romantic squab blings, Krista's placid nature slowly turned her into the backbone of the team.

Chad: Hi! Jill! I didn't see you at your 9 AM coaching appointment!

Mike (as Jill): Oh yeah! I tried to send you a Facebook message, but I couldn't find your profile.

Chad: You...what?

Jill: A Facebook message.

Chad: Face...book.

Jill: UGGGH. You need to get a Facebook profile.

Chad: It's like she was speaking in Sumerian. Though I was less than a decade older than all the students on the team (and in one case, younger than), the exponential growth in communication technology put a gulf between me and them. My education my first year of coaching expanded not only my interpersonal boundaries, but my technological ones as well.

Mike:

Dear everyone on the circuit who I competed against and am now judging,

Hey! Remember me? Of course you do. This is awkward.

Sincerely,

Mike

Recently, I got a frantic phone call from a first-year coach going through the same thing.

"I feel like if I give people I know a bad rank they'll hate me," she said. I told her what I told myself: "You don't owe anyone anything but an open mind and good justification."

Chad [in a coaching session]: So, how are you doing today?

Mike (as Krista): I'm good.

Chad: Good, good.

Krista: Yeah, good.

Chad: Cool.

Chad: So....how's your semester going.

Krista: Good. I have a lot of work. My mom thinks I've been hanging around the speech team too much, but....you know.

Chad: Um, yeah. Well, let's hear your POI.

Krista: [gets into position, starts speaking] I LOVE MY CUNT.

Chad: [coughs uncontrollably]: Have you....read this....to your family??

Krista: Are you crazy?

Chad: STEP THREE. DRY ALL LOADS. TOGETHER.

Mike: The biggest challenge in being a graduate coach has little to do with coaching, really. Coaching itself is usually relatively easy. What makes life as a graduate coach difficult is that you are never just a graduate coach. You are also a graduate student. And teacher. And mentor and colleague, and surrogate parent, and scholar, and friend, and Facebook friend, and somehow, through it all, you have to try to maintain your status, not only as a worthwhile human being, but as somewhat of an authority figure. Ohmygawd.

Chad: Ah, the juggling act. I had not been new to it. I had been active in many extra-curricular activities in undergrad. In addition to being a leader on my forensic squad my

senior year, I was keeping a giant, grand piano-sized ball in the air as I prepared for my senior recital, and remained active in a French club, a church group, and the honors program. This new juggling act, however...this was new. Before, if balls dropped to the ground, I was only accountable to myself, and my ability to make excuses to professors. This time: if I didn't prepare lesson plans in time, it was my students who suffered, not myself. If I creatively moved around coaching appointments because of a juggling mishap, it was my freshman who was hungry to break at their first swing who didn't learn how to compile a POI. I got off scot free. I was used to picking up my own balls. I wasn't used to picking up someone else's.

Mike: And why does it seem like other peoples' balls are never quite as big as ours were when we were their age? I cringe whenever a student tells me they are "just too busy" to read a prose cutting or "too overwhelmed" to go to that weekend's tournament. Too busy with what? Certainly not speech work. Fortunately, a wise friend and dear mentor has endowed me with a little saying that goes, "We all make choices." Four simple words. Yet they have given me an entirely new lens through which to view the world. For one thing, they give me leverage and the courage to tell a student "no." No, you're not ready to travel this weekend. No, we cannot "just talk" during your entire coaching session. You chose to sign up and had you not, someone else could have. But at the same time, these words also remind me that it is okay for students to choose other activities over speech. I have. I still *do*. And while I wouldn't skip a tournament to attend a homecoming football game, for some people, it's worth it. Life is about experiences, and for some, the goal is to get your feet wet in as many different avenues as possible, to balance a lot of

little balls, if you will. Others prefer to dive in until they are completely submerged, with a few giant balls occupying most of their time. Both are okay. But I still feel compelled to share with students something else I have learned through this metaphor: just *saying* that something is a priority is not enough to keep it in the air. It's never a good idea to lie about the size of your balls. We all make choices.

Chad: Adding to the stress of the circus act was the strange liminal space I found myself in. I was not a DOF, so I didn't have enough authority to truly steer the course of the ship, but I was still responsible for the whirring of the machinery. I kept budgets, determined whether or not events went to competition, and did the lion's share of actual coaching. I was responsible for, in large part, how events looked when they went out to competition, but ultimately, I could not make policies for the team that really determined the course we were steering. It's all very similar to how I imagine being a parent. The sudden, panicked rush of realization that suddenly, your actions (or inactions) have real consequences in the lives of someone else, in the lives of someone who is counting on your skills as a juggler. [pause] Of course, sometimes they do some dropping of their own.

VOICEMAIL 2

beep

You have four new voicemails. Message one. Nine. Fifteen. PM.

“Hi. I'm having a breakdown. My life is a tragedy. A real, honest-to-God, tragedy. I can't go into it right now. But, I can't coach at all this week. Probably next week either.”

Message two. Eleven. Twelve. PM.

“Hey, it’s Alex. Ummm....I have class? Like for when I signed up? I know! I’m sorry. I’m really sorry. I suck. I SUCK! But....well, I’ve skipped this class like four times already to coach with you, so I thought I should go this time. Bye!”

Message three. One. Forty-nine. AM.

“Hey, it’s Joe. I can’t come in to coach tomorrow morning. (sigh) I haven’t practiced at all, and I’m just not feeling this prose piece. I don’t really get what you told me to do with it. Like, at all. Sorry man. I guess I just have work to do.”

Message four. Three. Twenty-seven. AM.

“Hi, Chad! It’s your sense of inadequacy and self-doubt! Hi, yeah, sorry to do this to you, but I was just wondering if your couch was going to be free for the next two weeks, ‘cause I’m going to be in town and staying with you for a reeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeal long time!! Just thought I’d let you know!! OK bye!!!!”

Mike: I remember one coaching session in particular. I was trying to help a student find the emotional levels in her DI. It was clear her mind was elsewhere. I asked her what was up and after several repetitions of “I’m fine,” she told me she’d gone to the doctor again and it didn’t go so well. Our entire team knew of her medical condition, but she hadn’t told any of us that things were getting worse. “The average patient with my condition dies at 35,” she said. “I’m 19. I’m fucking tired of doctors and bad news and being sick. Sometimes, I just feel like giving up.” “I know,” I said. “But we can’t.” I squeezed her tight. And we talked. What more could I do?

Mike (as Rachel): Hey.

Chad: Hey you.

Rachel: How's it goin'?

Chad: Oh, just gearing up for NFA...by turning in all the stuff that was due over AFA.

Rachel: Yeah, I hear ya.

Chad: So. How did you take AFA?

Rachel: Oh, all right. Saw a lot of really good stuff, and you know...head wasn't all the way there with grad schools and everything. I'm just kinda stressed out.

Chad: Yeah. [pause] Well, I suppose I should let us get some stuff done.

Rachel: Yeah, I suppose! It was....good seeing you!

Chad: Yeah. [beat] You sure you're OK?

Rachel: Yeah. [beat] Chad, I'm done.

Chad: Done? With...

Rachel: With everything. I have nothing left. I don't have anything to give to anything anymore, and I don't know what to do. I want to coach and I was counting on that break at AFA, so the pressure would be off at NFA to get into outrounds, but now here it is, and here I am, and I have nothing.

Chad: Rachel....that sucks. You have nothing to lose here, really. Break or no break, you're going to be an amazing coach, so just go and [disappointed at how cliché this sounds]...have as much fun as you possibly can. We're....all kinda done at this point.

Rachel: Yeah. I know. Aw, fuck it.

Chad: She would go on to break three of her events, getting two to semi-finals. She would also later accept a coaching assistantship and go on to coach an all-around individual champion.

Mike: STEP FOUR. REMOVE FROM DRYER. FOLD.

Chad: Since my first year of coaching has passed, I can say that I've improved my coaching "method." I've had to tell roughly the same things to many incoming novices, so some of my techniques have certainly become more codified. I've become more adroit at handling the social limbo graduate coaches are placed into, though in the great forensics metaphor of family, I still can't say I'm quite sure where I fit on the family tree? Old, wise brother to the competitors? Uncle who's more fun than Mom or Dad, but still deserves respect? Odd cousin from Indiana who no one pays attention to at the Thanksgiving table? I still move in and out of these identities, and this game of identity hopscotch is one that I am still playing today.

Mike: No matter how many times I fall back on what worked in the past with a student, I'm always amazed at how, in order to be a truly gifted coach, you must learn to act in the moment. On one level, you may have to adjust a coaching strategy to maximize student learning in a given situation. On another level, you have to remain attuned to the student's emotional state. If the "perfect" coaching tidbit comes after an hour and a half of grueling new input, it's going to exhaust or crush the student and fall flat on its face.

Similarly, holding a student's hand when instead they need a fire lit under their butt only reinforces dependency.

Chad: Wash with gentle soap or wash with bleach.

Mike: You have to know your clothes.

END

Reflection

It is worth reflecting on some of the themes which emerge through this script. The first idea we would like to discuss is the subjectivity of coaching. White (2005) depicts four mentoring styles, three of which—nurturing, friendship, and apprenticeship—she recommends using at various times, depending on the coach's role and the students with whom they are working. This serves as an important reminder that there is not simply one approach to fulfilling our mentoring obligations as forensic educators. In creating and sharing this script, our goal was not to look back with positive or negative judgment on our coaching decisions. Rather, it was to re-live the realities we experienced through our lived performances as first-year coaches, creating a shared platform for observation, introspection, and dialogue.

As forensic professionals, we are bombarded with decisions, many of which directly affect the forensic experiences of the students we oversee. Chad speaks of this in the script when he notes the change in accountability from oneself to one's students:

This time... it was my students who suffered, not myself. If I creatively moved around coaching appointments because of a juggling mishap, it was my freshman

who was hungry to break at their first swing who didn't learn how to compile a POI.

This is a lot of pressure, especially for someone still grappling with the specifics of their new role. Chad later acknowledges feeling simultaneously competent and unqualified, one of the many dichotomies facing this demographic. "What's more," he goes on, "how do I learn to do this? Nobody taught me....Did the fact that I competed for four years make me qualified, for that reason alone, to tell someone how to do it...?" While we were lucky enough to work under two extremely supportive mentors in our Director and Assistant Director of Forensics, the fact remains that they could not step in for us. At best, they could offer their perspectives, help us find resources, and send us on our way. In a sense, they became our "coaching coaches." However, many graduate student coaches, particularly those serving in DOF and ADOF capacities, are not fortunate enough to have such mentorship (Elton, 1989). For them, we imagine the feeling of "sink or swim" to be even more overwhelming.

Another issue facing graduate student coaches is that of rank and responsibility. Chad mentions this unique liminal space in the script:

I was not a DOF, so I didn't have enough authority to truly steer the course of the ship, but I was still responsible for the whirring of the machinery. I kept budgets, determined whether or not events went to competition, and did the lion's share of actual coaching. I was responsible for, in large part, how events looked when they went out to competition, but ultimately, I could not make policies for the team that really determined the course we were steering.

This problematic balance of complete responsibility and zero control can prove very confusing, both to graduate coaches and the undergraduate students they serve. Adding to this matter of authority, Elton (1989) writes:

A graduate student is not faculty, so it is often more difficult to get through all the lines of paperwork at the university. It is an education to learn through experience, but the process is slow. There are a lot of stumbling blocks; a lot of doors are not open, and a lot of people are not there. (p. 60)

Yet, for us, the negotiation of contradictory rank and authority proved most difficult not in these moments of logistical frustration, but in the interpersonal chaos that is a forensic team.

The fine line of mentorship is perhaps never so strained as when helping students deal with their interpersonal (and in some instances, intrapersonal) issues. White (2005) writes, “As forensic educators we expect to spend countless hours helping students polish their speaking and performance skills. What often catches new coaches off-guard, however, is the significant amount of time one spends functioning as a ‘life coach’” (p. 89). Elton (1989) describes this situation as follows:

With no mentor, no role model, and no formal training, some graduate students may discover their roles simply by accident. These roles include safety monitor, career counselor, administrator, teacher, coach, chauffeur, parent, counselor, and friend. For instance, I had no idea that I would have to be counselor to the students.... (p. 60)

Allow us to elaborate: A student wants desperately to get their first break. One forgot to pack a suit. Another snores so loudly that the students in the adjacent room pound on the wall, which leads a nice family staying in the hotel to call the front desk, who then calls the room of the students, who then direct the call to you, who has to be up in four hours to knock on doors and defrost the van. Meanwhile, the duo partners you begged not to date in the first place are “officially over,” which means tears. Lots of tears. And the remaining team members are forced to choose sides. Some threaten to quit. Others beg them not to leave. It’s six o’clock. Where’s so and so? The van is packed; we’re ready to go. What do you mean they were still asleep when you left the room?

We do not necessarily intend to get in the middle, but often, circumstances demand it. White explains:

Due to the sheer amount of time we spend with our students in coaching sessions, meetings and weekend travel, it makes sense that students will gravitate toward us when they need guidance and advice in other areas of their lives. (p. 89)

Furthermore, “[s]tudents decide who they are more comfortable working with on any one issue. The students are bright enough to pick up on what each coach has to offer, and these undergraduates will go the appropriate coach” (Elton, 1989, p. 57). We contend that this applies to non-forensic issues, as well—the loss of a family member, relationship woes, identity negotiation. Certainly, there is a point at which these issues can move beyond us, and the best we can do is refer students to others who are more equipped to help them. Yet (and this varies on a case by case basis), it has been our experience that the vast majority of issues students bring to us fall well within our boundaries as mentors.

Although mentoring is “not what we are ‘officially’ hired to do, it is fundamental to the success of our programs” (White, 2005, pp. 92-93). Fundamental and, at times, exhausting.

There are a couple key jumping-off points we would like to propose for further research. One of the ideas not highlighted in the script, but which we feel is worth mentioning, is how one’s experience as a new graduate forensic coach differs depending on the number of graduate coaches in a program. Specifically, how does one’s relationship with and status among the coaching staff affect their overall graduate coaching experience? Additionally, how does competitive success (or lack thereof) affect one’s acculturation into a new team environment, particularly when that program has higher or lower expectations for competitive success than the one the coach competed for? Finally, we would like to encourage current and recent graduate forensic coaches to share their experiences and the uniqueness of their own journeys with the forensic community. These are voices we would love to hear more from. Do not discount your experiences simply because they are abbreviated; young forensic professionals make up an integral part of the forensic community, and as such, our voices need to be heard.

Throughout this project, we have not tried to claim ourselves as authorities on coaching forensics—far from it. If anything, we have presented ourselves as novices, grappling with the notion that perhaps there is no such thing as an ideal forensic coach. By crafting our experiences as first-year graduate coaches into a performance script, we were able to re-experience and reflect upon this monumental period in our lives, creating a common space for identification with those who have gone before us and all who will continue to follow. As coaches, as mentors, as professionals, and as pedagogues, it is

worth taking such opportunities to stop and think about the significance of these roles and what we choose to do with them. It is amazing to see the varied ways in which we all move seamlessly between our complex identities, adapting our performances to fulfill our multiple roles. Whether we are just starting out or seasoned professionals, we all have to start somewhere. This is our beginning, our plunge directly into the washer, where we will be tossed and battered and rinsed and spun, with the end goal of emerging clean, ready to wear, the best we can be.

References

- Alexander, B. (2000). Skin flint (or, the garbage man's kid): A generative autobiographical performance based on Tami Spry's *Tattoo Stories*. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, 20(1), 97-114.
- Amaya, H. (2007). Performing acculturation: Rewriting the Latina/o immigrant self. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 27(3), 194-212.
- Corey, F. (2003). Tim Miller's body (of work). *Text & Performance Quarterly*, 23(3), 253-270.
- Denzin, N. (2006). Pedagogy, performance, and autoethnography. *Text & Performance Quarterly*, 26(4), 333-338.
- Ellis, C. (2004). *The ethnographic I: A methodological novel about autoethnography*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.
- Elton, K. (1989). Second among equals: The graduate student perspective. *National Forensic Journal*, 7(1), 53-62.
- Morris, K. (2005). Evaluator vs. critic: Judging intercollegiate forensics. *National Forensic Journal*, 23(1), 75-78.

Spry, T. (2000). *Tattoo Stories: A postscript to Skins. Text and Performance Quarterly*, 20(1), 84-96.

Spry, T. (2006). Performance, autobiography, and subjectivity in *Mirror Image. Text & Performance Quarterly*, 26(3), 313-316.

Wall, S. (2006). An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(2), 1-12.

White, L. (2005). The coach as mentor. *National Forensic Journal*, 23(1), 89-94.

Changing Team Culture: Who Should Lead

Leah White, Minnesota State University – Mankato

The complex nature of the autoethnographic process prompts another lesson drawn from Ellis: vulnerability is essential. Doing autoethnography well means deliberately working to self-explore and remain open to the twists and turns that emerge as a result (Berry, 2008, p. 158).

As I approach the mid-point of my career as a forensic coach, I find myself frequently questioning my ability to shape the organizational culture of my team. Although I am still confident I know what that culture should be, gone are the days of absolute assurance that I can lead a team to that place. When it came to team culture, I used to consider myself a sculptor. I was the artist with a clear vision in my head of the end product I wished to create. A sculptor is able to mold a formless collection of clay into a priceless piece of art. What I began to realize over the years, however, is that I am not a very good sculptor. I would exert too much force while throwing a pot on the wheel and end up with a lopsided bowl. I would become impatient waiting for the glaze to dry

Spry, T. (2000). *Tattoo Stories: A postscript to Skins. Text and Performance Quarterly*, 20(1), 84-96.

Spry, T. (2006). Performance, autobiography, and subjectivity in *Mirror Image. Text & Performance Quarterly*, 26(3), 313-316.

Wall, S. (2006). An autoethnography on learning about autoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 5(2), 1-12.

White, L. (2005). The coach as mentor. *National Forensic Journal*, 23(1), 89-94.

Changing Team Culture: Who Should Lead

Leah White, Minnesota State University – Mankato

The complex nature of the autoethnographic process prompts another lesson drawn from Ellis: vulnerability is essential. Doing autoethnography well means deliberately working to self-explore and remain open to the twists and turns that emerge as a result (Berry, 2008, p. 158).

As I approach the mid-point of my career as a forensic coach, I find myself frequently questioning my ability to shape the organizational culture of my team. Although I am still confident I know what that culture should be, gone are the days of absolute assurance that I can lead a team to that place. When it came to team culture, I used to consider myself a sculptor. I was the artist with a clear vision in my head of the end product I wished to create. A sculptor is able to mold a formless collection of clay into a priceless piece of art. What I began to realize over the years, however, is that I am not a very good sculptor. I would exert too much force while throwing a pot on the wheel and end up with a lopsided bowl. I would become impatient waiting for the glaze to dry

and remove the bowl from the kiln too soon, causing the finish to crack. Every so often I would get it right, but not frequently enough to be proud of my body of work.

I decided I needed to try my hand at baking. A baker is experienced enough to know what ingredients need to be mixed to create a hearty loaf of bread, but a baker must at some point in the process relinquish control and let the loaf form on its own. A baker accepts the slight variations in conditions that can alter the outcome of the project. Although care is taken to work within those constraints, much of a baker's work is driven by faith. A baker believes in the recipe, but accepts something magical happens in the oven that is outside her control. I started baking in 2005, and although it made me a bit softer around the middle, I felt more at home in the kitchen than I ever did in the studio.

My purpose in this paper is to share the story of my journey from sculptor to baker while simultaneously integrating a discussion of organizational theory into that story. I include my story because I agree with Berry (2008) who argues, "We are not distanced, uninvolved persons who examine communication and cultural life, but rather subjective beings whose experience makes possible the understanding of these and all research topics" (p. 156). I have been coaching forensics for nearly 20 years. An academic discussion, of any aspect of forensics, not tied to my own subjective experiences would be impossible. As Boylorn (2008) explains, "Autoethnographers look in (at themselves) and out (at the world) connecting the personal to the cultural" (p. 413). My role as a forensic coach is deeply personal and it is only through my own successes and failures as a coach that I have been able to gain any critical understanding of the dynamics of forensics as an organizational culture. Like Gingrich-Philbrook (2005), I view autoethnography more "as a broad orientation toward scholarship than a specific

procedure” (p. 298). As such I will weave my story throughout this discussion rather than offer a more formalized narrative to be coded and categorized.

My story is included not as a prescriptive guide for how one should create a team culture, but rather as a means to illustrate one method that worked for me, during one particular time, with one specific group of students. “An important assumption held by autoethnographers and qualitative researchers in general is that reality is neither fixed nor entirely external but is created by, and moves with, the changing perceptions and beliefs of the viewer” (Duncan, 2004, p. 4).

There is not one “right” type of organizational culture to which all teams should adhere. As Swanson (1992) writes, “a forensic program is comprised of people, their communication skills, emotions, values and interdependent relationships” (p. 65).

Swanson’s approach to the concept of forensic team culture is consistent with Deetz (1982) who argues, “An organization's culture consists of whatever a member must know or believe in order to operate in a manner understandable and acceptable to other members and the means by which this knowledge is produced and transmitted (p. 133).

Therefore, the organizational cultures of teams will be as varied as the individuals comprising them. Yet, more often than we as coaches would like to admit, our team cultures become unhealthy and need to be nurtured, even changed. In this paper I discuss how to approach this need for change. I argue that change coming from within team membership can be more effective than change instigated from the coaching staff. In order to explain this position, I will first discuss the point at which one recognizes the need for organizational change, second, why top-down leadership often fails to bring

about the needed change, and finally participatory approaches to leadership that can be effective.

Identifying the Need for a Change in Organizational Culture

General consensus among forensic scholars indicates that forensic teams do indeed function in ways similar to other types of organizations (Dreibelbis, 1989; Swanson, 1992). Holm (2006) observes, however, that forensic teams are unique in that they are “short-term” organizations, or organizations with frequent and significant turnover. Because the membership of a forensic team routinely changes, the cultural dynamics of a team are nearly in constant flux. Despite the presence of steady change, my experience coaching has led me to believe that there are at least three aspects of a team culture that must be present at all times in order for the team to function at its highest level of effectiveness. Those aspects are a desire for individual excellence, a willingness to embrace the joy of competition, and a shared respectful cohesion. My most successful team cultures have possessed these three characteristics.

Initially, I believe a successful team culture is one in which all individuals involved desire to achieve personal excellence. This does not mean every student will be, or even should be, a national finalist, only that all students are committed to striving for their best performances. For some students this may result in national awards and accolades, yet for others it may mean conquering extreme communication apprehension. When a team culture is healthy, students hold themselves accountable for accepting nothing less than their best performances. When students become complacent, or start to settle, the growth on a team stagnates. One of the main values of forensics is to help improve speaking skills. When students fail to set goals for notable improvements,

forensics becomes a “club” including individuals with shared interests, rather than an educational activity focused on advancement and achievement.

Next, healthy team cultures include team members who willingly embrace the joy of competition. Forensics is at its core a competitive activity. In my experience, when a team loses sight of the gratification competition can provide, the health of the team culture starts to falter. I have seen this happen most frequently with teams who are intimidated by competition because they don’t recognize the pleasure of playing the game. Yes, competition means there is victory and defeat, but to become fixated on the end product rather than the process of the competition can be harmful. To be fully immersed in the experience provided through forensic competition, students and coaches need to enjoy the process of competing. Hinck (2003) eloquently expresses this view writing:

Competition gives a sense of life to the season with its initiation, subsequent competitive events where students develop their skills over a season, and then a final set of events that represent a culmination of a student's or team's efforts. The collective effort, the ups and downs of competitive outcomes, the focused effort on the pursuit of excellence, all seem to be potentially valuable experiences for college students. (p. 62).

Paine and Stanley’s (2003) research affirms this assessment of healthy team culture. When surveying forensic participants regarding what makes forensics ‘fun’, many responded that the “sheer act of competing is fun” and there is value in winning as well as losing (Paine & Stanley, 2003, p. 45). Those who responded to the survey stating that competition harmed their ability to enjoy forensics implied this was the case when

coaches and students focused too much on the outcomes of a tournament. Therefore, a positive approach to the process of competition is a characteristic of healthy team culture.

Finally, my experiences have led me to believe that healthy team cultures require a shared respectful cohesion. Friedley & Manchester (2005) support this stating, “cohesion is believed to be one of the distinguishing characteristics of a high-performance team” (p. 96). By shared respectful cohesion, I mean all team members recognize and respect the interdependent nature of a team. Team members do not necessarily have to “like” each other at all times, but all members are valued as integral components of the team. A team culture that possesses shared respectful cohesion is one in which students value the successes and failures of their team members to the same degree they value their own competitive joys and sorrows. Although cliché, the phrase, “there is no ‘I’ in team” is appropriate.

I recognize that not all coaches would identify these three features as integral to the team cultures they wish to develop, but my personal experience has led me to consistently value these elements in my own teams. I review them here, only to offer a starting point for my discussion regarding how does one attempt to change a team culture when one feels the team is faltering. When my teams are lacking in any one of these areas, I feel compelled to intervene. This point of intervention, however, can be the defining moment in a team’s ability to recover. Adler (1997) warns that “for most organizations uncertainty is an incircumscribable fact of organizational life than can never be completely eliminated. As a result, long-term organizational success is largely dependent on an organization’s ability to respond to environmental change and crisis” (p. 98). Therefore, the fact that we will find our teams struggling during times of change and

uncertainty is a given, and how we negotiate those times is crucial to the long-term survival of our programs.

Sculpting: Coach Controlled Changes

I am a planner. I like to know that I can manipulate and control my environment so there will be few surprises. The idea of a carefully planned and controlled organizational culture shift guided by my wise leadership had, until five years ago, seemed not only desirable, but entirely possible. What I was starting to realize though, was as Lewis (2000) cautions, “planned change efforts often fail” (p. 44). At the end of the fall 2005 semester my team was suffering in all three of the areas I have outlined as important to my conceptualization of a healthy team culture. Team membership was shrinking, we had taken a significant step backwards in terms of competitive outcomes and most of us, students and coaches included, were unhappy. Since taking over as the Director of Forensics at my institution in 2003, I had been trying to sculpt a culture change on my new team. Although some of my goals had been met, my team was unhealthy. The students made their discontent with my approach clear in their fall 2005 evaluations of my role as Director of Forensics. One student wrote,

I think we need to motivate ourselves and make our own competitive goals instead of having so many rules enforced. No one really likes being told what to do. High standards and many requirements may work well at motivating some people, but I feel sometimes they can cause undue stress for an activity which is supposed to be a fun extra-curricular activity.

Another added,

Since this activity is very much about the students and could not exist without us, I think it is important that students be given a voice in decision making, especially on things like philosophy/goals of the team. I also think that this coach needs to work on how messages are portrayed and perhaps reevaluate her expectations because we cannot all be or want to be super students/competitors, but the perception, especially with this year's new philosophy, is that anything else isn't good enough.

Although I appreciated the frank honesty of the student comments, I found the students' inability to understand my pedagogical reasons for wanting a competitively successful team frustrating.

My bowl was lopsided, cracked and about to fall off the shelf. We had reached a point where something had to change. I was not going to lower my expectations, but clearly I needed to find a more effective way of integrating a value for excellence into this team's culture.

I had been practicing a bureaucratic system of control in that I had predetermined not only what the goals for my team would be, but more destructively, how we were going to achieve them. I had made it unquestionably clear that one of my major goals when taking over this program was to return it to a nationally ranked team. I will never waiver in terms of my objective to lead students toward personal excellence, but conceptualizing that excellence within a narrow framework of a national ranking was a mistake for that particular group of students. This prevented those students from seeing that the important issue was their willingness to excel, not the trophy at the end of the journey. The ranking was merely evidence that the culture I desired for my program was

forming. Had I simply left this narrowly defined goal alone for the team to rally around, we may have been able to stay a healthy team. But, I made a much more crucial mistake by outlining a rigid plan of action in terms of how we were going to achieve this goal. I established strict rules regarding the number of events students had to prepare, I devised a travel schedule that essentially created an ‘A’ team and ‘B’ team, and I began to enforce specialized elements of professionalism I had previously let naturally evolve. I never at any point said to my team, “*how* do you think we should achieve excellence?”

This top-down approach to organizational change backfired. I attempted to nurture team leaders within the program to spearhead the change, but was baffled by the inability, and perhaps unwillingness, of any of them to take charge of the organizational culture shift. Although some individuals embraced my vision, they never chose to pull other team members along with them. I realize now I was failing at a relationship exchange approach to leadership. Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX) describes how leaders develop exchange relationships with their subordinates. Yukl (1989) explains according to LMX theory, “leaders treat subordinates differently depending on whether they are part of the in-group or out-group” (p. 266). Members of the in-group “are given greater influence, autonomy, and tangible benefits in return for greater loyalty, commitment, and assistance” (Yukl, 1989, p. 266). I had developed an in-group who did indeed adhere to my vision. These students were loyal to my rules and committed to my goals. As a result, they did indeed receive more benefits than those students in the out-group. In retrospect, I realize that this may have been why none of those students ever chose to become team leaders. They had no reason to take on this role. I was controlling the show and simply by following me they were receiving the benefits they wanted from

the organization. In their eyes, there was no need for a shift in power. There was no need for a significant personal investment in team leadership.

After much self-reflection and several discussions with my assistant coaches, I realized I needed to embrace a more participatory approach to organizational change. Alder (1997) affirms this idea encouraging “leaders to explain their decisions” and “allow group members to question procedures” (p. 111). During the first team meeting of the spring 2006 semester I sat down with the team and admitted my approach was not working. I had spent much of the winter break processing the student evaluation comments and engaging in critical self-reflection. I was searching for a way I could maintain my own personal integrity as a forensic educator, but also recognize the student concerns and show them their voices were valuable in the shaping of team culture. I outlined for them the three characteristics of organizational culture I value and, as the Director of Forensics, will not abandon (individual excellence, the joy of competition, and shared respectful cohesion). I then told them how we as a team create a culture focused on those values was entirely up to them. With the exception of the designated G.P.A. requirement to travel, and the basic “wear your seat belt and don’t break any laws” policies, everything was up for negotiation.

Given the tension that existed prior to the winter break, the meeting was oddly not all that awkward. We all knew change was needed and the students were ready to take charge of some decisions. Once the students knew what their “task” was in terms of redefining “how” we as a team were going to uphold core values, the coaching staff left them alone to talk. The team chose to keep some of my policies and do away with others. Most telling, however, is that the core essence of what I had been trying to do was still

intact. The major point of change was that they finally felt some legitimate ownership over the team culture. The differences were oddly subtle, but seemed to mean a great deal to the students.

Baking: Coach Monitored Changes

Notice that the heading of this section is not “Team Controlled Changes”. My decision to become a baker rather than a sculptor does not imply I chose to adopt a laissez-faire style of leadership. Some instincts run too deep. The change does imply, however, that I learned to step back and embrace a more organic and participatory approach to leadership. Kramer (2006) describes this shared approach to leadership as “a bottom-up process in which the team values and structure emerge through interaction of leaders and members as the leaders empower team members rather than control them” (p. 145). I recognized the importance of organizational change from within.

Specifically I was drawn to a concertive control style of leadership that encourages empowerment among team members. In this approach, “control is exercised through identification with organizational core values and is enforced by peers,” essentially, members of the organization “become responsible for directing the work, monitoring themselves, and dispensing rewards and punishments among each other” (Larson & Tompkins, 2005, p.3). Because the organizational core values are still a guiding principle, this approach to leadership is not without influence from organizational “management”. In their study of a shift to concertive control style leadership in a telecommunications company, Barker et. al. (1993) noted, “the fundamental roots of ‘control’ do not change in the concertive self-directed culture. The organization still shapes employee behaviors so they will act in effective and functional manners” (p. 308-

309). Yet, the active involvement of all organizational members creates a greater sense of connection with those organizational values.

In terms of a forensic team, concertive control can develop students who feel a sense of investment in the team. Brunson and Vogt (1996) describe this sense of investment as empowerment. They argue, “Because empowerment occurs by enhancing individuals’ ownership and control, it is a powerful tool that can transform individuals, groups, teams, and organizations. Empowerment enables people to produce their best products because it encourages personal responsibility and accountability for outcomes” (p. 73). When I made the choice to step back from trying to shape my team’s culture, and allowed the students to take a much more active role in this process, they did indeed become more invested in the team. The quality of their work improved and in a matter of six weeks the team made a near full recovery. We were able to refocus on the values that made us a strong and healthy team.

Based on that experience, I made some major changes in how I directed my forensic program. I made the core values I cherish clear to the students at the start of the year, but opted to do little to instigate policy with regard to how we would stay focused on those goals. I lowered my standards in terms of travel requirements and let the team members motivate and challenge each other. It meant making some decisions with which I was not fully comfortable and in fact found personally embarrassing, such as sending students to non-district tournaments with just two events, and allowing novices to use manuscripts. Yet, letting the team cultural norms develop organically seemed to work for that generation of students. Without being required to be memorized, those students decided they wanted to meet that goal as soon as possible. Without being required to

carry multiple events the students chose they wanted more events because tournaments are just more enjoyable when they are busy. In the past, these decisions had been mandated for them and the team resisted my control. By simply stepping back and letting the team negotiate these things themselves, I got the changes I wanted.

My hope was those changes would eventually be embedded in the team culture and withstand the many challenges we would face in the future, and for a few years all was well in my kitchen. The size of my team quadrupled, students sought each other out for social and competitive support, freshmen seemed more integrated into the program than they had in years, and team leaders finally seemed to emerge. I enjoyed my time in the kitchen. As a baker, I was still able to select the ingredients I wanted. I have never liked white bread. I want a multi-grain with substance and texture. I mixed the ingredients and kneaded the dough, and then stepped back, waited for it to rise and bake on its own.

However, I never turned off the oven light. I have always kept my eye on what it is I am baking. Yet, after several years as a baker, I can't help but feel, given the high quality of ingredients I am putting into my bread, I should be producing a better product. My bread keeps earning honorable mentions but I am looking longingly at those blue, red and white ribbons just out of my reach. I am questioning if my team really is adhering to a core value of excellence or even more problematic, if I am conceptualizing excellence in the most pedagogically sound way. Once again I sense discontent and begin to wonder if perhaps it may be time to learn a new trade.

References

- Alder, G. S. (1997). Managing environmental uncertainty with legitimate authority: A comparative analysis of the Mann Gulch and Storm King mountain fires. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 25, 98-114.
- Barker, J. R., Melville, C. W., & Pacanowsky, M. E. (1993). Self-directed teams at Xel: Changes in communication practices during a program of cultural transformation. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 21, 297-312.
- Berry, K. (2008). Promise in peril: Ellis and Pelias and the subjective dimensions of ethnography. *The Review of Communication*, 8, 154-173.
- Boylorn, R. M. (2008). As seen on T.V. An autoethnographic reflection on race and reality television. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25, 413-433.
- Brunson, D. A., & Vogt, J. F. (1996). Empowering our students and ourselves: A liberal democratic approach to the communication classroom. *Communication Education*, 45, 73-83.
- Deetz, S. A. (1982). Critical interpretive research in organizational communication. *Western Journal of Speech Communication*, 46, 131-149.
- Dreibelbis, G. (1989). The director of forensics, assistant director and staff: An organizational communication perspective. *National Forensic Journal*, 7, 63-70.
- Duncan, M. (2004). Autoethnography: Critical appreciation of an emerging art. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3, 1-14.
- Friedley, S. A. & Manchester, B. B. (2005). Building team cohesion: Becoming “we” instead of “me”. *National Forensic Journal*, 23, 95-100.
- Gingrich-Philbrook, C. (2005). Autoethnography’s family values: Easy access to compulsory experiences. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 25, 297-314.

- Hinck, E. A. (2003). Managing the dialectical tension between competition and forensics: A response to Burnett, Brand and Meister. *National Forensic Journal, 21*, 61-76.
- Holm, T. (2006). Organizational culture in short term organizations: A theoretical overview. A paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention in San Antonio, TX.
- Kramer, M. W. (2006). Shared leadership in a community theater group: Filling the leadership role. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 34*, 141-162.
- Larson, G. S. & Tompkins, P. K. (2005). Ambivalence and resistance: A study of management in a concertive control system. *Communication Monographs, 72*, 1-21.
- Lewis, L. K. (2000). 'Blindsided by that one' and 'I saw that one coming': The relative anticipation and occurrence of communication problems and other problems in implementer's hindsight. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 28*, 44-67.
- Paine, R. E. & Stanley, J. R. (2003). The yearning for pleasure: The significance of having fun in forensics. *National Forensic Journal, 21*, 36-59.
- Swanson, D. R. (1992). Forensics as a laboratory experience in organizational communication. *National Forensic Journal, 10*, 65-76.
- Yukl, G. (1989). Managerial leadership: A review of theory and research. *Journal of Management, 15*, 251-289.

Documenting Teaching Efficacy: Pedagogical Prerogatives, Learning Outcomes and the Future of Forensics as an Academic Activity

- Hinck, E. A. (2003). Managing the dialectical tension between competition and forensics: A response to Burnett, Brand and Meister. *National Forensic Journal, 21*, 61-76.
- Holm, T. (2006). Organizational culture in short term organizations: A theoretical overview. A paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention in San Antonio, TX.
- Kramer, M. W. (2006). Shared leadership in a community theater group: Filling the leadership role. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 34*, 141-162.
- Larson, G. S. & Tompkins, P. K. (2005). Ambivalence and resistance: A study of management in a concertive control system. *Communication Monographs, 72*, 1-21.
- Lewis, L. K. (2000). 'Blindsided by that one' and 'I saw that one coming': The relative anticipation and occurrence of communication problems and other problems in implementer's hindsight. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 28*, 44-67.
- Paine, R. E. & Stanley, J. R. (2003). The yearning for pleasure: The significance of having fun in forensics. *National Forensic Journal, 21*, 36-59.
- Swanson, D. R. (1992). Forensics as a laboratory experience in organizational communication. *National Forensic Journal, 10*, 65-76.
- Yukl, G. (1989). Managerial leadership: A review of theory and research. *Journal of Management, 15*, 251-289.

Documenting Teaching Efficacy: Pedagogical Prerogatives, Learning Outcomes and the Future of Forensics as an Academic Activity

Brendan B. Kelly, University of West Florida

Randy Richardson, Berry College

“Explicit identification of learning expectations facilitates the department's coherence about their goals. Sharing those expectations explicitly with students can provide an effective learning scaffold on which students can build their experiences and render effective performance” (American Psychological Association, March 2002). While some in higher education have been slow to embrace the integration of student learning outcomes and other assessment measures, institutional focus on these notions is continually increasing. *Measuring Up 2000*, comprised the first 50-state report card on higher education. The study was intended to provide an overview of student learning at the state level in order to provide a clear framework for comparison (Miller & Ewell, 2005). The result of the examination of each state produced a surprising result that has informed the direction of the business of higher education ever since.

Each of the 50 states was given the same grade: *Incomplete*. “The report card found that ‘there is no information available to make state-by-state comparisons’ of higher education’s most important outcome, learning. The primary purpose of the *Incomplete* was to stimulate a more robust discussion” (Miller & Ewell, 2005, p. iv). Indeed, the product of that discussion has been an increasing focus on assessment in higher education. Throughout the last decade, all segments of academic affairs have adjusted practice and expectations in order to accommodate and integrate the systematic assessment of student learning into pedagogical practice. In this paper, we argue that the practice of collegiate forensics pedagogy must adapt to this new set of expectations and devise specific means to meet learning assessment requirements. Transforming the

institutional and association documents that define the purpose and practice of the activity through the means featured in this paper would significantly enhance and formalize forensics pedagogy at the collegiate level. Such inclusions would improve communication and pedagogy in two key ways. First, it would demonstrate that the collegiate forensics community has embraced formalized assessment practices. The trend toward assessment as a common element of teaching practice is well documented in education literature, but also in the call of United States Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings to increase accountability in American higher education (Spellings, 2008). A move toward more specific measures of assessment would increase the viability of arguments supporting the institutional inclusion of forensics pedagogy based on *effectiveness and consistency with institutional mission*. Second, the means of defining pedagogical purpose and expectations highlighted in this paper (i.e. means dedicated to the questions of “what we are trying to teach”) would significantly enhance teaching and learning in collegiate forensics. Since all aspects of forensics pedagogy are to be rooted in and respective of a larger body of communication theory, then the expectations for performance practice should clearly reflect the association of theory. The operationalized model presented in this paper directly connects a disciplinary theory base to the event rules and descriptions that govern performance practice and shape coaching/training instruction.

Identifying Institutional Standards for Assessment

While each state continues negotiating and developing a unique process related to the assessment of student learning, a single institutional assessment document was

integrated into the analysis. The University of West Florida (UWF) *Academic Learning Compact (Table 1)* features *domains* approved by the Board of Governors for the Florida State University System that “should characterize the skills and abilities of a UWF graduate, regardless of major.”¹ The document informs the configuration of student learning outcomes for undergraduate majors and individual courses for the purpose of academic assessment. A key value in emphasizing assessment of student learning in collegiate forensics is the systematic demonstration of the effectiveness of forensics pedagogy in achieving learning outcomes. Since the UWF Academic Learning Compact (ALC) is institutionally based, it serves as an ideal construct for modeling enhanced event descriptions, because the demonstration of effectiveness in meeting such goals reveals its greatest utility when presented to forensics program funding sources (i.e. colleges and universities that provide the resources for forensics programs).

The choice to utilize the UWF Academic Learning Compact was two-fold; convenience and generalizability of the standards. First, one of the authors, by right of institutional affiliation, is heavily invested in efforts to meet program and course assessment standards based on the provisions in the UWF ALC. Therefore, the author possesses a high degree of experience operationalizing teaching practice and student learning outcomes based on the provisions in the ALC. Second, while each state and many institutions have and will continue to be engaged in the process of developing and negotiating standards for student learning assessment, honing in on one particular construct allows for specific links between the standards set at the institutional level and specific area of study to be neatly drawn for the illustrative purposes of this analysis.

¹ A common Board of Governors oversees the Florida State University System. The Florida State University System is comprised of 11 public universities, including the University of West Florida.

Clearly, the macrocosm of the institutional mandate for assessment of student learning must inform the microcosm of subject specific common pedagogical practice (*Table 1*). The model featured in this analysis was designed to reflect the rules and performance standards issued by national associations committed to forensics pedagogy. Currently each institution involved in collegiate forensics devises an organizationally unique approach to the pedagogical practice. Assessing student learning at the program level does not inherently alter such a configuration. National standards will, as they are now, be utilized to shape pedagogical practice.

Establishing the Need for Pedagogical Prerogatives in Collegiate Forensics

“Forensic program administrators must maintain a consistent appreciation of the perception of the intra-institutional value of forensics programs” (Kelly, 2008, p. 40). There is no more substantive means of achieving this goal than enlacing the institutional assessment goals with the learning outcomes of forensics pedagogy. One of the most important features of the practice of forensics pedagogy is the ability to measure learning. The traditional practice of collegiate forensics provides a ideal means of measuring degrees of learning. General practice in collegiate forensics: Student demonstration, shared with multi-institutional audiences outside the confines of the classroom or campus community, is a clear and distinctive product of learning. Each demonstration garners written evaluations from educators in the audience, as well as a comparative assessment to the performance of peers from different institutions. These attributes of forensics pedagogy are built into current practice. Therefore, adapting pedagogical practice to meet the requirements of institutional assessment is simplified. In order to operationalize assessment in forensics pedagogy, it is critical that national associations move toward an

evolution of the event rules in which pedagogical and performance expectations are featured. This paper functions as a second step in a developmental series dedicated to marrying pedagogical practice to theory based learning expectations. In the following section, we provide an overview of the dominant conceptions of forensics pedagogy informed by the disciplinary literature.

Dominating Metaphors in the Conception of Forensics Pedagogy

Laboratory Metaphor

Scholars have worked for decades to isolate and define constructs for forensics pedagogy that would function as guiding principles concerning the fundamentals of teaching practice and philosophical frameworks. Conceiving of forensics as a *laboratory* initially dominated the conversation within the community. At the 1974 National Developmental Conference on Forensics, the laboratory metaphor was established as a tool for explaining the basic function of forensics practice. Richardson and Kelly (2008) explained:

The Sedalia Conference concluded “forensics activities...are laboratories for helping students to understand and communicate various forms of argument more effectively in a variety of contexts with a variety of audiences” (McBath, 1975, p. 11). A decade later, the guiding metaphor was reaffirmed at the Evanston Conference (McBath, 1984). No perspective on forensics has received more scholarly attention (Harris et al., 1986; Kay, 1990; Aden, 1991; Dreibelbis & Gullifer, 1992; Friedly, 1992; Swanson, 1992; Zeuschner, 1992). (p. 112-113)

The laboratory metaphor is functional in explaining the nature of forensics pedagogy as it relates to the elements of student experimentation with public speaking and performance choice making. The idea that students will learn a great deal about communication theory and practice through the act of experimentation in a controlled, “laboratory-like” environment is consistent with the realities of current practice. However, the metaphor is an insufficient mechanism for explaining and accounting the expansive scope of the teaching and learning in collegiate forensics. “The goal of the laboratory experiment is education, regardless of how it is conceived” (Richardson & Kelly, 2008).

Forensics as Argument

Given the deep and fundamental rhetorical roots of forensics pedagogy, it is natural that this brand of pedagogy would be fundamentally linked to argument. Richardson and Kelly (2008) explained:

The close association of the argumentative perspective with the laboratory metaphor makes it almost impossible to consider them separately.

Whereas the laboratory furnished the context for learning, the content of the teaching was instruction in argumentation. The First National Developmental Conference on Forensics affirmed the centrality of this perspective through its conference publication titled *Forensics as Communication: The Argumentative Perspective* (McBath, 1975). They defined forensics as “an educational activity primarily concerned with using an argumentative perspective in examining problems and communicating with people” (McBath, 1975, p. 11). Argument provided

both a focus for educational inquiry and a convenient umbrella under which members of debate and individual-events communities could unite.

(p. 113)

Collegiate forensics has long battled with the tension between the idea that the activity is preoccupied with competitive goals, at the peril of educational outcomes. The metaphor was originally devised as a means of justifying forensics pedagogy to university administrators by linking theory and practice more definitively. Thus, forensics practice would be perceived as directly invested in the educational mission of knowledge delivery. While some early forensics theorists and practitioners engaged in sound pedagogical practices, the fact remains that close examination of the history of the activity reveals the development of competitive structures and practices preceded educationally founded statements about communication theory and education.

Forensics as Liberal Art

Aden (1991) asserted a liberal arts perspective on forensics, claiming that the activity is “most educational...when it is viewed as a liberal art” (p. 101).

He contrasts the scientific language of the laboratory metaphor and its dependence on existing knowledge with the independent, creative spirit of the liberal arts paradigm, which empowers individuals to seek new answers and questions. Whereas the laboratory metaphor enjoined the argumentative perspective for theoretical grounding, the liberal arts approach sought rhetorical justification (Richardson & Kelly, 2008, p. 114).

The rhetoric at the heart of forensic inquiry broadened the scope of legitimate forensic activity, and empowered individuals by increasing the significance of the value of personal perspective (Aden, 1991). Yet, the metaphor has found little scholarly support in the annals of forensics literature.

Forensics as Athletic Competition

An application of Burke's (1945) perspective sheds great light on the competitive/educational duality with the conception that the forensic drama that ideally features the purpose of education through the agency of competition is upstaged by a drama whose purpose is winning (Richardson & Kelly, 2008 p. 115). Richardson and Kelly (2008) frame the evolution and acceptance of the athletic model based on a Burkeian foundation.

Valuable pedagogy does not inherently reside in speech competition. Our students are not blocking and tackling. Caring professionals must vigilantly nurture forensic pedagogy. The preponderance of unwritten rules represents a problem perpetuated by the indifference of the athletic perspective (p. 115).

The pervasive honoring of unwritten rules and expectations consistently maintains a high potential for abuse, thus compromising the pursuit of theory-supported educational outcomes. This type of practice stands in fundamental contrast to the pedagogical foundation of rooting teaching and practice in a well-reasoned consideration of broadly based disciplinary theory. Instead, the whim of a particular judge trumps any kind of established pedagogical criterion (Richardson & Kelly, 2008). In the absence of such measures, it is often much easier to learn who is good over what is good, which may

partially account for the fact that familiar speakers receive better ranks than unfamiliar ones (Richardson, 1994). Hinck (2003) described the dialectical tension that exists between the “public, community-oriented goal of our communication practices and the personal, or ego-oriented objective of competing for awards” (p. 69).

Forensics Rooted in the Pedagogical Prerogative Perspective

It is the role and responsibility of each generation of forensics educators to enhance the integrity of the activity as a unique teaching space. At the 2008 National Developmental Conference on Individual Events, Richardson and Kelly (2008) asserted the *Pedagogical Prerogative Perspective* as an epistemological foundation for an ontological product. The perspective was intended to emphasize the philosophical foundation of forensics practice in order to promulgate the notion that the central concern of collegiate forensics is teaching communication in a fashion that honors the theoretical foundations of the discipline. Richardson and Kelly (2008) articulated the basis for the perspective:

The activity engages the arts and sciences of oral interpretation, public address and argumentation/debate. In doing so, students are able to learn, through the study, training, and practice of these art forms, a wide variety of meaningful skills such as those articulated in the introduction to this paper. Yet, when a competitive paradigm is utilized as the primary lens through which a forensics program’s value is assessed, the philosophical justification of forensics pedagogy receiving institutional support is problematized. More importantly, when competitive products are placed ahead of teaching priorities, then the value of forensics programs generally

is problematized. Additionally, the products of forensics pedagogy are diminished, because students are not taught that competitive results are an act of the community honoring exceptional performance. Rather, as Burke conceived, our community often teaches students to be “goaded by hierarchy” (Burke, 1984, p. xlii). (p. 117)

The *Pedagogical Prerogative Perspective* is a means of rectifying the space between educational and competitive goal seeking in the collegiate forensics by establishing a theory-based set of learning expectations and outcomes. Simply, the perspective is dedicated to identifying “what we seek to teach” in order to be able to measure the effectiveness of teaching through an examination of the products of the process (i.e. student demonstrations).

While the *Pedagogical Prerogative Perspective* emphasizes pedagogical prerogatives, reshaping forensics administration, and recognizing competitive results as a communal act of “honoring,” this paper specifically concentrates on the operationalization of the initial component. The following sections of this document outline pedagogical prerogatives for the individual event *rhetorical criticism*. Additionally, we offer explanation and analysis related to the development of specific student learning outcomes which function as direct links to institutional assessment.

What We Seek to Teach and Testing Teaching Efficacy Through Institutional Assessment Tools

Contest rhetorical criticism, more than any of the individual events, owes its existence to the communication discipline. Murphy (1988) observed, “No other event is so clearly based on academic activity and has such strong ties to the rest of the

department.” Because it is deeply rooted in academic soil, the educational rewards of rhetorical criticism are both obvious and numerous. A unique benefit of rhetorical criticism is that it is the only event, which fosters metacommunicative analysis (Larson, 1985). The communication about communication ideally results in the following:

- a) An increased knowledge of and appreciation for rhetorical theory and scholarship.
- b) An enhanced understanding of the role of persuasion in society.
- c) An introduction to scholarly students in communication, which can serve as a valuable foundation for graduate students.
- d) An increased understanding of the sufficient contributions of rhetorical criticism within society.

Perhaps no better tool exists for motivating the “critical impulse” (Brock & Scott, 1980) and developing rhetorical scholars than contest rhetorical criticism.

In the following section, the *Pedagogical Prerogative Perspective* is applied to contest rhetorical criticism. Pedagogical Prerogatives, which link practice to the larger sphere of communication theory, are presented in the more intricate descriptive sections. Following the descriptive component for each prerogative, a related *student-learning outcome* that is reflective of the UWF *Academic Learning Compact (ALC)* is identified. Table 2 illustrates the constructive direction that is articulated in the UWF ALC regarding the composition of *student learning outcomes (SLO)*.

The dancing of the two elements is exemplary of the operationalized and applied goals of the *Pedagogical Performance Perspective*. Of course, the form and format of this articulation are not inherent in the perspective. Rather, this paper demonstrates an

approach to applying the perspective that accomplishes the articulation of pedagogical expectations and connects the content to the larger framework of institutional assessment.

Rhetorical Criticism through the Lens of the Pedagogical Performance Perspective

The following content presents 8 areas critical to fulfilling the pedagogical mission of contest Rhetorical Criticism. The articulation in each area is linked to *student learning outcomes* in order to demonstrate the connection between theory-driven event descriptions and common institutional assessment measures. This paper only considers the event of Rhetorical Criticism. Further development in the area of forensics assessment will require work that addresses pedagogical prerogatives as they relate to genre and event.

Each descriptive element teases out different and essential aspects related to the teaching goals of the event. The approach differs from the current formulation of event descriptions, which depict aspects of a performance product. The National Forensic Association asserts a current description of the event parameters and goals in a contest setting.

Contestants will deliver an original critical analysis of any significant rhetorical artifact. The speaker should limit the quotation of, paraphrasing of, or summary of, the analyzed artifact to a minimum. Any legitimate critical methodology is permissible as long as it serves to open up the artifact for the audience. The speech must be delivered from memory.

Maximum 10 minutes (National Forensic Association, n.d.).

While this event description identifies fundamental aspects as to what the performance product and content should look like, it is not successful in going beyond a description of

parameters. The format does not provide comprehensive goals for pedagogy. Forensics is, fundamentally, a highly successful teaching mechanism. Yet, the event descriptions that guide practices in training and performance do not articulate what, specifically, the mechanism is supposed to be teaching as it relates to the communication discipline.

The formulation that follows works to operationalize the connections between the communication discipline and common practice in collegiate forensics in the hope to stirring action toward event definition that focus on pedagogical goals, rather than performance parameters. In the section that follows, pedagogical prerogatives are outlined for the event of rhetorical criticism, student learning outcomes related to each prerogative are identified, and each student-learning outcome is linked to the ALC in table 1. We argue that future development of academic learning compacts for forensics will require discipline-specific articulation for the individual parts of the compact.

Connecting Rhetorical Criticism to the Discipline: Element 1

Differences imposed by time constraints and level of expertise clearly separate contest rhetorical criticism from its scholarly namesake. However, in essence, their purposes are enjoined; to describe, interpret and evaluate rhetorical phenomena (Brock & Scott, 1980).

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME 1:

The student, following the study of foundations of rhetorical analysis, will be able to describe, interpret, and evaluate rhetorical phenomena.

Element 2

Description, interpretation and evaluation provide the cornerstone for effective rhetorical criticism. The student uses description in explaining the methodological tool or perspective employed, and in explicating the nature and scope of the rhetorical artifact, event, campaign or movement itself.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME 2:

The student will be able to describe with clarity the theoretical foundation for and rhetorical object of their analysis.

Element 3

Interpretation requires the student to make judgments in naming, labeling, and arguing from a rhetorical perspective. An application of the methodological insights to the rhetorical phenomena should necessitate the formation of an argument by the student (Kay & Aden, 1989). Forensic scholars agree that interpretation and analysis should go beyond mere identification, or labeling of phenomena (Kay & Aden, 1989; Murphy, 1988; Rosenthal, 1985; Ott, 1998). The formation of an argument invites students to discover unique insights into rhetorical artifacts. It goes beyond the “cookie cutter” basic identification of key methodological concepts. An argumentative approach encourages students to provide supporting language evidence for their interpretive claims. The student’s own interpretive argument, grounded in the rhetorical theory provided by the methodology, and supported by the language (symbolic) evidence inherent in the rhetorical artifact, comprise the core of rhetorical criticism.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME 3:

The student will be able to assert an interpretation of the rhetorical strategies employed in a given rhetorical situation. This interpretation should be unique to the student, supported by language, evidence, and founded in rhetorical theory.

Element 4

Evaluation completes the process of contest rhetorical criticism (Kay and Aden, 1989). A comprehensive evaluation section includes the documentation of historical effect (what happened as a result of the rhetorical event), rhetorical effectiveness (how effective were the various rhetorical choices), and a consideration of the possible implications, including ethical ones, in the larger social sphere, when appropriate. While students may offer methodological evaluation as well, Murphy (1988) and Ott (1998) warned against this emphasis. Several authors mention the problem of a shallow judgment of methodological “fit” as being a driving force for criticism. Ott (1998) described the problems associated with forcing practice to fit theory, and theory to fit practice. He observes “... many students mangle a critic’s controlling principles until they fit the discourse they are analyzing... Some students... disfigure a discourse until it fits the controlling principles found in a published rhetorical analysis” (p. 65). Evaluative standards, which foster disrespect for rhetorical studies and rhetoric, in general should be abandoned.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME 4:

*The student will be able to document the historical effect
and evaluate the rhetorical effectiveness of the rhetorical
strategies employed in a given rhetorical situation.*

Element 5

Topic choice is important in rhetorical criticism. Kay and Aden (1998) argued that social significance should be the guiding standard for topic evaluation. A student should argue that the chosen topic is both socially significant and rhetorical in nature.

While topical uniqueness may be desired, it should not be the dominant concern for students or the central evaluative criterion for judges.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME 5:

The student will be able to identify and demonstrate the social significance of the chosen rhetorical artifact.

Element 6

Source documentation is essential in rhetorical criticism to establish the scholarly nature of the rhetorical methodology or perspective, document the historical facts of the rhetoric, and enhance speaker credibility.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME 6:

The student will be able to specifically document evidence related to the chosen methodology or perspective and the nature and effect of the rhetorical artifact itself.

Element 7 (includes outcomes 7-9)

Speech delivery is another important concern for students of rhetorical criticism. Contest rhetorical criticism offers a unique delivery experience more closely akin to academic, or professorial speech than any other genre. The form closely resembles the types of presentations delivered at professional conferences, academic seminars and graduate-level/research symposia. The unique blending of purposes (a simultaneous clarifying of academic and professional jargon while both analyzing and constructing arguments) provides the challenges inherent in both informative and persuasive genres. The student should exude professionalism and scholarship while attempting to clarify and simplify the complex ideas for the audience.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME 7:

The student, following intensive study of public speaking theory and practice, will be able to deliver the speech fluently with a professional tone and manner.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME 8:

Following intensive study of public speaking theory and practice, the student will be able to clarify intellectually rigorous ideas through audience-centered delivery choices.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME 9:

The student, following intensive study of public speaking theory and practice, will be able to enhance the acceptance of the argument posed by the rhetorical criticism.

Element 8

Rhetorical criticisms should be clearly organized and easy to follow. It is common to structure of speeches that reflect the three-fold purpose of the event (description of method, application of method, evaluation of rhetorical strategies).

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOME 10:

The student will be able to orally deliver a well-structured, clearly organized criticism.

Discussion

Institutional assessment of student learning is quickly becoming an essential factor in higher education. The collegiate forensics community has long boasted of a high

level of teaching effectiveness that is inherent in its multi-layered pedagogical practices. The national trend toward institutional assessment provides the collegiate forensics community an opportunity to take a proactive position by embracing assessment and documenting teaching efficacy. Such an embrace would produce, among others, three central enhancements to forensics program administration at the institutional level. First, embracing assessment enhances the potential for the preservation of forensics programs by clearly demonstrating teaching effectiveness. Second, it allows program administrators to illustrate the institutional value of a forensics program by aligning the output (teaching and learning) with institutional goals (teaching and learning) through the documentation procedures for assessment. The documenting variable increases the likelihood that a forensics program will be regarded as a central feature in college and university offerings in achieving the institutional mission. Finally, the effectiveness of a forensics program can be justified by a more vast number of variables aside from competitive achievement. The move does not negate or devalue competitive achievement, but rather frames it as a single indication of program effectiveness. Pedagogical prerogatives would also influence the behavior and choice-making of students and judges. Students engaged in event development and performance would be compelled to closely study the pedagogical prerogatives for each event to make certain that the product of their learning is reflective of pedagogical goals of the event. Adjudicators evaluating student performances would be compelled clarify judging paradigms based the links between individual events and the disciplinary theory base of communication (pedagogical prerogatives).

This paper works to operationalize the notion of pedagogical prerogatives for collegiate forensics. Although, despite the content dedicated to linking prerogatives to student learning outcomes, the paper does not lay out specific criteria. The specifics of pedagogical expectations do not work to limit performance choices available to student competitors or coaches. In fact, the inclusion of prerogatives opens up sensible options that can be evaluated based on the theoretical foundations of the discipline and shuts out performance choice making, and the evaluation thereof, that is rooted in unfounded personal preferences. Specifying pedagogical priorities would link collegiate forensics to institutional assessment practices. Such developmental moves would call forth educationally defensible foundations for all events and practices resulting in fundamentally enhanced forensics pedagogy.

This paper focuses on linking forensics pedagogy to institutional assessment tools such as the ALC in table 1. Yet, in 2009, the National Forensic Association *Committee on Pedagogy* presented a report to the NFA Executive Council that featured an adaptation of the ALC featured in table 1. The adaptation tailored and applied the general components of the ALC to collegiate forensics in order to link forensics pedagogy to formal national assessment tools [Table 3] (Kelly, B.B., Paine, R., Richardson, R. R. & White, L., 2009). The ALC featured in the report by the NFA *Committee on Pedagogy* (table 3) could serve a similar function and/or benefit institutions that place higher value on assessment alignment with links national, discipline-specific standards.

References

- Aden, R.C. (1991). Reconsidering the laboratory metaphor: Forensics as a liberal art. *National Forensic Journal*, 9(2), 97-108.
- American Psychological Association. (March 2002). The Assessment CyberGuide for Learning Goals & Outcomes in the Undergraduate Psychology Major. Task Force on Undergraduate Psychology Major Competencies, Board of Educational Affairs.
- Brock, B. & Scott, R. (1980). *Methods of rhetorical criticism*. (2nd ed.). Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Burke, K. (1984). *Permanence and change (3rd ed)*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Burke, K. (1945). *A grammar of motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Hinck, E.A. (2003). Managing the dialectical tension between competition and education in forensics: A response to Burnett, Brand, & Meister. *National Forensic Journal*, 21(1), 60-76.
- Kay, J., & Aden, R.C. (1989). Clarifying tournament rhetorical criticism: A proposal for new rules and standards. *National Forensic Journal*, 7(1), 29-42.
- Kelly, B.B. (2008). Maintaining and enhancing institutional relevance: Long-term program sustainability in an era of increased intra-institutional competition for resources. *Proceedings of the National Development Conference on Individual Events*. Peoria, IL: Bradley University.
- Kelly, B.B., Paine, R., Richardson, R. R. & White, L. (2009). What are we trying to teach:

- reconnecting collegiate forensics to the communication discipline. Report from the National Forensic Association Executive Council.
- Larson, S. (1985). Communication analysis: A survey research report. *National Forensic Journal*, 3(2), 140-153.
- Miller, M.A., & Ewell, P.T. (2005). *Measuring up on college-level learning*. The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, San Jose, CA.
- Murphy, J.M. (1988). Theory and practice in communication analysis. *National Forensic Journal*, 6(1), 1-11.
- National Forensic Association (n.d.). *Description of events*. Retrieved on May 8, 2009, from <http://cas.bethel.edu/dept/comm/nfa/ierules.html>
- Ott, B.L. (1998). Bridging scholarly theory and forensic practice: Toward a more pedagogical model of rhetorical criticism. *National Forensic Journal*, 16(1&2), 53-74.
- Richardson, R., & Kelly, B.B. (2008). Re-examining competition and education in collegiate forensics establishing the need for a pedagogical prerogative perspective. *Proceedings of the National Development Conference on Individual Events*. Peoria, IL: Bradley University.
- Richardson, R.R. (1994). The effect of familiarity on ranking in individual events competition. *Florida Communication Journal*, 22(1).
- Rosenthal, R. E. (1985). Changing perspectives on rhetorical criticism as a forensic event. *National Forensic Journal*, 3(2), 128-138.

Spellings, M. (2008). *Keynote address at greater Houston partnership 2008 state of education luncheon*. Retrieved May 8, 2009,

<http://www.ed.gov/news/pressreleases/2008/02/02082008.html>.

Stanney, C. J. (2008). *Preparing course and program CCRs: Writing measurable student learning outcomes*; Preparing ALCs & ALPs. Lecture presented at the May 22, 2008 CCR submission workshop sponsored by the University of West Florida Center for Teaching and Learning. University of West Florida, Pensacola, FL.

University of West Florida (n.d.). *Academic learning compact*. Retrieved May 8, 2009

from

http://uwf.edu/academic/assessment/UWF_ALC_Policies_and_Procedures_Approved_by_BOT_3_20_07.pdf.

TABLE 1

University of West Florida Academic Learning Compact

The UWF Academic Learning Compact incorporates student learning outcome activity across five domains that should characterize the skills and abilities of a UWF graduate, regardless of major. Every ALC will address the three domains specified by the Board of Governors:

- discipline knowledge and skills
- communication
- critical thinking

-----and two additional domains as follows-----

- integrity/values
- project management.

These five domains represent student-learning outcomes identified by faculty as essential to the UWF baccalaureate degree.

TABLE 2

University of West Florida *General Philosophy for
Writing Student Learning Outcomes*

- Statements that describe what students will be able to know, do, or value educational experience. Descriptions of knowledge, skills, abilities, and values attained by students in language that clearly implies a measureable student behavior or quality of student work. Statements that describe what students will be value as a result of their educational experience.
- Descriptions of knowledge, skills, abilities, and values attained by students in language that clearly implies a measureable student behavior or quality of student work.

(Stanney, 2008)

TABLE 3

The National Forensic Association Academic Learning Compact incorporates student learning outcome activity across five domains that should characterize the skills and abilities of a successfully trained student/competitor in collegiate forensics, regardless of the program, which they represent. The Academic Learning Compact ¹should align with the following five domains.

DISCIPLINE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (ALC 1)

- (ALC 1.1) Use communication technology effectively.
- (ALC 1.2) Describe and apply communication concepts and principles from the following areas:
 - Rhetorical theory
 - Fundamentals of speech
 - Audience analysis
 - Fundamentals of oral interpretation of literature
 - Argumentation

COMMUNICATION (ALC 2)

- (ALC 2.1) Adapt style and delivery to communication clearly and memorably.
- (ALC 2.2) Deliver effective presentations with well-defined introductions, main points, supporting information, and conclusions.
- (ALC 2.3) Establish credibility with audience.
- (ALC 2.4) Use information technology effectively to conduct research.

CRITICAL THINKING (ALC 3)

- (ALC 3.1) Apply rhetorical, relational and critical theories to understand communication events.
- (ALC 3.2) Evaluate effective and ineffective communication.
- (ALC 3.3) Suggest audience-centered strategies for improvement in public speaking and performance that are considerate of the speaker
- (ALC 3.4) Identify trustworthy evidence and information.

INTEGRITY/VALUES (ALC 4)

- (ALC 4.1) Distinguish between ethical and unethical behavior in human communication.
- (ALC 4.2) Describe and adhere to the principles of ethical practice in public speaking, performance, scholarly activity and citizenship.

Coaching for the Interstate Oratory Contest: Strategies for Success

Clark D. Olson, Arizona State University

TABLE 3

The National Forensic Association Academic Learning Compact incorporates student learning outcome activity across five domains that should characterize the skills and abilities of a successfully trained student/competitor in collegiate forensics, regardless of the program, which they represent. The Academic Learning Compact¹ should align with the following five domains.

DISCIPLINE KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS (ALC 1)

- (ALC 1.1) Use communication technology effectively.
- (ALC 1.2) Describe and apply communication concepts and principles from the following areas:
 - Rhetorical theory
 - Fundamentals of speech
 - Audience analysis
 - Fundamentals of oral interpretation of literature
 - Argumentation

COMMUNICATION (ALC 2)

- (ALC 2.1) Adapt style and delivery to communication clearly and memorably.
- (ALC 2.2) Deliver effective presentations with well-defined introductions, main points, supporting information, and conclusions.
- (ALC 2.3) Establish credibility with audience.
- (ALC 2.4) Use information technology effectively to conduct research.

CRITICAL THINKING (ALC 3)

- (ALC 3.1) Apply rhetorical, relational and critical theories to understand communication events.
- (ALC 3.2) Evaluate effective and ineffective communication.
- (ALC 3.3) Suggest audience-centered strategies for improvement in public speaking and performance that are considerate of the speaker
- (ALC 3.4) Identify trustworthy evidence and information.

INTEGRITY/VALUES (ALC 4)

- (ALC 4.1) Distinguish between ethical and unethical behavior in human communication.
- (ALC 4.2) Describe and adhere to the principles of ethical practice in public speaking, performance, scholarly activity and citizenship.

Coaching for the Interstate Oratory Contest: Strategies for Success

Clark D. Olson, Arizona State University

Perhaps no truer words were spoken about the Interstate Oratory Contest than by luminary coach Grace Walsh in her observations on oratory in the special edition of *Winning Orations* devoted to her when she commented, “Little agreement exists about what is a great oration these days.” Today, some thirty years later, those words continue to ring true. With 135 years of history, countless orations have been dubbed “winning” and the study of what makes successful oratory and orators persists. The purpose of this essay is to share some strategies about coaching successful oratory for this contest, with regard to topic choice, speech content, audience and judge analysis and delivery skills, acknowledging my limited perspective which includes but the past forty years.

As an avenue of study, oratory has been at the forefront of our discipline. The earliest volume of the *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* devoted attention to the art of oratory (Gunnison 1915). Throughout the years, the Interstate Oratory Association has been the subject of a variety of studies, attempting to examine what comprises successful oratory. In 1984, Olson did a content analysis of the first five winning speeches and then the most recent speeches to determine what differences a century had made in the art of oratory. Reynolds (1983) examined current orations to determine similarities in organizational structure and evidence usage. Indeed, an entire early issue of the *National Forensic Journal* (1983) was devoted to what has become popularly known as “persuasive speaking.” Sellnow and Ziegelmüller (1988) did a content analysis of Interstate Oratory speeches comparing strategies from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, while Leiboff (1991) did a content analysis on what persuasive topics were successful in the 1990 National Forensic Association tournament. Today, public speaking textbook publishers regularly rely on the texts and examples of speeches from the Interstate

Oratory Contest to illustrate successful persuasive speaking. Without a doubt, the impact this historic contest has had on the field of oratory has been substantial. However, few scholarly efforts have been made within the past twenty years to analyze current trends of success at this unique event.

One hundred years after the inception of the Interstate Oratory Contest, the National Forensic Association began its national tournament and has selected a champion “persuasive speaker” each year since. In 1978 the American Forensic Association began its tournament and has likewise selected a “national winner” annually. Yet, both of these contests and corresponding national organizations such as Phi Rho Pi, Delta Sigma Rho, Tau Kappa Alpha and Pi Kappa Delta, have stuck routinely to traditional forensic modes of competition and judging, largely having current forensic coaches as the judges. As the Interstate Oratory Contest has developed, it has retained one unique feature setting it apart from traditional forensic contests—the final round judging panel.

Now, if one truly believes Walsh’s initial words, it is no surprise that what traditional forensic “experts” may judge to be successful oratory, may not always “play in Peoria”—the final round Interstate panel, typically comprised of local politicians, media experts, and prominent community members. For the final round audience, success often hinges on connecting “in the moment” with the members of that judging panel. And so, while advancing to that final round through the traditional notions of having forensic coaches adjudicate the preliminary and semi-final rounds, often an entirely different tack is necessary to achieve victory at Interstate. Indeed, when one examines the results for NFA, AFA and Interstate over the past thirty-five years, it is rare to find a contestant who has won both an AFA and/or NFA persuasive speaking title AND been victorious at

Interstate. In fact, due to the nature of qualifying two contestants from each state, not every AFA or NFA champion has even qualified for the Interstate Oratory Contest. This essay will attempt to articulate what sets Interstate apart from these other national contests and provide insights found successful when coaching for the Interstate Oratory Contest.

Initially, topic choice is key for the successful orator. While no small amount of debate has occurred on what makes a “winning topic,” Walsh counsels that traditional problems are successful, ones that emanate from society. For many years, the “dread disease” speech was popular (Reynolds 1983). Prior to that, the “I am the . . .” genre was quite popular relying on a great deal of personal proof from the speaker about the particular problem elucidated (Sellnow and Ziegelmueller, 1988).

In recent years, the popularity of topics which an audience might be unfamiliar with, where speakers first present an expose about the horrors of a previously unknown problem and then attempt to offer practical solutions seems to be a trend. Since Clanton’s* winning speech in 1988 on nuclear experimentation in space (following on the heels of the Challenger disaster), speakers have been able to find problems which are not in the headlines of daily newspapers, but which may be uncovered on news shows, such as *60 Minutes*, *Dateline*, or *20/20*. Successful speeches that have fit this mold include Griesinger* (2007) on the Falun Gong organ harvest, Holbrook (2005) on domestic abuse in the gay community, Shankar (1999) on free Saipan, Johnson* (1998) on Astroturf legislation, Keaveny* (1996) on foreign prescription drugs, Jamison* (1991) on battery disposal, and Kimmey* (1990) on time theft. In each of these speeches from the final round, the audience was introduced to a problem they were probably unfamiliar

with, stunned by the significance of the problem, and then presented with solutions which could help to remedy the problem.

A second genre of topics that have been successful are the speeches which find a problem embedded within the solution to another, typically more well known, problem. These topics lend themselves well to shocking the audience with the fact that in solving a previously known problem, another—often worse—problem has arisen, which far surpasses the initial problem, and often calls for swift, immediate action. Successful speeches using this strategy have been Klatt* (2005) and Meinen* (1999) on funding AIDS research, Bevernitz (2004) companies investing in corporate owned life insurance on elderly and terminally ill employees, Note (2002) on unreliable mammograms, Gallagher (1999) on enhanced computerized 911 responses, Campbell (1996) on the recycling placebo, Kaplan (1990) on the dangers of asbestos removal and Kimmey (1989) on reselling unsafe school busses.

Now, while both of these contemporary topic area suggestions may seem somewhat formulaic, it is critical to reinforce already known criteria of topic selection, and that is that the topic/problem must be one the speaker feels strongly about. While the “I am the...” genre of speeches have waned—often sacrificing personal credibility—several successful contestants have indicated how their topic impacts them personally. Among these speakers are: Ohl (2007) on skin cancer, Bender (2005) on media misinformation, Grace (2000) on unsanitary hotels, and Schawe (1999) on diploma mills. Indeed, if a coach just hands a “winning” topic to a student and he/she doesn’t feel compassion for the topic, the content and delivery is likely to suffer. Similarly, as we teach our public speaking students, there should also be an adequate amount and variety

of resources available on the problem as the standard for proof within persuasive speaking also seems to have risen over the past several years (Olson, 1984).

But the content of the successful Interstate speech rests not only with a winning topic, but also in how the speech is developed. As contemporarily practiced, persuasive speeches typically have three main points, clearly identified as problem, causes, and solutions. Thorough substructuring has also become more common as typical forensics judges often “require” the highlighting of the organization, down to specific solutions on a global, national, and individual level. However, while some level of structure is no doubt helpful, the successful Interstate contestant needs to balance this expectation for explicit structure, with the expectations from the final round panel of judges being for merely “some” structure...where less is often more. Moorehead’s* (2004) winning speech on oral histories was void of any overt structure or substructure, serves as a clear example.

One way to more subtly accomplish this “less is more” aim is through the language choices a speaker builds into his or her speech. The use of metaphors has often distinguished the successful Interstate speech, perhaps used no better than by Joeckel* (1981):

In past election years, it has been said that if politicians discover their constituents are cannibals, they will promise them Christians for dinner. In 1980, the reverse was true. Evangelical members of the New Christian Right served up politicians, from the county weed commissioner to the President of the United States with the zeal and expertise of French chefs. Lead by religious television figures such as Falwell, members of the

movement concocted their elaborate recipe for success: Mix the country's 30 to 65 million Evangelical Protestants and Catholics together with heaping handfuls of conservative discontent. Add a dash of Salt II; blend in abortion, gay rights and Equal Rights Amendment, the Department of Education and sex education in public schools. Sprinkle liberally (if you will) with unconstitutional activity and tax law violation. Cook over high heat with plenty of fire and brimstone until November 4. Yield: the defeat of numerous liberal politicians targeted by the New Christian Right.

Metaphors and clever language choices serve to highlight the intentionality of writing the oration. Rawlins' (2005) speech on internet phishing began her preview by stating "[W]e will today *load the boat* with the problems of phishing, then *cast* into the causes of phishing, before finally *reeling in* some solutions." In explaining the nature of the problem Rawlins wrote "Here we see the *hook*. . .," and her concluding line was "[W]e can avoid taking the *bait*." Johnson's* (1998) speech on Astroturf lobbying serves as another successful example. In his previewing the problem to be the "fastest growing segment of the public relations field," he wrote, "In clarifying the mechanics of this practice, it will become clear that in both football and lobbying, Astroturf has two main advantages over real grass. It's easier to maintain and it's a lot prettier." In his transition to his second point, Johnson proclaimed, "But [Kansas City] Chief's running back Marcus Allen is quick to point out that Astroturf might be prettier and easier to maintain than real grass, but it yields more injuries. And in the lobbying game, it's not just the big name players getting hurt." Finally, as he makes a transition to his conclusions he notes: "On the field of public policy, Astroturf has caused enough damage. It's time to rip it up

from the stadium floor and plant the seeds of authentic grass roots, by finally looking at what can be done to ensure the legitimacy of grass roots reform.” These metaphoric examples serve to demonstrate the way clever language choices can help unify a theme. While some traditional forensics judges may criticize such language choices for being “punny” and unnecessarily cute, once inserted into the final round, they often provide a large advantage to the speaker who can pull them off by appearing as an intentional rhetorical device to the lay judges in the final round.

The last aspect of content that sets apart Interstate speeches from typical persuasive speeches is the reference to the occasion. Interstate has a rich and illustrious history, one that is often referred to prior to and during the contest. Past contests have been held in historic locations such as the Smithsonian, the first U.S. colonial capitol, and several state capitol buildings. Often a single reference to the historic events that happened in the very building where the final round occurs, or even within a historic city can gain the favor of the final round Interstate judging panel. Perhaps the best example of this technique was by Pruitt (1996) in her speech on the college credit card crisis. The final round was held in the home of William Jennings Bryant, and at the luncheon which preceded the final round, a guest speaker had made liberal reference to Bryant’s “Cross of Gold” speech. In moving to her conclusion Pruitt parodied how today’s college students are being crucified upon a “cross of plastic.” The addition of this reference made the content of her speech stand apart from speakers who were merely reciting memorized orations for the hundredth time that year.

There is no doubt that audience analysis plays a key role in successful speaking as it is ultimately the audience who determines the success or failure of a speaking event

(Brigance, 1925). Attempting to analyze the final round audience can be a unique task. Often, coaches and contestants merely assume that the final round panel will act as Perelman's universal audience (1969), and that what is sufficient to advance to the final round during a typical tournament, will often be enough to win the Interstate Oratory Contest. Indeed, Interstate provides collegiate speakers with a unique opportunity to adapt not only to a typical forensics audience in preliminary rounds, but also the lay audience of community members who typically adjudicate the final round. A quick look at results from the past twenty-five years shows that frequently it is the lowest ranked contestants who advance to elimination rounds who are most successful in elimination rounds (1989, 1993, 1996). This proves that what forensics judges deem successful differs in the final round with lay judges. Given the divided expert/lay audience, it behooves both the coach and the speaker to identify characteristics that may set apart the final round audience.

One simple way is to do your homework, even at the tournament. Ask the tournament director and host who the members of the final round panel are, and find out as much detail as possible. In addition, know exactly where the respective members will sit, so that specific appeals can be made directly to specific audience members. For example, political solutions can be referred to local politicians, legal solutions to members of the judiciary, business solutions to members of that community, educational solutions to teachers, and informational solutions to members of the media. When judges believe solutions or appeals have been crafted especially for them, they tend to become ego involved in the speech and tend to rank it higher. Two examples from recent contests provide proof of this technique. In 1995, Benton* discovered that the mayor of the local

city was a final round judge and made direct reference regarding his speech on private police to what local politicians could do. Unseth* (2001) offered as part of his solution a CD to be played on local radio stations, and emphasized that solution to a radio media personality who was a member of the final round panel. Being aware of the proclivities of judges can often tilt the balance toward a given contestant, and at the very least gives the speaker an added feeling of confidence as they reach the home stretch of their speech.

Finally, several delivery techniques can be employed to give a speaker an edge in Interstate competition. Hopefully, speakers will already feel some passion about their topic. Given that Interstate is typically the last tournament of the year, and that the final round is often the last time a speech will be given in competition, energy is often high. But speakers should be coached to guard against being complacent in this round and instead speak with all the conviction they can muster. Slight modifications may need to be made in pronoun usage to include the entire audience in the speech. The title of the event the final round judges have come to hear is the Interstate Oratory Contest, and for many, the word “oratory” conjures up great meanings of high emoting and great conviction. Typically, the older the panel, the greater emotional involvement and volume expected. In addition to vocal emotion, speakers can show further conviction by directly addressing the audience, particularly the judges. Devoting a disproportionate amount of eye contact to the judges can help the judges feel they are the only ones in the room, and that the speech is meant exclusively for them. Additionally, moving physically closer to the audience, again particularly the judges, can make a speaker appear confident, and unafraid as they explicate their solutions and truly motivate the audience to feel involved and responsible for the problem and urged to take action. Even developing a wider stance

or broader gestures can signal to the judging panel a high degree of personal involvement.

Despite thorough delivery preparation, sound fluency, and confident delivery, every speaker can learn from the mistakes of other speakers. As speakers learn to “work a room” they can try to make the speaking situation work in their favor. Typically the first speaker in the round will set the tone and pace for the round. For instance, the first speaker sets the standard as to where it is appropriate for the speaker to stand. Given that many final rounds do not occur in typical classrooms, often there is a choice for speakers to make. Sometimes physical barriers, such as a stage or table, separate the speaker from the audience, and the speaker should use every advantage to attempt to diminish these barriers, reducing the space between audience and speaker so the conviction is easier to “feel.” In adapting to a room, successful speakers should take the opportunity to visit the physical location of the round, so they can get the feel of how their voice will carry, where they want to direct their eye contact and energy, and be able to feel comfortable motivating an audience. Speakers who are later in speaking order can observe earlier speakers; make a mental checklist of successful and unsuccessful techniques used by earlier speakers. They can then adjust their volume and even their physical stance to avoid running into objects as they move, and work to distinguish their style. Often these are the subtle, intangibles that give a winning speaker the edge.

The Interstate Oratory Contest is a unique speaking situation. Contestants are all usually solid, representing their states with pride. For many speakers, their dream is to participate in the final round of this distinguished contest (Schnoor and Wickelgren, 2001). No small amount of preparation goes into creating an Interstate champion.

Typically, the unique factors of the contest—being cognizant of the history and surroundings as well as the little adjustments one can make from preliminary rounds to the final—which separate all the successful speakers who qualify for Interstate from those who make history as champions.

Notes

All referenced speeches are finalists in respective years at the Interstate Oratory Contest. First place winners are noted with an *.

References

- Bender, K. (2005) Speak to be heard: Overcoming media misinformation. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Benton, B. (1995). Very fake badges—very real guns. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Bevernitz, A. (2004). Dead peasants insurance: Are you worth more dead than alive? *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Brigance, W. N. (1925). What is a successful speech? *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. 11 (372-377).
- Clanton, J. (1988). *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Campbell, K. (1996). The recycling placebo. *Winning orations*. Northfield, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Gallagher, B. (1999). E-911: A “call” for reform. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Grace, K. (2000). Unsanitary hotels. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.

- Griesinger, C. (2007). The Falun gong harvest. *Winning orations*, Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Gunnison, B. (1915). Imagination in oratory. *The Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking*, 1, (144-153).
- Holbrook, D. (2005). Domestic abuse protection for all Americans. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Jamison, J. (1991). Alkali batteries—Powering electronics and polluting the environment *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Joeckel, K. (1981). When the intolerant rule. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Johnson, C. (1998). Astroturf lobbying. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Kaplan, S. (1990). Untitled. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Keaveny, M. (1996). Granny the drug runner: A cheap alternative to a dangerous problem. *Winning orations*. Northfield, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Kimmey, K. (1989) The bingity bangity school bus. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Kimmey, K. (1990). Time theft: The silent thief *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Klatt, S. (2005). HIV Prevention. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Leiboff, M. (1991). An analysis of topics used in persuasive speaking. *National Forensic Journal*, IX, 155-161.
- Meinen, S. (1999). The forgotten four-letter word. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Moorehead, A. J. (2004). Core Stories. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Note, M. (2002). The mammogram mindset. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.

- Ohl, J. (2007). Rising sun, rising cancer. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association
- Olson, C. D. (1984). Winning orations: An historical, comparative perspective of the Interstate Oratorical Contest. Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association convention. Chicago, IL.
- Perelman, Ch. & Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1969). *The new rhetoric: A treatise on argumentation*. Trans. J. Wilkinson & P. Weaver. Notre Dame, IN: UND.
- Pruitt, J. (1996). College credit card crisis. *Winning orations*. Northfield, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Rawlins, P. (2005). Untitled. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Reynolds, C. L. (1983). 'Winning orations?' A study of select Interstate Oratorical Speeches. *National Forensic Journal*. 1, 119-135.
- Schawe, W. (1999). Diploma mills. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Schnoor, L. G., & Wickelgren, B. (2001). Roots of oratory: The historical record of the Interstate Oratorical Association. Paper presented at the National Communication Association Convention, Atlanta, GA.
- Sellnow, T. L. & Ziegelmueller, G. (1988) The persuasive speaking contest: An analysis of twenty years of change. *National Forensic Journal*, VI, 75-88.
- Shankar, R. (1999). Free Saipan. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Unseth, A. (2001). Child warriors: Pawns in international warfare. *Winning orations*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.
- Walsh, G. (1980). Observations on oratory. *Winning orations special edition Grace Walsh*. Mankato, MN: Interstate Oratorical Association.