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THEMED ISSUE

"Viewing Forensics as Epistemic"

Beyond Education vs. Competition: On Viewing Forensics as Epistemic
ROBERT S. LITTLEFIELD

Learning to Play Well With Others: Forensics as Epistemic in Creating and Enhancing Communication Competence
SCOTT JENSEN and GINA JENSEN

Rigorous Program Assessment in Intercollegiate Forensics: Its Time Has Come
MICHAEL BARTANEN



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The *Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta* invites authors to submit manuscripts related to scholarship, pedagogy, research and administration in competitive and non-competitive debate. The Editor and Editorial Board especially seek articles that are especially about ways to increase diversity in forensics. The Editorial Board will consider manuscripts of this nature of top priority. Manuscripts submitted by undergraduate students and previously unpublished scholars will also receive serious consideration.

This journal reflects the values of its supporting organization, *Pi Kappa Delta*, which is committed to promoting "*the art of persuasion, beautiful and just.*" The journal seeks to promote serious scholarly discussion of issues connected to making competitive debate and individual events a powerful tool for teaching students the skills necessary for becoming articulate citizens. The journal seeks essays reflecting perspectives from all current debate and individual events forms, including, but not limited to: NDT, CEDA, NEDA, NPDA, Lincoln-Douglas debate, as well as NIET, NFA, and nontraditional individual events.

Reviews of books, activities, and other educational materials will be published periodically (as submitted), and those submissions are also sought. Potential authors should contact the Editor regarding the choice of materials for review.

All works must be original and not under review by other publishers. Submissions should conform to **APA guidelines** (5th edition). Authors should submit **3 print copies AND a PC-Compatible disk version** (for editing purposes) or E-mail submissions are acceptable with prior permission from the editor provided they are in Word format with no specialized formatting. Manuscripts should not exceed 25 double-spaced typed pages, exclusive of tables and references; book reviews and educational materials should be 4-5 double-spaced pages. Submitted manuscripts will not be returned. The title page should include the title, author(s), correspondence address, e-mail address, and telephone numbers. The second page should include an abstract of 75-100 words. The text of the manuscript (including its title) should begin on the next page (with no reference to author), with the remaining pages numbered consecutively. Avoid self-identification in the text of the manuscript. Notes and references should be typed and double spaced on pages following the text of the manuscript. Tables should be clearly marked regarding their placement in the manuscript.

SEND MANUSCRIPTS TO: Nina-Jo Moore, College of Fine & Applied Arts, Appalachian State University, Box 32039, Boone, NC 28608-2039, 828-262-2171. Do not fax submissions. Send electronic submissions to: moorenj@appstate.edu (Make sure there is no text formatting other than regular word processing.) Authors should have an editorial decision within 3 months.

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Editor's Note: This issue of THE FORENSIC is being guest edited by Dr. Robert Littlefield, former President and former National Secretary/Treasurer of Pi Kappa Delta. Dr Littlefield is a professor of Communication at North Dakota State University in Fargo, North Dakota. It is with great honor and pleasure that I introduce this issue to you, the readers. Nina-Jo Moore, Editor of THE FORENSIC

Theme for Issue: "Viewing Forensics as Epistemic"

The inspiration for this issue came from discussions among forensic educators held over the past several years at a number of national conferences who expressed their concerns about the declining status of forensic programs in academic departments across the United States. While the reasons for the decline varied, based upon the particular circumstances, the results were similar: Less faculty involvement; fewer students willing to participate; fewer financial and institutional resources; and a declining status for the service performed by forensic educators among their colleagues in the communication discipline. What seemed to be missing in the conversation was a broader understanding and appreciation for forensics beyond the traditional values associated with education or competition. To respond to this absence, three essays were chosen to explore philosophical and practical justifications for forensics.

In the first essay, *Beyond Education vs. Competition: On Viewing Forensics as Epistemic*, I argue that the justification for retaining forensic activities within academic programs should be made on a philosophical level. The position that forensics is epistemic stems from the characteristics of the activity. Forensics is creative, contextual, certain, strategic, processual, argumentative, and culturally adaptive. The benefits for students from the experiential knowledge gained through forensics provide practical knowledge for confronting real-world situations.

Scott Jensen and Gina Jensen identify the practical goal of communication competence as a key component in the portrayal of forensics as epistemic in their essay, *Learning to Play with Others: Forensics as Epistemic in Creating and Enhancing Communication Competence*. They explore the socialization within forensic activities as epistemology, arguing that social skills are important benefits accrued through forensic participation. In addition, mentoring, cultural communication, and conflict management are identified as competencies enhanced through forensic participation.

In the final essay, within the context of current efforts in higher education to be accountable and cost-effective, Michael Bartanen's, *Rigorous Program Assessment in Intercollegiate Forensics: Its Time Has*

Come, highlights the state of forensic assessment and identifies how cultural barriers within the community work against program assessment efforts. As a longtime advocate of forensic assessment, Bartanen identifies the criteria for sound assessment practices, along with possible strategies of student portfolios, alumni surveys, triangulation, and external reviews.

Each of these essays adds emphasis to the justification for forensics being included within speech communication departments. The ideas advanced provide an informed and encouraging point of view for those seeking to justify the argument for their forensic programs within the current academic environment. I hope they stimulate conversation and contribute to continued discussions about the future of forensics at the collegiate level.

Robert S. Littlefield, Guest Editor
North Dakota State University



Beyond Education vs. Competition: On Viewing Forensics as Epistemic

ROBERT S. LITTLEFIELD, NORTH DAKOTA STATE
UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT: *The present academic environment challenging the continued existence of forensic programs is described, along with illustrations reflecting the century-long debate within the forensic community about the effects of competition on the educational value of forensic activities. This essay argues that the justification for retaining forensic activities within academic programs should be made on a philosophical level, and characterizes forensics as epistemic. Describing forensics in this way was inspired by the work of Robert L. Scott who argued that rhetoric is epistemic. Characteristics of forensics illustrate epistemic qualities: creative, contextual, certain, strategic, processual, argumentative, and culturally adaptive. The benefit for the students from the experiential knowledge gained through forensics provides practical knowledge for confronting real-world situations. Key Terms: epistemology, forensic activities, experiential knowledge, competition*

Many departments of speech and communication across the United States are struggling with the decision whether or not to continue supporting forensics (competitive intercollegiate speech and debate activities) as a component of their academic programs. This struggle, in part, has resulted from the growing accountability demanded of all academic and co-curricular programs to prove their worth; however, this is not a new struggle. Over 50 years ago, the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools attempted to abolish "all interscholastic contests except athletics" ("North Central Association . . .," 1950, p. 145), prompting national forensic organizations to rise up in defense of the activity and members of higher education and secondary schools to clarify their commitment to speech and debate programs.

While forensic educators claim that forensic activities positively contribute to critical thinking, enhanced research skills, increased self-confidence, team building, and other related academic and social skills (Littlefield, 2001; McMillan & Todd-Mancilas, 1991; Williams, McGee, & Worth, 2001); the cost of supporting forensic programs has been held up against the backdrop of unhealthy competition fostering practices considered by some as neither educational nor ethical, and an estrangement between forensic directors and speech communication theorists who continue to disagree about whether forensics even should be part of a speech curriculum (Granell, 1972). Unfortunately, the belief that forensic practices and speech commu-

nication may be incompatible threatens the future of forensics, because if we accept the claim that forensics no longer “maintain[s] and advance[s] the ideals and standards of the speech profession (Article II, Constitution of the American Forensic Association)” (Kully, 1972, p. 198), then the elimination of financial and faculty support will be justifiable.

I believe that forensic educators assume a problematic and unjustified position when they abdicate their defense of debate and speech activities as part of an academic program. My argument is simply: forensics can be supported on a higher level that is incontrovertible; a level that makes it more difficult to dismiss; and a level that is actually more real-world than even the earliest forensic educators may have realized. This essay supports the position that forensics is epistemic, and with the *knowledge* that is *forensics*, students are better able to respond and act with certainty to the world in which they live than they would have been without the forensic experience.

The perspective that forensics is epistemic is drawn largely from the inspiration of Robert L. Scott (1967, 1976), who characterized rhetoric as epistemic in an effort to claim a legitimate place for rhetoric beyond that of being a vehicle or means for conveying truth.¹ Because classical philosophers considered only *Truth* to be certain and immutable, rhetoric was incapable of being more than a means for the philosophers to inform the masses of what was considered to be certain. That which was uncertain (beliefs, opinions) could similarly be conveyed through rhetoric, which undermined rhetoric's value and brought Scott to consider the epistemology, or how we come to know what is truth. Scott (1967) argued that truth is not fixed or final, but created from cooperative critical inquiry created by the participants:

Truth is not prior and immutable but is contingent Insofar as we can say that there is truth in human affairs, it is in time; it can be the result of a process of interaction at a given moment. Thus rhetoric may be viewed not as a matter of giving effectiveness to truth but of creating truth. (p. 13)

If truth occurs in the process of discovery, the epistemological nature of rhetoric is defined. Because humans act in the face of uncertainty to create situational truth, toleration, will, and responsibility are essential for those who use rhetoric.

In his subsequent article, Scott (1976) responded to critics who questioned if there was one way of knowing truth or if there were many, what sort of knowing rhetoric sought to achieve, and if rhetor-

¹The critics of contemporary forensic activities are dissatisfied with the vehicle they perceive forensics has become. Their solution is to change vehicles or adopt a different means for achieving educational value; in actuality, to discontinue offering the experiences that participation or involvement with forensics provides.

ical relativism was vicious. Scott concluded that there are many ways of knowing, including experiences and lived traditions, which produce opportunities for shared discovery or truth. The concern that rhetorical relativism places humans into a "standard-less society, or at least a maze of differing standards, and thus a cacophony of disparate, and likely selfish, interests" (p. 264) was refuted with an expectation that "relativism would be likely to quicken a sense of commitment to creating agreement" (p. 264). Relativism would not place humans back in a state of nature, but would recognize that "shifts in cultural consciousness, both revolutionary and evolutionary, seem consistently present in human experience" (p. 265). Through rhetoric, humans persuade and can be persuaded.

Using Scott's point of view to reflect upon the value associated with forensics and how the forensic experience produces truth and knowledge for those who participate seems appropriate and purposeful. To that end, this essay philosophizes about forensics. I hope to clarify and provide an alternative perspective to foster a renewed dialogue regarding the worth of forensic programs as components of academic programs.

Education versus Competition

The conflict within the forensic community over the value of forensic activities stems from tensions associated with education versus competition. The historical accounts of early forensic activities in America provide evidence of this duality driving the activity:

Up to the middle of the nineteenth century, the record books indicate that the major literary and debating societies were functioning with unabated vigor, conducting strenuous parliamentary business sessions, assigning and criticizing compositions, orations, and debates, competing with one another for members and academic honors, amassing large libraries, holding public exhibitions, jealously clinging to their independence from faculty interference, and, in general, behaving like little republics. (Potter, 1944, pp. 70-71)

Throughout the 20th Century, the tension caused by the interaction of education and competition spurred the debate among forensic educators and speech communication theorists about whether competition enhances or eliminates the educational benefits gained from participation in forensic activities. Clearly, intellectual competition was viewed as a positive aspect of forensic activities in the early 20th Century. In accounts of early intercollegiate debates, Cowperthwaite (1946) quoted an editor of the *Daily Iowan*, as writing: "To win on the athletic field is great, but to win in a forensics contest where brain meets brain is greater" (p. 251).

While engagement in these forensic contests provoked great interest among the public and healthy rivalry among the participating schools, Toussaint (1938) offered the hope "that forensic directors will

set their house in order in an effort to preserve educational values" of forensics (p. 4). In addition, Toussaint acknowledged the criticism questioning the need for students to "appear in fifty or sixty intercollegiate debates on the same subject over a period of a few months or the merit of a schedule of two hundred debates for a single high school in a single season" (p. 4); the "conflict between large and small school systems" (p. 5); and the "anti-competition and anti-reward theory of certain schools of thought in education" (p. 5). In defending contemporary debate for its "important role in the curricular and extra-curricular activities of Midwestern schools," Eistenstadt (1951) acknowledged three criticisms applicable to the situation confronting forensics in the 21st Century: Competition produces questionable practices; the intended educational outcomes associated with forensics are not being realized; and the purpose for forensics as a vehicle for learning how to function in a democracy no longer exists (p. 8-9).

In the 1970s and 1980s, national developmental conferences on forensics and argumentation² brought together the top forensic leaders in the country to address several issues, including the belief that debate and individual events are "over-competitive, insufficiently related to the 'modern demands' of speech communication, and unrelated to the 'real world'" (Shiffrin, 1972, p. 189). The conferences fundamentally supported the belief that forensics is an educational activity (McBath, 1975), and suggested ways to legitimize forensic activities as an integral part of communication departments.

Nearly 30 years later, however, the perspective advocated by Burnett, Brand, and Meister (2003) to reject the myth that forensics is educational, and "to be honest about what forensics really is: a competitive activity" (p. 20); and the published responses and discussions among forensic educators about this controversial viewpoint (Hinck, 2003), suggest that the debate about forensics as education versus competition continues. While this portion of the essay is not intended to provide more than a cursory examination of this issue, these viewpoints suggest that the forensic community has recognized and been concerned about the balance between education and competition for over a century.

My perspective disregards both of these positions. In justifying the inclusion of forensics in academic programs, I believe the debate over competition versus education is immaterial because both lead to a higher level, which should be the ultimate goal; that higher level is knowledge. Plato identified knowledge and certainty as being of the highest order. In Book VI of *The Republic*, Plato characterizes this quest

²Developmental conferences have focused on problems facing the forensic community in general, and issues confronting specific forensic organizations and groups, including: Western Conference on Forensics (Los Angeles), 1971; National Developmental Conference on Forensics (Sedalia), 1974; Second Developmental Conference on Forensics (Northwestern), 1984; Third Developmental Conference on Individual Events, 1997; the Summer Conferences on Argumentation (ALTA), and the Pi Kappa Delta Developmental Conferences, 1989-present; among others.

for knowledge as all encompassing:

Will it not be a fair plea in his defense to say that it was the nature of the real lover of knowledge to strive emulously for true being and that he would not linger over the many particulars that are opined to be real, but would hold on his way, and the edge of his passion would not be blunted nor would his desire fail till he came in touch with the nature of each thing in itself by that part of his soul to which it belongs to lay hold on that kind of reality . . . and through that, approaching it, and consorting with reality really, he would beget intelligence and truth, attain to knowledge and truly live and grow, and so find surcease from his travail of soul, but not before? (pp. 28-29)

As Plato describes, through striving, one attains knowledge. This perspective confirms the effect of experience on the way one comes to know. Scott (1967) furthers this suggestion by arguing that rhetoric creates truth, and thereby knowledge:

If debate is critical inquiry, then it is not simply an effort to make a preconceived position effective. It would be absurd for anyone who begins with the attitude that he possesses truth . . . to embark on any genuine enterprise of cooperative critical inquiry What these statements do suggest is that truth is not prior and immutable but is contingent. Insofar as we can say that there is truth in human affairs, it is in time; it can be the result of a process of interaction at a given moment. Thus rhetoric may be viewed not as a matter of giving effectiveness to truth but of creating truth. (p. 13)

The application of this analysis to forensics is inescapable. The experience of forensics provides knowledge that is unique to the nature of the activities involved; and from forensic activities comes truth, or certainty, about the nature of the experience for the individuals involved.

The debate about education versus competition is misguided when attempting to justify the inclusion of forensics in academic programs. When drawn into the question of whether forensics is capable of providing knowledge through competition because practices are corruptible, or whether sound educational practices are the only vehicle through which students can gain knowledge, the participants in this debate lose sight of the bigger issue; that being, the knowledge forensics offers supercedes either vehicle of education or competition. I suggest that forensics should be characterized at a higher level than being educational or competitive. These are only signs of the substance of forensics, and as signs, they can be refuted. Aristotle explains:

The Sign which is as a Particular to a Universal would be illustrated by saying, 'Wise men [sic] are just; *for* Sokrates

was wise and just.' This is a Sign, indeed, but it can be refuted, even though the statement be a fact; for it does not make a syllogism. (p. 59)

In this case, if one considers forensics as educational or not educational because particular practices are followed, the sign can be refuted. However, because forensics creates knowledge through the experience, it is epistemic and may be justified at a higher, philosophical level.

Plato claimed that all knowledge is not equal. In *Gorgias*, Plato equated knowledge associated with the truth as good, especially when used "for instruction in the matter of right and wrong" (1969, p. 11), but knowledge produced for the "gratification and pleasure" of those who do not know better is valueless and actually harmful (p. 18). The inherent value judgment in forensics associated with particular questionable practices is unavoidable. Some will argue that knowledge, based upon bad or unethical practices, is valueless; however, the world is not a utopia where events always go as they should. People confront situations where politics, rather than justice, determine outcomes; where people who follow the rules experience defeat or failure; where difficult people complicate decisions, and misunderstandings prevail. It is in both good and bad situations that forensics is epistemic because the knowledge to deal with both the positives and negatives results in individuals being better able to manage the situations they face.

Experience is Knowledge

How do we know if something has worth? We often base our assessment on the result, or what the outcome of the effort produces. In a perfect world, hard work and adherence to sound, ethical practices should help an individual to succeed in any venue, but since we are not all equally enabled, the human variable must affect the outcome. That is why forensics is an imperfect system. If we cannot be certain about the means that will get us to our desired end goal, then we must draw from our experience so we can know how to act when situations do not end as we think they should.

Within this frame, the certainty or truth that forensic participants come to understand through participation, produces a paradox: Do students benefit from winning in competitive contexts if they use practices considered by speech communication theorists to be educationally unsound? While I do not want my response to be characterized as advocating what Plato called "cookery" or "a habitude" (1969, p. 18), I will argue that even winning when using questionable practices or having to cope with losing in situations where questionable practices have been employed, students gain a knowledge they would not have otherwise achieved. To provide for a better understanding of how forensics is knowledge, the following aspects of forensics are offered.

Forensics is Creative

Forensics is epistemic because the activities included constitute an art. Just as one does not know what it means to paint a picture until the brush is in hand and the paint meets the canvas, so does a speaker not know what it means to present ideas in a competitive public forum until rising to the occasion and speaking. Mundt (1935) characterized forensics as an art and suggested that as with any art, there is no such thing as perfection; there is always room for improvement and refinement. In forensics, the elements of pitch, rate, pronunciation, inflection, body action, and speech composition (to name a few) are elements to be used by the speaker or performer. While the level of artistry demonstrated by a forensic student can range from being that of a "bungler" to being almost "perfect," forensics is epistemic because knowledge of the art of performing or speaking is experienced through its creation (p. 3).

Forensics is Contextual

Forensics is epistemic because it is created in context. In every situation, students must cope with the dynamics of the environment, whether in the research process, in practice, during travel to tournaments, within the competitive environment, or in the debriefing and assessment phases of the experience. Students gain knowledge by selecting topics or pieces of literature, finding materials to help them convey their topic or literature in meaningful ways, experiencing the process of being coached, engaging in the dynamics of relational communication among teammates and mentors, and finding themselves in the in- and out-of-competition context under the rules of particular tournaments or organizational perspectives. In addition, they learn by subjecting themselves to the scrutiny and preferences of adult listeners, realizing the feelings of personal and/or team success or failure, reflecting on their individual performances, and understanding what will be required of them if they seek to engage in the experience again. The context gives knowledge that can only come through the experience.

Forensics is Certain

Forensics is epistemic because it provides certainty in its application. In life, there is certainty that one will perform better than another, whether in business (people are promoted based upon performance), medicine (heart surgeons are sought after by those needing the most experienced specialists), or the arts (individuals are cast in particular roles because they are best suited to play or sing the parts), to name but a few. In forensics, through competition, there is certainty that someone will prevail and be perceived by judges and observers as the best orator or debater or interpreter. While the identity of the individual winner may not be a certainty, the fact that someone will prevail in forensics is incontrovertible.

Forensics is Strategic

Forensics is epistemic because coping and strategizing to prevail are inherently part of the experience. Coping is necessary in forensics because there are factors beyond the control of those who participate. The bias or preferences of judges, the time of day or month, speaker order, previous record of performance, or ability of the opposition in a given situation cannot be controlled by the student. As such, the process of dealing with these uncontrollable aspects of forensics gives knowledge that will fuel future strategies where competition will again be encountered.

Forensics is Processual

Forensics is epistemic because it is processual. In every situation, the process of forensics involves knowing that terminology must be understood and defined, research on all aspects of the topic or event must be evident, issues must be analyzed and sorted based upon whether or not they are extraneous or germane. In addition, personal effort must be concentrated to the task in order to function, main ideas or issues must be focused upon consistently when positions on issues are articulated and repeated, and the manner of presentation must be considered and altered for each audience. The process of forensics is knowledge.

Forensics is Argumentative

As an extension of the processual nature of forensics, the stages of argument development further the claim that forensics is epistemic. No matter in what event the student is engaged, an argument is being created. The argument may take the form of a particular point of view regarding how a piece of literature should be introduced and interpreted, the appropriate way for the topic of a speech to be developed, the logic of a line of analysis in a debate, or the identification of a weakness in an opponent's viewpoint. As Scott (1976) suggested, "in working through an idea and communicating with others about it, we come to awareness" (p. 259); in this case, we gain knowledge. Certainly when students make choices about materials to use in their speeches or debates, their decisions are constituted in the knowledge they possess.

Forensics is Culturally Adaptive

Forensics is epistemic because being able to function in a culture or community constitutes knowledge. Considering the forensic community to be a culture or community is not a new concept (Churchill, 1989; Miller, 2005; Roden, 1989). In fact, as one looks at the verbal and nonverbal language of forensics, forms of dress and general appearance of forensic contestants, time consciousness, organizational structure, and worldview, to name a few, there are many characteristics of the forensic culture that must be mastered by the student participant. The specialized terms used in debate, the terms associat-

ed with functioning knowledgeably in a tournament, terms used to describe particular practices in individual events that are expected (using black books or teasers) or rejected (tag team cross examination), paralanguage, proxemics, gestures and body language, all affect how a student succeeds in a competition. Knowledge regarding the appropriate attire for forensic activity comes as students observe others engaged in the different venues where forensics occurs. As students engage in forensics, time consciousness affects how long they choose to speak or perform, the time required for preparation, the length of rounds, the duration of tournaments, and even the length of season. How time affects a contestant is only known as the contestant engages in forensics. The organizational structure of a forensic team has its particular dynamics, as does the structure of a round or tournament. Students gain unique insight of structural elements of forensics as they participate and interact within the dimensions of organizational settings. Finally, forensics is epistemic because only through experiencing the nature of forensics (competition), the purpose of forensics (effective communication), and the relationship of forensics with the other dimensions of the human experience (juggling home, school, work, relationships) can students know and understand the worldview of individuals who engage in these or similar activities.

In summary, students who experience forensics gain knowledge that is uniquely produced through their involvement. Forensics is epistemic because it is creative, created in context, provides certainty, involves coping and strategizing, is processual, develops arguments, and prompts cultural adaptation. These are characteristics of the knowledge that is gained. Whether competitive or not, educationally sound or not, the knowledge afforded students who engage in forensics provides a certainty or truth that cannot be gained in another environment. That is why forensics is philosophically justified.

The Value of Practical Knowledge

Scott (1976) suggested that rhetoric is clarifying because it creates "understanding that one's traditions are one's own," that "these traditions are malleable," and that "in acting decisively" one binds "others who will inherit the modified traditions" that are passed along. "Such understanding is genuinely knowing and is knowing that becomes filled out in some particulars by participating rhetorically" (p. 261). In a similar way, forensics is clarifying because it creates knowledge about preparing for engagement in real life situations. Whether in business, the military, medical professions, or professional sports, individuals function more effectively because of the clarification forensics provided them. Knowing the corporate, technical, or common terminology; the appropriate or uniform manner of dress; the acceptable means and channels of communication with employers, co-workers, the public, subordinates, superiors, specialists, technicians; the potential rewards and punishments for particular behaviors that enhance or detract from the groups' efforts; and the selection cri-

teria for advancement in levels of responsibility or specialization, or recruitment for higher positions or ranks, all influence how an individual will function within a larger unit or group. The clarification of how these elements work in forensics provides real knowledge about what students can be certain to experience when they begin their careers after leaving the academic environment.

One need not be Machiavellian to recognize the challenges posed by the real world for individuals of good character. The need for people to have power, and their ability to use this power for their own gain, is a fact of life; and the facts surrounding the Enron case, in particular, aptly suggest that this is so (Burke, 2003; Harden, 2005; Johnson, 2002; Saporito, 2002; Zellner & Forest, 2001). The internal communication of the top executives was manipulative. They made evaluations that were unjustified, took actions that were unsound, and enabled themselves to retain their positions of power within the company at the expense of their subordinates. Fortunately, in the end, their unethical and illegal practices were uncovered; the fact that they were caught and brought to justice is immaterial to the fact that unethical practices, for a time, prevailed in such a way that good people suffered.

From the point of view of those outside the highest circles of power in Enron, having to cope with the chain of events required an understanding of the situation that may have exceeded their levels of expertise. Let us now consider the forensic context in which "inside groups" show preference for those they prefer at the expense of others, where decisions are made based upon reputation and politics, and where unsound practices are occasionally rewarded. This is the world faced by some forensic competitors. If there are situations that appear to be unfair, then the knowledge gained through experience can help the student to deal more effectively with the world outside the collegiate environment.

Perhaps we assume that only good forensics has value, and willingly apply Quintilian's words, "vileness and virtue cannot jointly inhabit in the same self heart . . . it is as impossible for one man [sic] to be at once both good and evil" (1969, p. 118). Because bad practices can exist, the truth provided by forensics is suspect; however, when it comes to knowledge, bad forensics may actually produce more real-world value for the student because most situations in life are the result of bad or difficult actions that occur with certainty. If we only prepare our students for good or ideal situations, we are not doing them justice. It is at this level that forensics is particularly justified because in what other activity or class are students forced to identify the characteristics of a culture which may have good or bad elements, master the characteristics of that culture through a regimen of subjecting themselves to the scrutiny of adult critics who will tell them how they are or are not mastering the culture, and leave an impact on that culture through the positive actions they take? Beard's (1937) comment is reflective of what others have suggested

throughout the history of forensic activity in the United States: "We often find students who have learned to have faith in themselves through facing and dealing with the difficult situations often afforded by the competitive contest" (p. 4).

I am not arguing that contemporary forensic activities are free of unethical or questionable practices, nor will I suggest that I find unethical practices acceptable. As a forensic educator, I always strive to uphold standards that I believe are essential; however, there is no way to guarantee that everyone will have or apply standards equally. Through rhetorical means, I am able to persuade and be persuaded by colleagues about particular practices to which I may or may not subscribe. In the end, I must be content with an imperfect, relativistic world where not all is good, not all are fair, not all are ethical, and not all practices are justifiable. The only way I can justify forensics is with the understanding that experience is knowledge; forensics is epistemic.

The Future of Forensics

This essay is intended to raise the philosophical position that forensics can be justified for inclusion in academic departments of communication because it is epistemic. While the tone of this essay may have appeared somewhat defensive as I acknowledged the imperfect aspects of forensics and attempted to justify their part in the process of coming to certainty about the experience afforded by forensics, I do not want to leave the reader with the impression that the negatives outweigh the advantages derived from the forensic experience. The massive anecdotal evidence from individuals involved in over a century of forensic activity in the United States and around the world supports the positive aspects of forensics far outweighing the identifiable imperfections.³

I hope an outcome of reading this essay may be a renewed discussion and justification for forensic activities by forensic educators at schools where support for the activity is waning or has vanished. Certainly there is reason to support the notion that "the method of correcting educational procedure is not to throw overboard all that is good along with all that is bad in any situation" (Beaird, 1937, p. 5). We must continue the discussion at a philosophical level if we want to succeed in retaining the real-world knowledge afforded students through participation in forensics.

³There are far too many published accounts of the positive effects of forensics on the lives of individuals to include more than a few examples here. For a flavor, see: Bartanen & Frank, 1991; Carleton, 1949; Compton, 2005; Compton, 2006; Mecham, 2001-02; Nichols, 1948; Ripon College in intercollegiate debating 1921, 1921; Sillars, 1949.