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SPECIAL 1995 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ISSUE

AN INTRODUCTION

by

Scott L. Jensen

Assistant Professor of Communication

McNeese State University

The 1995 Pi Kappa Delta Professional Developmental Conference was the largest in its history. A number of other important distinctions characterize that conference. Students' voices were heard loud and clear during the conference, as is evidenced by the seventeen papers and reactions presented by student members of Pi Kappa Delta. Change was a popular topic within the conference theme, "Constructing the Deconstruction: Re-Formulating Forensics for the New Century." Panel issues ranged from uniting forensics activities under one organization's umbrella, to securing administrative support for our activities. The seven panels provided a wealth of stimulating ideas and discussion.

This special issue of *The Forensic* highlights the 1995 developmental conference. Authors were invited to revise and submit their papers for possible inclusion in this issue. Submissions were blind reviewed by guest associate editors. The five published papers highlight paramount issues that face our activity as we move toward the next century. Cox and Adams provide an analysis of administrators' views of academic debate. Similarly, Schroeder and Fletcher-Schroeder present findings of a national survey soliciting administrators' views regarding the present state of forensics activities. Derryberry outlines how the concept of "team" can be a motivation for forensic and educational development in students. Rogers addresses the problem of integrating African-Americans into forensics activities, providing both an outline of concerns as well as recommended changes that address present problems. Finally, Adams and Cox examine both reforms in academic debate as well as an agent for sponsoring such reforms when they advocate Pi Kappa Delta as the sponsor of Officiated Debate.

Also featured in this special issue is a review of the *Proceedings* of the 1995 developmental conference. Robert Littlefield, former Pi Kappa Delta President and current National Secretary-Treasurer, organized the first Pi Kappa Delta Professional Developmental Conference in 1989. He also provides the insightful review of the 1995 *Proceedings*.

Forensics activities will continue to undergo scrutiny as its participants strive to make them competitively, educationally, and socially rewarding. Ours is not a perfect activity. But it is blessed with open-minded, critical thinkers who are willing to tolerate diversity and growth. We now have more individual event, debate, and organizational opportunities than ever before. While choices can be frustrating, they can also be characteristic of the quilt-like nature of college forensics. We each bring to forensics a different perspective. What is key is that we agree on what is fundamentally important about our activity. Conferences such as this help us to come to a consensus

about what defines forensics while also allowing us to celebrate our diversity.

A number of individuals played critical roles in the preparation of this special issue of *The Forensic*. Special thanks are extended to Professor Steve Hunt, Editor of *The Forensic* for his patience and guiding wisdom. The associate editors also were invaluable in providing their keen insights into the papers presented for publication. Thanks to Professors Russell Church (Middle Tennessee State University), Bob Derryberry (Southwest Baptist University), Jeff Hobbs (Abilene Christian University), Chris Leland (The Wichita State University), C. Thomas Preston, Jr. (University of Missouri-St. Louis), Jack Rogers (University of Texas-Tyler), Anthony Schroeder (Eastern New Mexico University), and Glenda Treadaway (Appalachian State University). I also want to thank both the Department of Speech and Theatre Arts, and administration at McNeese State University for their support of both this project, as well as forensics activities in general. Our activity will move successfully into the new century *only* with the support of our educational institutions. Gina Jensen also provided valuable editorial assistance in the preparation of this special issue.

Finally, I want to thank all who participated in the 1995 Pi Kappa Delta Professional Developmental Conference. Without dialogue over ideas we are left to stagnate. All who participated in this year's conference are to be commended for their willingness to advocate, disagree, and collaborate in an effort to better understand and improve upon forensics. Ours is a special activity. Events such as this remind me of how we all must become stewards, willing to nurture forensics as we move it into the future.

WHAT DIRECTION ARE WE TRAVELING? KEYNOTE ADDRESS TO THE 1995 PI KAPPA DELTA PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE MARCH 22, 1995

Larry Schnoor
Director of Forensics, St. Olaf College

First of all, let me take this opportunity to tell you how pleased I am to be here. Little did I think that all those times when I was talking to Dr. Robert Littlefield as we sat around at various forensic tournaments about Pi Kappa Delta that I would one day be invited to give the keynote address to the developmental conference. I am happy to be part of this conference during which we reflect upon the achievements of PKD as well as look at the direction for forensic activities. I am certain that I can say, without fear of contradiction, that the goals and traditions of PKD expressed by past keynote speakers such as Dr. Carolyn Keefe, Dr. Don Swanson, and Dr. Bob Derryberry will continue

to provide the direction for our association in the future. Hopefully my remarks will add to the development of the road map already started as part of this conference.

In looking to the future, we as a group of forensic educators need to start from a strong philosophical base. We must make a genuine commitment to the activity, whether we represent an institution of higher education, or a department of speech, whether we are directors or coaches, or if we are student participants. We must believe that forensics is an educational laboratory experience for the understanding, appreciation of and gaining skills in the art and craft of oral communication. As we approach the turn of the century, it is time that we take stock of just what we are about, what has been said about forensics, and what we need to consider for the millennium ahead.

What we are about? Numerous studies by practitioners in our field have examined this very question. Pettus and Danielson looked at what the 1990's would bring. Gill examined the question why coaches decide to quit. Littlefield looked at support for programs, and Underberg examined how a climate for support of forensic programs could be created. Two years ago at this very conference, Bob Derryberry (1994) put forth the need for us to consider speech training, our role in providing that development, and the challenge to be faced by PKD. He stated that "we must guard against our preferences and biases becoming the sole focus" (p. 7) in the development of our forensic programs. Dr. James McBath addressed this same issue as he examined and put forth a rationale for forensics in 1984 as did Professor Grace Walsh when she offered her reflections on forensics in 1983. These views were echoed by Ziegelmueeller and Parson in their position on how educational goals and forensic programs could be strengthened.

As I reflect over my past involvement with forensics, over the past involvement of many of us in this room, I realize that we have been witness to many changes in the forensic community. These changes have been in the types of events, growing from just debate, with maybe extemp speaking, original oratory, and oral interpretation at a few tournaments, to the growth we have today with numerous kinds and styles of debate to numerous public speaking and oral interpretation events. I can remember when I was a student competitor attending a tournament at Wayne State College in Nebraska. My first extemp topic was "Does President Eisenhower spend too much time on the golf course?" I remember developing the speech by saying that no, he perhaps should spend more time there since that is where he made his best decisions. At any rate, along with the changes in the kind and number of events, has come changes in educational practices as well. When I and many in this room first started as coaches, we were it - no assistants - small budgets - a more manageable and humane travel schedule - and maybe one or two national tournaments at the season's end. Today there may still be programs with a single coach, but we all recognize that many programs have a number of coaches and graduate assistants and budgets that allow for extensive travel, not only within a regional circuit, but a national one as well in order to be ready for those important national tournaments that have seemed to multiply as we speak. It is a matter of the choices we make. Whatever direction a forensic program takes, it is my firm belief that if it is based on sound educational principles, regardless of budget, travel, or national tournaments, it will be successful and will be recognized as a solid program by colleagues

across the nation. But there have been problems for many of us. These problems may or may not be justified. We need to take a look at what is being said about the forensic activity that would give grounds for the existence of these issues.

In many of our colleges and universities, forensics is an established part of the school's communication program, while in others it is totally removed. In both cases, however, there is a common link with which we endeavor to justify the existence of this activity that we all love and practice. In some cases, the program grows out of a department's curriculum, parallels it and contributes significantly to the objectives which are identical and similar to those of the department itself. Some programs and activities may be sponsored and promoted by non-departmental groups and organizations to serve objectives and to realize outcomes which are not, in both emphasis and kind, completely compatible with the objectives and desired outcomes of the department. In some of these cases, this results because departments have divorced themselves from the activity – for whatever reason – and the activity drifts until it finds a new home. Whatever the home for the activity may be, forensics could have a perilous future in these times of budget crunch and declining enrollments as departments of communication often look to the reduction of such a program in order to meet other needs within the department.

Many of the complaints directed toward forensics usually follow a path similar to this: Complaints are lodged against the alleged over concern about "winning," or the loss of regular class time, or the overemphasis on the activities for too few students, or artificial motivation of the students, or expense out of proportion to the number of students who receive significant benefits, or the loss of teacher effectiveness in the classroom as the teacher's interests and efforts are directed to the "forensic" activity, or maybe even that there is inadequate supervision of the students' behavior as they participate in the program.

Why are these criticisms being voiced? What weaknesses in forensics gives the criticisms support? We have heard them before but let's take a few minutes to hear them again.

1. The adoption of a forensic program without any real understanding by the department, directors, and the students of the function the program should perform.
2. The failure to allow students to help plan, to make intelligent decisions, and to accept responsibility for the direction and progress of the program.
3. The practice of participation being limited to only a few "star" students.
4. The overemphasis on the competitive aspects of the program.
5. The devotion of energy to the end of the season "nationals" with loss of sight of more inclusive objectives.
6. The failure to keep the forensics program vitally linked and related to the curriculum of a department.
7. The lack of consistent effort to evaluate the activities in terms of fundamental objectives as opposed to the win/loss records.
8. The inadequate recognition of the work of the director and coaches of forensics in considering their load and recognition for tenure and promotion.

We are all aware of critics that have given voice to these views. If each director of forensics – each coach in the activity – were to approach the development of a forensics program with the idea that the program provides an opportunity to achieve the same educational values each strives for in classroom work in communication, the critics of forensics could easily be silenced. Certainly, it is well for each of us to ask ourselves certain questions concerning our attitudes toward forensic activities and toward our students who participate in the activity, and for students participating to ask the same questions of themselves. What would those questions be? The following might help direct one's thinking toward an educationally sound philosophy of forensic activities.

1. Does the forensic program teach a code of ethics?
2. Does the forensic program help students understand and use the reflective process in reaching conclusions?
3. Does the forensic program enable students to gain knowledge and understanding about the communicative process?
4. Does the forensic program allow for the students to receive a realistic evaluation of their speech performances in comparison with others?
5. Does the forensic program grow out of the curriculum? If not, is the program working at cross purposes with the department? What is needed in order to develop a positive link with the department? Does the program have the respect and support of the department and if not, why not?
6. Does the forensic program place too much stress on "national recognition and achievement" in relation to the overall goals and objectives of the program?
7. Does the forensic program maintain a sound and proper perspective on winning in relationship to the educational values derived by participants in the program? What is the relationship between the awards received and the educational growth of the student?
8. Does the forensic program limit participation to only those students that "win" or does it allow all students with an interest to participate?
9. Does the program take an adequate look at the student's interests, needs, abilities, and capacities?
10. Does the program succeed in teaching social responsibility?
11. Does the program call for systematic evaluation of the director – coaches – as to what they accomplish and to what they want to accomplish?
12. Does the program take advantage of enough opportunities in the community to give students experiences outside of "competition"?

Participation in forensics offers each of us a number of values to be gained. First, there are the personal values – we can learn to know our limitations and our potential by seeking solutions to baffling problems. These personal values accrue from our learning to compete intellectually even when the logic may falsely emphasize that the better students always win. Students who compete

in the activity cannot lose as they have tournament experience, and receive feedback on their performances from a variety of critics. This is a dynamic, broadening, and deepening experience which is bound to nourish and invigorate the mind. There is no other activity, as far as I am concerned, that exceeds or equals the potential for enabling students to evaluate communication. The activity challenges us all to develop criteria to make choices, to develop criteria by which to analyze problems and situations, and allows us to develop the self confidence and poise needed in order to effectively communicate in our global community.

We must also remember, that while desirable personal values and attributes are necessary, they cannot be separated from social values. I know of no other activity that is able to instill the awareness, interest, knowledge, understanding, and intense concentration on social problems and propositions as successfully and everlastingly as is done in forensic participation. Addressing the searching questions on civil rights, family abuse, health care, gun control, government regulations, interpersonal communication, and the list could go on and on, allows the participants in forensics to be informed and knowledgeable about events and issues as no other activity can accomplish.

In 1989, Richard Young, a high school coach from Hutchinson, Kansas, said that "We as coaches must be fanatics about our academic discipline." It was his view, as it is mine, that we need to be so involved and concerned that we, directors, coaches, and students, become 100% intellectually and emotionally involved. If I were put in a position where I could no longer be able to be involved with forensics, I honestly believe I would have to say no to the position. I feel that forensics has been the most important activity with which I have had the pleasure of being associated. Granted, as I get older, and have even less hair, and as I look out over the other polished domes in the audience, I recognize that I and my fellow colleagues have been able to enjoy, to see and observe the success of the students with which I have had the opportunity to work and to evaluate. Their success is a strong indication of the educational nature of the activity. Many of these students, as with many of yours, and as will many of the students at this conference, become involved with forensic programs of their own. Others have and will take their forensic skills and put them to excellent use in business and government. The students have learned, and must continue to learn, that this is their activity. They will let others know that it is because of forensics that they have and will be able to face the next century with confidence, with skill, to help shape the future of this global community.

To echo the words of Young, coaches and students that are totally committed 100% to what they are doing are fanatics. They are positive fanatics that devote time and energy to their program without thought of immediate reward or acclaim. They are the ones who not only profess, but live the creed of success – that recognize "the art of persuasion, beautiful and just."

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