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VALUING OF TOURNAMENT DEBATE: FACTORS FROM PRACTITIONERS AND ADMINISTRATORS

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Given the current concern for accountability in higher education (see Hay, 1989; Littlefield, 1991; Weiss, 1980), forensics educators need to be informed of how debate is perceived by fellow practitioners and administrators. Knowing the nature of colleagues' views of debate might help the educator to position the activity within the debate community as well as on the particular campus. Additionally, this positioning would be aided by an understanding of how administrators orient their values regarding debate. Typically funding for forensics programs is channeled through college administrators. Thus, a recognition of the importance of accountability in debate motivated the research presented here.

Horn and Underberg (1993) contributed greatly to our present understanding of how practitioners assess collegiate debate. Their focus on

purposes for academic debate provided a foundation for analyzing both practitioners' and administrators' evaluation of the activity. Horn and Underberg examined debate literature and extracted 22 educational objectives which are commonly associated with intercollegiate debate. They then used the instrument to survey CEDA directors.

The first purpose of this study was to combine the responses from Horn and Underberg (1993) with those from university administrators in order to determine the distinct categories used in assessing debate. The second purpose was to use these categories to compare the views of CEDA practitioners with those of administrators.

Methodology

Forty-four administrators at a major regional university, who volunteered for another study, completed the Horn-Underberg (1993) scales. The administrators were assured of confidentiality and encouraged to provide honest evaluations. As a gauge of "interpersonal expectations," (Rosenthal, 1969) half completed the scales for one researcher and half for the other. Scores for the two halves were essentially the same on all relevant statistical indices.

These individuals reflected all levels of administration from vice presidents to department chairs. While all of these administrators currently were employed by one university, their past service had included an array of colleges and universities. It is reasonable to conclude that perceptions would be typical of college administrators elsewhere.

Data from both the 113 forensics educators who responded in the Horn and Underberg study (1993) and these 44 administrators were factor analyzed to determine how many distinct categories of goals/purposes were contained in the Horn-Underberg scales. Using the obtained factors, the responses of the administrators were compared, via t-tests, with the responses of debate educators from the Horn-Underberg study.

Results

The factor analysis yielded four distinct categories (see Table 1). The first factor contained 8 items. On initial consideration these 8 items may appear disparate. Three items (contributes educationally to community, enhances skills for future careers, and enhances democratic decision making) reflect post-debate/on-going impacts of debate; and, three items (delivery skills, listening skills, and clarity & precision in expression) are more immediately focused on the debater. While these two sets of three items seem diverse, the remaining two items in the factor (audience analysis, and ability to prioritize ideas) help to unify the 8 items in the factor. Taking the group as a whole, the 8 items may logically define the values which most clearly, or primarily, define the benefits of debate; thus, this factor was labeled Primary.

The next factor contained only three items (research skills, organization skills, and writing skills). Each of these three items probably would be associated less uniquely as a benefit of debate; it seemed appropriate to call this factor Secondary.

The third factor had four factors (provides notoriety, refutation skills, interdisciplinary exchange, and director/participant contact). All four items appear to deal with outcomes which are directly and inherently associated with the practice of debate; thus it was named Organic.

The final factor held only two items which justified the term Social for the factor. The two items were (1) helps social relationships, and (2) understands and appreciates points of view. These four factors were then used as the bases to compare the two groups. The results of this comparison are presented in Table 2. The only significant difference (at a .05 level) occurred in the Primary factor. For this factor, the administrators' average was 34.00 while the practitioners averaged 28.50 on the 40 point scale (t = 7.11, p < .0001). On the other three factors the average scores for the two groups were very similar: for the Secondary factor, administrators scored 12.18 while debate educators averaged 12.40 out of 15 possible; for the Organic factor, administrators averaged 15.82 and practitioners scored 15.42 out of 20 maximum; for the Social factor, administrators averaged 8.14 while the critics scored 7.75 out of a possible 10.

Discussion

The Horn-Underberg (1993) scales provided an invaluable tool for assessing the goals of debate held by differing populations. In this way the scales should encourage and support extensive research within the forensics community. The present analysis could add to the value of these scales. The factors generated seem logical and have statistical underpinning. Given both the work of Horn and Underberg and the present study it seems appropriate that these scales could be used to test perceptions of different groups to established and innovative approaches to debate such as National Debate Tournament debate, National Educational Debate Association debate, Officiated Debate, Parliamentary Debate, as well as peer-judged debates and non-decision debates.

The Primary factor associates in a statistical manner items which are not always linked together in the discussion of debate (Bartanen, 1992; Winebrenner, 1994). This finding suggests that administrators as well as practitioners tend to associate delivery skills, listening skills and clarity and precision in expression with more generalized educational objectives. When the ability to prioritize ideas and the ability to adapt to audiences are considered in this context, the factor constitutes an encompassing perspective on the values of debate.[1]

This encompassing perspective when applied to communication education promotes an inclusive appreciation of the elements which comprise the totality of our field. The advantages of this perspective have been often articulated by debate scholars (see for example, Derryberry, 1994; Makau, 1990; McBath, 1975; Parson, 1984; Zizik, 1993).

Regrettably, what many of us consider as core elements of communication education (research and organization skills) fell into the second factor. The existence of the Secondary factor indicates that the contributions of debate are not viewed uniformly. The separation of the abilities to prioritize ideas and to adapt to audiences from research and organization skills suggests that practitioners (as do administrators) have a limited view of audience adaptation. In the rhetorical view, audience adaptation is an on-going process which begins with audience analysis and proceeds with research and organization designed for the particular audience. Certainly, adaptation continues in the delivery of the speech, but such adjustment constitutes a minor aspect of audience adaptation (see for example, Bartanen, 1987; Bitzer, 1972; Havland, 1959; Holtzman, 1970; McCroskey, 1972; Verderber, 1994).

Generally, the results of this study can be viewed as good news for the debate educator. The administrators' responses to the Horn-Underberg objectives (1993) were positive on all four factors and more positive on the Primary factor than those of debate educators.[2] The practice of intercollegiate debate seems to continue under a positive halo for these administrators, only three of whom had ever seen a competitive debate.

Finally, the results of this study can be used to position the debate program within the academic community. Since administrators view debate positively on all four dimensions, debate educators would be wise to reinforce the advantages of debate reflected in each dimension. Given that administrators are particularly positive toward debate for its contribution to students performances which are perceived as beneficial for later life, practitioners would be wise to showcase these performance skills for administrators. Demonstration that programs promote good delivery, conciseness, adaptability, and the ability to prioritize should contribute to the administrators' beliefs that the programs generate graduates who will make positive contributions to society.

TABLE 1
Factors of Debate Objectives Used by Coaches and Administrators

Measurement Items	Factor Loadings			
	Primary	Secondary	Organic	Social
Contributes Educationally to Community	**.7157**	-.1580	.3181	.0771
Enhances Skills for Future Careers	**.5386**	.1455	.3278	.0826
Helps Social Relationships	-.0055	.1401	.3339	**.6865**
Understand & Appreciate Points of View	.3336	.1026	.1047	**.7386**
Research Skills	-.0515	**.7576**	.1239	.2307
Organizational Skills	.1747	**.7035**	.2105	.2297
Delivery Skills	**.7961**	.0339	.0124	.2269
Audience Analysis	**.6569**	.1752	.2433	.2439
Provides Notoriety	.0356	.0261	**.7002**	.1048
Refutation Skills	.1884	.3775	**.6034**	.1499
Interdisciplinary Exchange	.2185	.0146	**.6748**	.1282
Listening Skills	**.6355**	.3096	.1233	.0537
Director/Participant Contact	.2347	.2854	**.6217**	.1694
Writing Skills	.3727	**.6273**	.0944	-.0536
Clarity & Precision in Expression	**.7424**	.3150	.0544	.1124
Ability to Prioritize Ideas	**.6314**	.3065	.1007	.2896
Enhances Democratic Decision Making	**.5986**	.1732	.2119	.2739

TABLE 2
t-test by Factors between Practitioners & Administrators

FACTORS	PRACTIT	ADMIN	t	p<
Primary	28.50	34.00	7.11	.0001
Secondary	12.40	12.18	.68	.4960
Organic	15.42	15.82	1.12	.2668
Social	7.75	8.14	1.78	.0780

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Endnotes

[1] The emergence of the Primary factor in the first position does indicate that those surveyed disagree most as to the contributions of debate from this perspective. The results do not indicate the extent to which the respondents accept or reject the objectives in this perspective (factor) as being appropriate for the debate activity; the results only indicate that the respondents see the eight items as interrelated and that the respondents disagree as to whether or not debate is currently accomplishing these objectives.

[2] It could be argued that the Primary factor emerged as the first factor as a result of differences between administrators and practitioners. Given the validity of this argument, the disagreement among practitioners as to the value of debate in terms of this dimension would be reduced. To check the validity of this argument, the 113 responses from Horn-Underberg were factored separately. The first factor in this analysis still would be labeled Primary.

EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND FORENSICS: AN ADMINISTRATIVE PERCEPTION

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INTRODUCTION

As part of their preparation for the 21st century, educational institutions are undergoing rigorous self-examination in an effort to evaluate what is currently being achieved and to predict changes based on future needs. The institutional mission statement is being used as a basis to determine whether or not specific objectives are being achieved. State legislatures are questioning the return on their financial investment as well as the preparation/quality of the graduates. In an effort to determine accountability and justify expenses, university administrators are analyzing individual programs to evaluate their strengths, weaknesses, accomplishments, and goals. As forensics is both an undergraduate participatory activity and a graduate recruiting activity, it seems reasonable to examine its effects, practices, and future within the area of higher education. Perceptions about the worth or role of any activity within an educational institution are due to a number of factors; among these factors is the administrative view of mission.

Almost every institution of education has, as a part of its mission, the preparation of articulate and critical thinking individuals who are able to speak intelligently about the issues of the day. Forensics, or competitive speech activities, clearly fit within this mission of the institution, and, indeed, may have a more integral relationship with the educational mission than many other activities. In the past, many administrators viewed forensics as the activity that draws the "best and the brightest". What is the current image? Do past educational objectives compare with more current ones? Do early educational practices in forensics compare with present practices? In answering some of these questions, the authors of this paper seek to reveal some of the perceptions about forensics and in so doing, provide a realistic view of the future of the art.

CONCERNS

The forensics activity has changed over the years. Fifty to sixty years ago debate was primarily audience oriented, much as competitive sports are today. Each participating institution was represented by two of its most talented debaters (Albion College, University of Michigan, and Wayne State archives), whose aim was not only to inform and persuade the audience of their particular point of view, but also to kindle a competitive feeling among the listeners that was similar to the vicarious excitement felt by sports fans who are watching

their favorite team in action. The event was advertised and promoted to such an extent that administrators, faculty, and the community were made aware of the activity. These audiences were interested in the topic, discussed the arguments presented, and the analyzed the behaviors of each team. The skill and the intellect of the debater was measured by everyone attending, as the debater attempted to provide entertainment as well as information.

As administrators recognized the value of forensics and encouraged more students to be involved, the need arose to provide additional opportunities for debate and other speaking events. The tournament format provided this opportunity. The traditional tournament format allowed for oral critiques and discussions about how the argument was structured. Two rounds increased to four, and after a few years, even four rounds were considered inadequate to provide the desired educational experience. At this point, critic time was cut so that additional rounds could be fit into the weekend schedule. With less attention placed on oral critiques, the activity began to encourage creative approaches to structure and types of argumentation, such as spread tactics. The instructional nature of the tournament began to focus on the awards to be won. As tournaments grew in size and number of rounds of competition, the audience was forgotten; with the audience, went the interest of the administration. Organized sports such as basketball and football offer opportunities for audience participation, and the promotion of the events requires the involvement of the administrative team in the process. While most colleges and universities do include the training of athletes (football, basketball, etc.) as part of their mission, for many institutions, " sports" appear to have BECOME the mission of the educational institution. A winning football or basketball team provides the school, and thus the administration, with press coverage and recognition. A successful season in forensics; indeed, even a national championship in debate or an individual event, may bring little press recognition, and may therefore result in merely a note of appreciation from the dean, a vice-president, and the president of the institution.

Acknowledgment and support of a program is directly related to the program meeting stated objectives and the resulting image. Recent literature focuses on the educational purpose of forensics (Manchester, 1981; Littlefield, 1988; Greenstreet, 1990; Albert, 1991). As programs evaluate educational concerns they must insure that the mission of the university and forensics activities are consistent. Regents, members of the legislature, and administrators face the issue of meeting the mission of the institution with a limited budget. Littlefield (1988) discusses the perceived benefits from forensics programs, noting that administrators felt that competitive speech programs enhanced the recruitment of students and faculty, scholarship, and the educational experience of the students. At the same time, Littlefield documents a decline in the number of forensics programs. Obviously, this situation indicates a contradiction, with the same administrators who see benefits in a successful program presumably being responsible for a decline in the number of programs. Four years later, Sellnow and Seekins (1992) made the assumption that "administrators need help in seeing the inherent value of forensics education" (p. 1). Manchester (1981), Greenstreet (1990), and Sellnow and Seekins (1992) argue that the success or failure of a program is measured by educational objectives, with the assumption that the activity should be coached, administered, and justified by educational objectives.

Jackson (1991) makes the case for debate having a very positive influence on students. Kaye (1991) in an article published in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* argues that colleges must prepare the next generation of public figures and intellectuals. Kaye placed 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 all of this is so, then why is the number of programs declining? Are administrators aware of this research? If not, perhaps the potential of forensics needs further research and dissemination. Greenstreet (1990), introduces the notion of experimental education, arguing that forensics is an experimental activity and its values and activities should be seen from that perspective.

This information has led the authors to consider a number of pertinent questions regarding the relationship between the administrative team and the future of forensics: When did the forensics program last involve a member of the administrative team as an invited judge? When did the forensics program last ask an administrator to attend a tournament or invite him or her to view a campus activity which show-cases students' argumentative and speaking skills? If the speech team is successful, that is, wins nationals or finishes in the top five, do they receive acknowledgment from the administration? Do administrators see any educational value in forensics? Do they view forensics as an educational activity? What roles have forensic activities played in their own training? Which (if any) activities do administrators view as preparing students for real world participation? Do administrators view forensics as a recruiting tool? How aware are administrators of the value(s) inherent in supporting a strong forensics program? What skills do debaters learn from their forensic experience? Do administrators perceive these "learned skills" as being worthwhile in terms of time and money spent? What changes need to be made in the art (in the administrator's view) to make forensics more "attractive" in terms of both moral and financial support?

PROCEDURE

As administrators, we approached this paper chiefly from the educational perspective, seeking to establish the intrinsic academic value of forensics, but also keeping a careful (and practical) eye on "the bottom line."

Approximately 300 administrative officers (deans and department heads) were contacted in an effort to determine their perceptions of the forensic activity. Names were taken from the current list of department heads listed in the SCA directory. The selection criteria used: participates in NDT, NIET, CEDA, NFA, & PKD sponsored activities, or has a graduate program in speech communication.

The survey consisted of open ended questions, so structured that respondents would explain the reason(s) for a particular response. Those responding were assured confidentiality if requested. Respondents were questioned about their perceptions regarding student participation in the program, skills learned from forensics, the impact of participation in a forensic program, academic expectations, and their perceptions about the value(s) of the field itself and the contributions of forensics to their academic programs (mission perspective). Questions were also asked about coaching and the nature of the program.

In view of the fact that an open ended scale does not lend itself to statistical analysis, the decision was made to summarize many of the actual comments from respondents. Many of these comments were more important in terms of their explanations than they would be if labeled only as "positive" or "negative" in orientation. It is these explanations which expose the true nature of the various strengths and weaknesses of the activities. If a respondent indicated the wish to remain anonymous, his or her name was not revealed. If a comment made by one respondent was similar to one made by another, individual reference was not made to it. The comments used in the results section represent a cross section of the comments received.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Forty-seven percent of the administrators contacted responded to the survey. The vast majority of these responses have very positive perceptions regarding the value of the activity. Although the overall comments were of a positive nature (and thus supportive of forensics as an activity of educational merit), a number of individual comments merit closer scrutiny.

In response to inquiries as to the importance of debate and forensics in their own career development, a number of respondents offer positive comments. James Greenwood, Chairperson at the University of Findlay writes, "Debate was more important to my career than any single course on the undergraduate and graduate level. Debate develops skills in organization, clarity and depth of analysis that most students do not encounter until the master's thesis." Bill Hill, University of North Carolina, Charlotte; John Olson, Everett Community College; Timothy Hegstrom, San Jose State; and Don Boileau, Chairperson at George Mason University also credit forensic activity with success in their educational and professional development. Boileau comments that he would not be in communication if he had not been involved in forensics, explaining ". . .I am constantly drawing upon impromptu and extemp abilities at meetings. The ability to give a competent speech is attributable to the coaching I received in both high school and college." Charles Bantz, chairperson at Arizona State University comments, "My understanding of forensics is that it contributes to the university as a whole, our department, and certainly to the participants. The participants can learn speaking, thinking, research, and teamwork skills. . . The university gains greatly by our enhanced scholarly reputation—forensics is after all one of the few nationally visible intellectual activities by undergraduates. The forensics program has helped us recruit outstanding undergraduates."

These comments present a unique perspective about the contribution that forensics participation has had on the respondents. To summarize these and other responses about the contribution of participation–the information supports the conclusion that participation contributed to the development of or enhancement of skills in critical thinking, listening, argumentation, research, organization, group interaction, self confidence, and public speaking.

On the negative side, most respondents indicate that they perceive little evidence of consideration of educational objectives in planning the activity.

Perceptions about forensics and what is offered to students suggest that there have been changes over the years, and that these changes have not necessarily enhanced the forensics programs. Randy Kluver, Chairperson at Oklahoma City University writes, "I do believe that forensics has intrinsic educational value, but only if we treat it as an educational activity."