

Don Boileau of George Mason University comments unfavorably on the casualness of debate explaining that they are quickly losing all rationale for a communication standard for the activity," a feeling supported by Rhonda Kekke, chairperson at Kirkwood Community College, who explains, "I came to view competitive speaking as quite detrimental to the kind of communication attitude I was trying to foster in students." Jerry Callahan, chairperson of San Jacinto College Central adds, "Debate has become a sterile, esoteric exercise in quick-speak non-communication for the very few. Getting a decision may mean that the debater possesses good evidence, or perhaps good arguments, or perhaps is just less unintelligible than the opponent, or perhaps looks smarter." Erwin Bettinghaus, Michigan State University Dean, adds, "It can and does teach critical thinking, but it also teaches glibness and a pattern of speech that I find bothersome." Thomas Steinfatt, chairperson, University of Miami offers, "Debaters are in my opinion, absolutely atrocious public speakers. I have argued long and hard for the type of change CEDA was supposed to bring about but clearly didn't." Another response argues that in forensics "Exclusionary practices have relegated us to the category of esoteric, and left us unwelcome in the mainstream." Sue DeWine, Chairperson at Ohio University suggests the total restructuring of the event. Jeffrey McCall, Chair at DePauw writes, "This year our Director of Forensics, Robert O. Weiss, has concluded that CEDA debate (which he has long supported) has become too bizarre for public consumption and, with strong department support, has chosen to commit the debate teams to the fledgling National Educational Debate Association."

Most of the negative remarks focus on debate, CEDA debate in particular. Most focus on delivery skills and lack of audience adaptation. Ozzie Banicki, Prairie View A&M and David Robinson, Youngstown State University, suggest that debate may be excellent training for being an auctioneer. Many administrators made references to "real world" persuasion where arguments are tested in the public marketplace of ideas, requiring communication and understanding of ideas. The comments focus attention on the structure of argument, use of evidence, the lack of refutation and communication skills. Timothy Hegstrom, Chair at San Jose State University describes the problem as having reached epic proportions a feeling shared by David Robinson (Youngstown State University) who sees CEDA as "a big disappointment."

Negative comments about individual events include essentially the same kind of remarks. The critic/judge is a "genius" if the competitor is ranked 1 with high points, and an "idiot" if the ranking is 4 with average points. Comments are seemingly not read for their educational value. However, in a content analysis of ballots, Carey & Rodier (1987) found that most judges do not provide a rationale for the decision, make "very personal" comments and tell the competitor of their preferences. Although the ballot is the pivotal point or the educational medium to instruct, no guidelines to instruct the critic on how to evaluate are provided at the collegiate level.

Many administrators note that individual event competitors are emphasizing delivery. Often the quality of the literature is overlooked, the intent of the author ignored or violated (if the competitor even knows the intent), and interpretative readings seem to be selected only for shock value.

Some respondents seem to feel that the quality of argumentation has declined in persuasion in favor of a "slick delivery." Professor Robinson of



Youngstown State University notes that, "Stereotyped, stultified 'disease of the week' speeches have driven everything else out of persuasion; the level of language usage has become at best pedestrian — nobody in the contests dares trust his/her fate to imaginative, figurative language. It bothers me that out in the 'real world,' speeches are still noticed and remembered for their stylistic excellence, but that we have fundamentally driven such characteristics out of intercollegiate forensics discourse." Could this mean that the activity now places its emphasis on elocution?

On the positive side, Michael Hazen, Chairperson at Wake Forest University comments, that "Forensics is an important part of the field of communication. It is one of those co-curricular areas that allows us to directly put into practice some of those things that are important in our discipline." Bettinghaus at Michigan State University argues that the main reason for keeping forensics is for recruiting "the best and brightest" students.

Concerns expressed by various individuals are best characterized by John Sisco from Southwest Missouri State University, who suggests that in his opinion, "forensics programs and especially the tournaments must get back to a sense of communication." Richard Paine, Chairperson at North Central College, concurs, explaining, "Frankly, I think forensics is moving in the wrong direction. I.E. . . is moving in the direction of the Elocutionary school. Debate, too, seems to be moving away from 'direct clash' and toward relatively irrelevant pre-fabricated argumentation and 'tricks'. I realize that this sounds terribly cynical—but it is, I fear, an accurate reflection of what I feel. The activity isn't to blame—the people involved in it are (especially we coaches/judges). Both individual events and debate can have tremendously valuable impacts on the lives of students."

It is important to attempt to determine the reason why this phenomenon seems to be so generally accepted among the various administrators. William Robinson, Chairperson at Purdue University - Calumet, states that he believes it is because forensics has become a 'step child' of the discipline, one that is often ignored, if not largely discredited." The reasons for this condition, in the opinion of the authors of this paper are many, most notably the lack of educational leadership, the deteriorating quality of debate, the fragmentation of the activity, the perceived expense of the program to the institution, the perceived lack of presence on the campus, and the perceived lack of scholarship on the part of faculty and students.

The issue of faculty evaluation is critical to the activity. Scholarship that is narrowly defined by our major research institutions often cuts the contributions of the "teacher" to nothing. Boyer (1987) questioned the educational agenda of the university system by asking about students and the quality of teaching. Albert (1991) indicates that most institutions have a very narrow definition of scholarship which rules out the "scholarship" in forensics. Albert also argues that what the forensics coach is doing does contribute as "knowledge-producing" research.

Erwin Bettinghaus of Michigan State University indicates from his many years of experience that once a debate coach is tenured his/her first request is to be relieved of coaching. Most institutions do not tenure forensics coaches; consequently interests must turn to publishable research. This leaves many programs to charge graduate assistants with setting and trying to meet the objectives. Some respondents indicate that the objectives themselves are not



"educational" in focus. Securing a position, and then being able to negotiate another position is dependent upon team wins or articles published, not the educational contribution of the individual.

As institutions move toward assessment, the activity must be evaluated in terms of educational objectives. Robert Chamberlain, Chairperson at Seattle Pacific University writes, "We have designed our curriculum to encourage argumentation students into debate, and forensics students into argumentation, and probably that has had some effect. But we have not monitored the effect." Professor Chamberlain is very candid in saying that forensics participation is not important academically.

The crux of this paper is expressed by Timothy Hegstrom's comment that, "When debate is at its best, it is because coaches stress the educational value of forensics with each other and with participants. It becomes a game when coaches encourage a social climate among students that fosters alcoholism and promiscuity, when sophisticated tricks are valued more than argumentation theory, then forensics is a detriment to education." Jay VerLinden, Chairperson at Humboldt State University indicates that, "Forensics is most negative when instructors lose sight of its role as an educational activity and perceive of it only in terms of competitive success. When that happens I've seen schools engage in unethical practices and abuse students involved in the program. An educational emphasis, though, recognizes that forensics is a means to an end, a way to teach students that isn't matched in other settings."

Mark Knapp, Chair of the Department of Speech Communication at the University of Texas-Austin writes, "There is absolutely no question or qualification in my mind that debate and individual events attracts some of the finest students on campus and that the activity itself prepares these students to be effective and responsible citizens, community leaders, and often national leaders."

## CONCLUSION

What has been learned from this survey? Administrators overwhelmingly indicated that debate was the single most important educational activity they engaged in and attributed many of their administrative skills to forensics participation. However, these same individuals question if students today are receiving the same educational benefits they received. Most of the comments focus on the problems in the activity and even blame the activity. Most comment on winning as the objective of the activity and indicate a need for clear, well stated educational objectives to guide the activity. Many suggest that an educational forum must be created on campus not only to "showcase" student abilities but to teach students about the need for communication in argumentation, critical thinking, and refutation. Many times judges/coaches are considered inadequate if they can't flow a debate with the speakers going at full speed. Glynis Strause Chair of Bee County Community College states that we need to "Prepare and showcase their talents which will help them in their professional lives." Speakers who use excessive speed will not find it helpful in most career choices. The issue is not speed, spread, or pathos. The issue is coaches setting an educational objective for the future.

Forensics is considered a valuable education tool. Loren Dickinson, Chair at Walla Walla College indicates that, "Debate is now listed among the several options in the general studies line-up under philosophy. It's there because



curriculum people liked what debate does for enhancing critical thinking." Kaye (1991) places forensics in the principal role of training critical thinking, public debate, training in argumentation, and foundation of argument in history, humanities, and social sciences if the academic setting is to prepare the next generation of public figures and intellectuals. Robert Street, Chairperson at Texas Tech University gives us this thought to ponder in closing: "Academically, I expect forensics to represent some of the best application of oral communication, in all its inventive, disposition, logical, and ethical form. Forensics is probably where most students should be after their first course in public speaking. Argument and arguing are the key, I think. If we could integrate the best of what forensics provides in terms of argumentative skill into other courses, then we wouldn't be in need of forensics, except for its competitive value. But I don't believe we will soon see such integration to any great degree, so forensics remains unique and valuable in its own right."

How do the objectives of the activity link with the mission of the institution? These comments suggest that a need exists to discuss the educational objectives, to state these objectives clearly and in quantifiable terms, and for coaches to advocate these educational objectives within the activity and on their individual campuses. The solution to the problem of the discrepancy between the objectives of the forensic activity and the mission of an academic institution will only be found if and when the effects of the activity on the participant and therefore on the program itself are adequately monitored. The future of forensics is not going to be determined by budget cuts. It will be determined by the ability of the coaches to develop educational objectives and to effectively articulate the objectives to others involved in the activity.

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# INTERROGATING THE MYTH OF MULTICULTURALISM: TOWARD SIGNIFICANT MEMBERSHIP AND PARTICIPATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN FORENSICS

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For eight years, I served as Director of Forensics at one of America's largest historically black universities. As a white male and the product of a moderately successful forensics program in the "Deep South," I carried a certain bias with me as I began to build a program. The members of that team struggled to educate me, while I struggled to understand their unique perspective of the rules of membership and inclusion within the forensics community which I had always taken for granted. Eventually, my immersion in and association with their culture as both coach and educator gave me a certain understanding and limited insight. While I cannot claim to speak for all African Americans, my experience has taught me that to exclude anyone from the educational discourse that forensics provides is to ethically and educationally bankrupt the community at large. As a community of forensics educators, we must dedicate ourselves to a pedagogy which provides significant educational opportunity without regard to the demographics of the participants.

Part of the purpose of this article is to provide not only the justification, but an honest understanding of the "must" used above. There *is* an educational bias implicit within the previous statements and this discourse which justifies inclusion of the "must." For forensics, and specifically the activity of debate, to function as a valid laboratory for communication education, then all cultures and viewpoints must be considered. Students must be able to adapt to the culturally diverse world they will encounter after graduation excludes them from further competition. We owe it to our students to teach them to communicate effectively beyond the tournament.

This is nothing new. Pi Kappa Delta has increasingly focused its efforts toward significant African American participation through its National



Development Conferences. Several authors (Crenshaw, 1993; Inch, 1994; Jensen, 1993, 1994; Loge, 1991; Logue, 1987, 1991; Parson, 1994; Rowland, 1993; Swanson, 1994; Tuman, 1993; Vang, 1994) have focused attention on the critical need to include subdominant cultures. However, it is reflective to note that Loge(1991)writes "Many directors expressed concern over the lack of black participation, yet only nine reported making special efforts to increase the racial diversity of their teams" (80). The question remains, how can we, as a community of forensics educators, significantly increase the membership and participation of African Americans within this activity? This article attempts to identify some of the major concerns of the African American forensic community and to offer practical advice toward future solutions.

### Review of Literature

Before we examine the specifics of African American membership and inclusion within forensics, it is essential that we understand 1) how the foundation of competition underpins the necessity of their inclusion; and 2) how competition and education are not by nature diametrically opposed. While this may seem a digression, it is critical to the analysis which follows.

I freely admit my educational bias. Studying theory is *good*. Using theory through the competitive laboratory is *better*. Education, which I define as having lasting, "real world" application is *best*. I am not alone in my educational bias. Madison and Chandler (1994) have even gone so far as to suggest that we "eliminate the common practice of concluding debate institutes with a tournament, instead replacing the tournament structure with a series of critiqued practice sessions" (7). Think of it; a purely educational forensics experience. However, I am not denying that competition is good. At the First National Conference on Forensics in Sedalia in 1974 Robert Rosenthal offered a succinct statement on the competitive principle: "The stimulus of competition is a motivation for excellence in performance. Competition provides feedback concerning educational performance, much as a grade is an indication of academic achievement. Indeed, it is the competitive nature of forensics which makes it a unique learning experience. To deny competition is to deny a core concept of the activity" (McBath, 1984, 5). McBath (1984) noted, however, "that the conferees at Sedalia concluded that forensics was best described by the statement: "Forensics is an *educational* activity primarily concerned with using an argumentative perspective in examining problems and *communicating* with people" (5). Perhaps, competition has become the scapegoat for what some refer to as the "drive to win." Jensen (1994) warns, "Perhaps we have become, first coaches, and second, educators" (9).

We could "debate" the theory and practice of competition (and I would argue that they are often vastly different) all day. Competition is only educational to the extent that it reflects a realistic, culturally diverse, world view. Therefore, the question critical to our understanding of the argument for the inclusion of subdominant cultures is: How valid is the educational experience in terms of its "real world" applicability, if most of the subdominant cultures' major players are either not involved or silent? Vang (1994) concludes, "If we wish for forensics to continue to educate students so that they are competent communicators, then they must be able to adapt to and understand the diversity of culture they will encounter" (126). Swanson (1994)



echoes this critical need for inclusion for educational solvency by stating, "The forensics community should work to establish a supportive multicultural context for the activity which recognizes diversity in participants and audiences" (128).

In summary of this point, the foundation of competition eloquently argues for the inclusion of subdominant cultures because they are both present and vocal within the post tournament world. Secondly, competition and education need not occupy opposite ends of the forensic motivation continuum. Competition is educationally sound so long as it continues to prepare students to communicate effectively in a culturally diverse world. Given that these statements are valid, what is the current status of African Americans in forensics?

An examination of the literature written specifically on the topic of African American involvement in forensics is reflective of the larger problem. There isn't a great deal of it and almost none of it is written from the Black perspective. Peter Loge (1991), who authored one of the few serious attempts to analyze forensics from the African-American perspective, mailed out an extensive survey to every school on the 1989 CEDA mailing list. Only 64 (somewhat less than 20%) bothered to respond. Southern University was the only HBCU (Historically Black College or University) that participated in the data set. At that time, Southern accounted for roughly 38% of African American debaters in CEDA, the vast majority of which were competing at the novice and/or junior varsity levels. Loge's (1991) analysis mirrors the broader argument thus far: "If we are to educate all of our students to the best of our abilities, then the lack of cultural diversity in CEDA clearly is a problem — one we ignore at our own peril" (83). But do we, as members of the coaching and research communities, ignore issues of African American inclusion?

Let us examine two recent research streams. Bartenan and Hanson (1994) argue that "the forensics community should speak out more clearly to counter discourse among its members that demeans participants rather than respecting them" (16). They begin by discussing the nature of the problem through the use of several examples taken from recent tournaments. Unfortunately, not a single example of the quoted "verbal aggressions" was racist in nature. Are we then to assume that racist aggressions do not happen? Here, the criticism is that our focus, as a research community, is not inclusive enough. It may seem a harmless omission, but if the goal of research is to generate discussion and understanding, this monograph failed to reach my students because they felt their experiences as victims of verbal aggressions had been ignored. They felt, as one of my students voiced it, "disenfranchised because they didn't think to include what we might be going through." It could be argued that my students chose to excluded themselves. However, it is this very perception that the dominant culture does not view their membership, inclusion and experiences as necessary, important, or even desirable, that keeps them from participating.

Is it pessimism or realism that motivates the perception of a forensic community which excludes the vast majority of participants who are not representative of the dominant cultural demographic? In a response to a question posed by Loge (1991), a student respondent writes, "a persistent pattern of gender, racially, and ethnically dissimilar individuals as the only successful participants in an activity makes its hard for minority and nontraditional students to relate to . . . the activity" (83). Vang (1994) is even more emphatic in expressing this perception when she asks, "Is forensics an elite activity reserved for a dominant cultural group who are not interested in



any adaptations and who wish only to understand, employ and teach their cultural approach to advocacy" (120)? Real or not, if minority and nontraditional students perceive of themselves as unwanted, unwelcome and/or unsuccessful, how can the forensic community realistically expect them to embrace what is often perceived of by them as an "affluent, white, male activity" and to validate it and themselves through increased participation?

An extremely insightful dialogue between Crenshaw, Rowland and Tuman (*CEDA Yearbook*, 1993) is the second research stream we should investigate. Crenshaw (1993) argues that "feminisms are transformed in feminism — the treatment of diverse issues into a single monolithic theoretical and pragmatic entity and feminists as women with identical motivations, methods and goals" (73). The reduction of feminism into single-minded, single-issue blocks seriously impacts the quality and depth of the issues analysis; and thus, the argumentation that flows from such flawed analysis.

This over-simplification is extended by Tuman (1993) to members of the gay and African American communities, which has the impact of "flying in the face of demonstrable value differences owing as much to geography as to accident of birth" (86). Crenshaw (1993) posits that "The marginalization of gay men and lesbians as well as people of color in debate culture at both argumentative and participatory levels deserves much more attention. Participation issues should play a prominent role in our discussions of debate culture . . . we need case studies of argumentation about 'race,' we also need treatments of debate culture from a critical race perspective" (94-95).

Crenshaw, Rowland and Tuman (*CEDA Yearbook*, 1993) offer excellent insight into another critical area; that of the over simplification of subdominant cultural issues. Inclusion of the African American perspective and experiences in our discussions via research and our forensic community via tournaments is not enough. We must be careful to avoid the temptation to over simplify their experiences and lump them together into "one voice." In my experience, my students wanted to be heard and judged on their own unique merits as members of the human race. They did not want "special treatment." They asked only to be treated the same as the white males.

In articulating that desire, my students were particularly supportive of Swanson's Response (*Proceedings of the Pi Kappa Delta Development Conference*, 1993) to the section devoted to the challenge of serving the needs of the culturally diverse student population in which he called for essentially three things:

- 1) supporting entry level forensics for all interested students (minority students with little or no forensics experience are often pushed aside and ignored in favor of those with experience);
- 2) developing forensic educators who have intercultural communication competence (who are sensitive to both the dominant cultural nature of forensics and the communication methods and needs of other culture students they serve);
- and 3) establishment of a supportive multicultural context that recognized diversity (it is not adequate for forensics educators to espouse the need for change and expect the students to do all of the work)" (127-128).

Clearly, the need for tremendous philosophical change and investment in the education and opportunities of *all* students from *all* cultures is critical to the future health of the forensic community. Elitism can only perpetuate the



lity of separatism that threatens the dissolution of CEDA as an institution and forensics as a community of excellence. Jensen (1994) says it best: "The ethic of diversity is essential if the forensics laboratory experience is to be worthwhile and legitimate" (109).

### **Issues/Concerns/Suggestions:**

This author cannot claim credit for most of these ideas, since many of them are the synthesis of suggestions already expressed by the authors reflected in the Works Cited section. The issues enumerated below do not reflect a complete list, but rather, an attempt to address those issues critical to the author with regard to laying the foundation for increased membership and participation for African Americans. The intent of this section is to stimulate discussion and to provide program directors with a common point to begin the process of significant inclusion.

#### **1) Where and how to recruit?**

**Recommendations:** 1) encourage forensics in non-traditional high school settings; 2) Increase entry level support for all interested students; 3) Create campus-wide forensic opportunities which are attractive to multicultural perspectives; and 4) Be willing to dedicate a percentage of scholarship/travel opportunities to minority students.

**Discussion:** As Loge (1991) argues, most program directors are concerned about their team's lack of cultural diversity, but the majority don't make any special efforts to increase African American participation (80). It has been the author's experience that many coaches do express the desire to recruit Blacks, but do not have any idea of how or where to begin.

Any long-term solution begins in the local high school setting. African American students must be exposed to forensics and encouraged to view their contributions as valuable. What has worked for our program has been 1) an effort to present performances of literature and debates on topics of interest to Blacks in area high schools; 2) the establishment of a mentoring program wherein college team members work with local high schools to specifically mentor and coach non-traditional students in forensics; and 3) the opportunity for students to showcase their talents in a noncompetitive forensics day hosted on campus.

In addition to high school recruitment, your own campus should provide you with many opportunities. Present open forums, discussions, audience and exhibition debates on topics of interest to multicultural audiences. Encourage participation. Establish an intramural debate program or society which minimizes the research and other burdens of competitive debate that outsiders often see as barriers to their participation. Let the students select the topics and argue them just for the intellectual fun and stimulation. The fears and pressures of "competitive debate" are reduced. With the right encouragement and attention, many of these students get "hooked" and come to perceive of themselves as having the ability to function competitively.

Finally, extend attention and commitment to every student who expresses an interest regardless of your initial assessment of their potential competitiveness. Students are not dumb. They know when they are being "pushed aside" or ignored in favor of those who seem to "fit the debate mold." If even one minority student quits because of a perception of non importance,



others will follow. Be willing to commit a certain percentage of the scholarship/travel budget to the minority students. Yes, time and resources are always tight, but if we want to increase the participation of minority students within the forensics community, we must increase the time and resources directed towards them. *There is no other way.*

## **2) What can we do about the lack of positive role models?**

**Recommendations:** 1) Encourage more Blacks to enter forensics as a profession; 2) Work with and mentor area universities with high African American populations to stimulate forensics programs; 3) Hire more African Americans to "round out" the judging pool.

**Discussion:** This is the one area where program directors can have the greatest impact. Encourage your Black students to enter graduate school, help them to secure an assistant coach's and/or graduate assistant's position, and mentor them through the process. Funding is almost always a problem for most African Americans until they are made aware of the tremendous financial resources which are geared specifically for Blacks in higher education. Our effort to work directly with the student and the receiving graduate program to bring the two sides together is critical to the successful integration of Blacks into not only forensics, but higher education, as well.

Those local colleges and universities with a high minority population that do not have a forensics program need to be encouraged to start one. As the local "experts," we must be available to mentor the new coach and his or her team — even to the point of sharing resources. Intersquad scrimmages, sharing research, running seminars and institutes, letting them fill an empty van seat or hotel bed, sharing judging responsibilities to defray entry fees, and most importantly, providing a mentoring relationship are essential to the birth of new programs.

Finally, we must make every effort to include minority representatives in our tournament judging pools. The necessity of inclusion speaks not only to providing positive role models and identification with a friendly audience/critic by the minority competitor, but the ethic of competitive "realism" demands that we provide a multicultural setting for all participants. Identifying a "qualified" pool is always challenging regardless of race or gender, but local business and professional organizations, minority faculty members, local attorneys, legislators and judges have always proved to be more than helpful when we have searched for judges. They are out there, but you must make the effort to contact them and make them understand that their contributions are vital to the forensics process.

## **3) Blacks perceive national forensics organizations as exclusionary and/or unconcerned with multicultural populations:**

**Recommendations:** 1) Develop topic selection committees that are supportive of multicultural or culture-sensitive topics; 2) Develop IE standards that do not delegitimize African American culture; and 3) Revise rules that exclude non-traditional students from competition.

**Discussion:** There are several issues under this general area. First, it should be understood that often the topic itself determines the level of participation for African Americans.

At times, the topic presents particular ethos problems for Blacks. Take for