

As was found in the Limited Preparation Events, the feminine sex-role type is the least adopted type of gender role in competitors entered in Oral Interpretation Events across both sexes (14.96%) compared to either the masculine (41.73%) or androgynous/undifferentiated (43.31%) sex-roles. Despite the fact that the majority of participants in the interpretative events identified their sex as female (61.42%) as well as Friedley and Manchester's (1985) characterization of these events as perceptually feminine, the female sex-role type remains the least prevalent type of gender identity. It is important to note that, unlike in the Limited Preparation events, those competitors who self-identified as androgynous/undifferentiated made up the largest proportion of competitors in the Interpretation Events, suggesting a higher tolerance for gender ambiguity in these events.

Public Address

RQ3 asked "Is there a difference between a participant's reported sex and BSRI category in Public Address events?" A chi-square test for independence indicated that there was no significant difference between a participant's sex and gender role in the Public Address events,  $\chi^2(2, 97) = 5.297, p = .071$ . Although there was no significant difference between participants' sex and gender role in the events of Persuasive Speaking, Informative Speaking, Communication Analysis, and After Dinner Speaking, the results were approaching significance. Table 4 shows the frequency distribution across each BSRI category for males and females competing in the Platforms.

Table 4: Sex and BSRI Category Distribution in Public Address Events

BSRI Identity	Males	Females	Total
Masculine	23	23	46
Androgynous/ Undifferentiated	14	17	31
Feminine	4	16	20
Total	41	56	97

Because the results of the chi-square test were approaching significance, an examination of the frequency distribution above is still warranted. Yet again, the feminine sex-role remains the least adopted gender role for both males and females in Public Address events (20.62%) compared to either the androgynous/undifferentiated (31.96%) or masculine (47.42%) sex-roles. However, these data also suggests that the distribution of sex-role types, or gender identities, is more evenly distributed in the Public Address events than any other category of events. Although males adopt a masculine style in the PA's more often than other sex-role type, it is within this category that males are most likely to adopt a feminine style (9.76%) compared to either Interps (4.08%) or LP's (6.25%).



## Discussion

Prior research on gender in forensics has consistently drawn conclusions about issues of parity, discrimination, and sex-stereotyping. However, because of the problematic methodologies used in such research, their conclusions remain tenuous at best. It is not our goal to delegitimize this research, as it has been deeply influential to both us and the larger community by drawing attention to issues of inequity. Rather, our hope is to extend this line of inquiry through methods which more accurately account for gender—and its performance—as a complex phenomenon. As such, the preceding analysis and subsequent discussion seek to provide insight on two areas of concern that have been addressed in previous research: gender parity and the assumed convergence of sex and gender while performing a forensics event.

### *Parity*

Previous research exploring gender differences in participation and success in forensics has produced evidence of gender disparity between males and females.

Examining participation levels based on BSRI categories would seem to make the issue of parity even worse. In the Limited Prep events, 49% of our participants identified as masculine, whereas 15% identified as feminine; in the Interpretation events, 42% identified as masculine while 15% identified as feminine; and in the Public Address events, 47% identified as masculine while 21% identified as feminine. The fact that these percentages are so drastically different from those based on sex—including those in previous research—suggests that the issue of parity may be more closely tied to one's gender role than their anatomical sex. A closer examination of the distribution of BSRI categories across the sexes reveals that, with the exception of female interpers, males and females in all genres are more likely to adopt a masculine sex-role. Although Manchester and Friedley (2003) observed a trend towards general balance in male and female participation levels, this balance is evident in our data in the percentage of competitors who adopt an androgynous/undifferentiated sex role. Thirty-six percent of students in Limited Prep, 43% of students in Interp, and 32% of students in Public Address identified as either androgynous or undifferentiated, suggesting that reducing the issue of parity to one's sex does not accurately reflect the influence of gender on forensics participation. If the forensic community is indeed interested in differences of participation based on biological sex, existing research provides a valid model to continue. If we want to move towards truly examining the relationship between socially-constructed gender and participation, however, alternate methods of determining gender—like the BSRI—need to be implemented in future research.

Additionally, because the BSRI assesses one's adoption/rejection of stereotypical gender performances it is possible to connect the issue of parity in forensics to larger issues of gender socialization and com-



munication. Forensics, at its most basic level, is analogous to the general public speaking course wherein McCroskey, Simpson, and Richmond (1982) reported that females are more likely than males to experience communication apprehension. Behnke and Sawyer (2000) argued that the higher levels of anxiety experienced by females may "result from the adoption of a more cautious presentational style in public speaking than male speakers" (p. 193). In response to such claims, however, Vevea et al (2009) argued that "being an effective communicator is often measured by middle-class, white male standards; standards which do not include women and could explain their elevated levels of communication apprehension"(p. 6). The adoption of the white male standard is not limited to the public speaking classroom, for as Murphy (1989) suggests "women's [natural] talk differs substantially from the traditional, rational standards of public speech and the criteria developed in forensics [and] the cultural expectations here are very strong" (p. 122). The adoption of the masculine sex-role, regardless of one's biological sex, may then be the product of communication educators attempting to produce speakers who embody the ideal standards established by the discipline or the result of students seeking to reduce their communication apprehension. Regardless of the motivation for adopting a masculine sex-role, our research provides some disappointing confirmation that the gender disparity in forensics may be a result of cultural and disciplinary expectations that elevate male communication standards while devaluing the natural communication styles of females.

Situating the issue of parity within the socially constructed realm of sex-roles rather than sheer biology sheds light on Donovan's (2012) assertion that "biases combine to predispose judges to see female competitors as less authoritative, compelling, and effective" (p. 44). Although truly resolving gender disparity in forensics would require an unrealistic undoing of the process of gender socialization it may be possible to address some of the environmental factors that exacerbate the natural differences between male and female speakers. Holding final rounds in a space with a stage and a microphone ensures that all competitors can be seen and heard – not just those whose height and body composition naturally enable them to project and fill the room without entering a higher register that is displeasing to the ear. Admittedly it is impossible for smaller tournaments to provide such accommodations; however at the national level, when months of planning are put in to ensuring that the best speakers in the country make it to the final stage, these accommodations are not a tall order.

### *Range/Cross-Performing*

The primary justification behind the line of research into gender parity in forensics is concerned with leveling the playing field, not only for female participants who have been historically under-represented in outrounds at nationals, but also for males and females participating in events perceptually linked to the opposite sex. Although our research does not speak to the first concern, as our sample was too



small to draw conclusions about the level of outround participation for males and females, it does provide a great deal of insight into the degree to which competitors utilize a sex-role not associated with a specific genre of events (i.e. male performers in Interpretative events or female performers in Limited Prep events). First, our research suggests that female performers adopt a wider range of sex-roles, or gender identities, than do males. Across all three genres, females adopted a sex-role other than feminine 75% of the time, compared to only 44% of males who adopted a sex-role other than masculine. These results suggest that males are more apt to have gender identities that conform to their sex, whereas women appear to more freely violate the gender norms associated with their sex. Given Olson's (2001) suggestion that "the masculine style has long dominated public rhetoric and women have typically adapted accordingly" (p.10), it is not altogether surprising that both males and females, regardless of genre, are more likely to adopt a masculine or androgynous sex-role. If females are more freely adopting the masculine sex-role, why is it that they have yet to receive the same level of outround participation as males? Prentice and Carranza's (2002) study of prescriptive gender stereotypes shed light on this phenomenon by utilizing the BSRI to examine how deviations from prescribed gender norms are interpreted and evaluated. They argue that females who deviate from prescribed gender norms are met with "discrimination through disparate treatment, whereby women are devalued or treated with hostility because they violate prescriptions about how women should behave" (p. 280). This research suggests that although the masculine style is preferred in forensics, females who choose to adapt their style to this framework are likely to be met with hostility on the grounds that doing so is inconsistent with our societal expectations for women. If we as forensics practitioners do not come to terms with these issues then the best hope we have of achieving true gender parity in forensics may simply be to return to the days of Men's and Women's Extemporaneous Speaking—a solution that would only concretize the disparities we wish to overcome.

Second, much has been said about the consequences males and females face when competing in events perceptually linked to the opposite sex (e.g., White, 1997). Manchester and Friedley (2003) argue that "males who cross sex-role typing into the perceived 'feminine' activity of interpretive events are rewarded more than females who cross sex-role typing into the perceived 'masculine' activities of debate and limited preparation events" (p. 33). These discussions are based on two problematic assumptions. First, this discussion assumes that crossing the gender boundaries associated with an event is infrequent. On the contrary, our research indicates that individuals frequently participate in events not typically associated with their gender, calling into question the perceptual association of events as either masculine or feminine in orientation. Because we were unable to collect data pertaining to the success of our participants, however, it is impossible to determine at this time if certain gender identities/



sex-roles are favored in particular events that would warrant their labeling as either masculine or feminine. Second, previous discussions of cross sex-role typing, or what we call *cross-performing*, presupposes that all individuals enact the gender associated with their biological sex—a supposition which relies on both the conflation of sex and gender and a binary view of gender wherein masculinity and femininity are the only available options. Our results suggest that the assumed convergence of one's sex and gender yields faulty results; in our sample only 38% of males and females adopted the sex-role associated with their sex compared to 62% who adopted an androgynous, undifferentiated, or transgendered sex-role. These findings further highlight the need to understand forensics participation in terms of performed gender identity, rather than biological sex, in order to more accurately understand issues of parity and representation in forensics.

### *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research*

Although we believe the method detailed above is ideally appropriate for the study of gender in forensics, our study does have several limitations. First, the self-report methods we used might have introduced a self-selection bias both in terms of participation and survey responses. Survey research is "susceptible to reactivity, which introduces systematic measurement error" (Singleton & Straits, 2010, p. 271) often in the form of participants giving socially desirable responses to survey items. Because the methods used in this study relied on self-report items rather than observations, measurement error may have been introduced by virtue of participants' instability of attitudes or opinions, or lack of truthfulness. Therefore, although we believe the self-report methods used in the present study yield many benefits over post-hoc analysis of tournament results, our data are not immune from the limitations of quantitative survey design. Second, our sample was limited in more than just its size. Whereas gathering data during a single tournament enabled us to recruit participants from across the country, the tournament's reputation for offering a rigorous and challenging competition likely influenced the diversity of schools or programs in attendance. The reputation of the tournament might deter smaller or less competitive programs from entering. We cannot assess whether the inclusion of such programs in our sample would have changed our results, but we wish to emphasize that our data may not be as generalizable as we would like them to be. Finally, it is important to acknowledge the limitations inherent in any attempt to conduct empirical research on the forensic population. Although surveys are easily administered online, face-to-face recruitment ensures higher response rates. Unfortunately, it is incredibly difficult to administer or distribute surveys during a tournament due to the limited amount of down time competitors are given. The present study, therefore, was susceptible to recruitment bias insofar as we were only able to distribute surveys to a limited population. Continued research on the forensic population would only be aided through



cooperation with tournament directors to ensure easier administration of data collection methods.

Thankfully, one of the benefits of deploying a pilot study is the ability to make adjustments to the research design before replication. Based on our findings and experiences, there are several alterations we plan on making when deploying this methodology in the future; it is our hope that these suggestions are useful for others wishing to conduct similar research. First, although the survey cannot be distributed prior to the start of the tournament, as competitors would not know their event code (this information is necessary to pairing survey responses with participant results), the survey could be administered online in hopes of streamlining the data collection and cleaning process. We should note, however, that we are unsure how this would affect turnout as we found it extremely helpful to distribute surveys face-to-face as a way of ensuring completion and also gave us the ability to compensate participants for their time. Second, rather than utilizing a convenience method of sampling, it may be possible to increase participation levels by distributing surveys to each team during registration so that every student in attendance has the opportunity to complete the survey. Through a combination of more precise face-to-face and online survey distribution, we hope to increase our sample size when replicating this study in the future making it possible to draw conclusions about success levels and conduct event specific analysis of our data. Finally, the issues put forth in the discussion section present two additional options for future research. First, in order to assess the influence of socialization into the normative standards of forensics, a longitudinal analysis tracking students from their first year of forensics onward should be performed to determine if participants adopt a different sex-role over time. Second, because college forensics is unique insofar as competitors are more likely to compete in multiple events/genres than high school competitors, it would be interesting to conduct comparisons between high school and college students to determine if cross genre performing accounts for the high level of androgyny amongst our participants. It has been over a decade since the publication of Manchester and Friedly's (2003) updated assessment, and although the findings presented here are not a perfect comparison to their study in terms of size and scope, it is our hope that this piece will reinvigorate a much needed scholarly conversation about gender parity in forensics.

### **Conclusion**

Much has changed in the world of collegiate forensics since the days when men and women competed in separate, but equal of course, event categories. Arguably, however, even with the combination of men's and women's events into non-gender specific categories, gender norms permeate this competitive landscape. In light of contemporary struggles for equality in all realms of society, the obvious gender inequities—in terms of both access and acceptance of different gender identities—is even more disheartening. Sadly, in the context



of previous research, we do not find it surprising that Bartanen's (1995) call for the forensic community to come to terms with its privileging of certain voices remains unanswered. This is not to say that the community has not tried, but rather, that until we start examining the nature of the voices being privileged/denied as opposed to focusing on their biological origins, we cannot hope to truly create parity in this activity. To this end, it is our hope that others concerned about gender parity—researchers, coaches, administrators, and competitors—will take up our call and make a commitment to researching *gender* in forensics more accurately, fully, and critically than previously imagined.

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APPENDIX A: The Bem Sex-Role Inventory  
(Long Form) and Scoring

Instructions: Rate yourself on the following items on 1-7 scale. Place your chosen rating to the immediate right of each item.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
never or almost never true						always or almost always true
1. self-reliant		12. theatrical		23. sympathetic		
2. yielding		13. assertive		24. jealous		
3. helpful		14. flatterable		25. has leadership abilities		
4. defends own beliefs		15. happy		26. sensitive to the needs of others		
5. cheerful		16. strong personality		27. truthful		
6. moody		17. loyal		28. willing to take risks		
7. independent		18. unpredictable		29. understanding		
8. shy		19. forceful		30. secretive		
9. conscientious		20. feminine		31. makes decisions easily		
10. athletic		21. reliable		32. compassionate		
11. affectionate		22. analytical				



- |                                   |                             |                                 |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 33. sincere                       | 42. solemn                  | 52. individualistic             |
| 34. self-sufficient               | 43. willing to take a stand | 53. does not use harsh language |
| 35. eager to soothe hurt feelings | 44. tender                  | 54. unsystematic                |
| 36. conceited                     | 45. friendly                | 55. competitive                 |
| 37. dominant                      | 46. aggressive              | 56. loves children              |
| 38. soft-spoken                   | 47. gullible                | 57. tactful                     |
| 39. likable                       | 48. inefficient             | 58. ambitious                   |
| 40. masculine                     | 49. acts as a leader        | 59. gentle                      |
| 41. warm                          | 50. childlike               | 60. conventional                |
|                                   | 51. adaptable               |                                 |

## BSRI Scoring Procedures

### Masculinity Score

Find the sum of the given ratings for items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19, 22, 25, 28, 31, 34, 37, 40, 43, 46, 49, 52, 55, and 58. Divide this sum by 20.

### Femininity Score

Find the sum of the given ratings for items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 23, 26, 29, 32, 35, 38, 41, 44, 47, 50, 53, 56, and 59. Divide this sum by 20.

## Sex-role Type based on Masculinity and Femininity Scores

	Masculinity > 4.9	Masculinity < 4.9
Femininity > 4.9	Androgynous	Female sex-typed
Femininity < 4.9	Male sex-typed	Undifferentiated





Missing



# Are They Getting What They Need? An Analysis of the Skills Former Collegiate Forensic Competitors Find Most Useful in Their Current Careers

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**Abstract:** This exploratory study sought to identify the forensic outcomes that former forensic competitors felt are used most frequently in their current careers, as well as the amount of emphasis forensic programs are placing on teaching these particular skills to students. One hundred twenty-one former competitors provided responses. The analysis revealed that most forensic programs are teaching students the majority of the skills they will need in their future careers. The analysis also revealed, however, that forensic programs are directing some emphasis at outcomes that are not very useful to students once they enter the workforce.

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Public speaking and debate have long remained mainstays in domestic and international educational systems. For over four and a half millennia, teachers and students have engaged in analysis of, improvement upon, and tactical approaches to creating arguments and crafting rhetorically sound messages for audiences. Lucas (2004) noted that the earliest known handbook on effective public speaking was written in Egypt 4,500 years ago.

Instruction in speech and debate techniques eventually evolved into speech and debate competitions. From its humble beginnings in literary societies, competitive speech and debate has grown to unforeseen levels of popularity over the last century. High school and college competition teams exist in all 50 states, and, according to the official website of the National Forensic League, there are currently over 112,000 active high school student members who participate in speech and debate competitions annually. Over a decade and a half ago, Bartanen (1994) stated: "During this school year, thousands of high school and college students will participate in some form of organized speech competition" (p. 1).

With such high levels of participation, students and educators alike theorize that many benefits accrue from participation in competitive speech and debate activities. Hinck (2005) stated that at the university level "speech and debate programs are vital components of departments of speech communication and colleges of communication, fine arts, and liberal arts" (p. 116). However, despite this asser-



tion, Kuyper (2011) noted that program cuts are, "...alarmingly commonplace" (p. 17), even though the discipline of communication studies has grown.

While many colleges or universities and high schools in America currently have a forensic team or have had one at some point, administrators constantly struggle with the issue of whether to continue funding for such programs (American Forensic Association Website, 2012). The cost of funding a program is a major consideration. Teams travel to tournaments nationwide during a season that spans from September to April. Additionally, 60% of active collegiate teams provide some means of financial support to team members, which can be a significant cost to the university as well (Ziegelmueller, 1997). Added to the already growing list of expenses, the salary and benefits for a team's coaching staff and the costs associated with starting and maintaining a team may strike some administrators as unfeasible.

This issue of whether or not to fund a forensic team has long plagued higher education administrators. Thompson (1930) argued nearly a century ago that "principals have reduced budgets for debating, have ignored debate coaches, and have reduced academic credits for debates" (p. 555). Speaking of college programs specifically, VerLinden (1985) claimed, "Administrators who would not think of eliminating a science laboratory perceive forensics as an activity that is acceptable but quite expendable" (p. 79). As Cunningham (2005) noted, "The goals of the institution and the goals of administrators have a definite impact on forensics" (p. 15).

Perhaps the most palpable explanation for the lack of support for forensic programs derives from a condition this study seeks to alleviate. As Billings (2011) explained, a lack of research may prove deleterious to the existence of many programs. In his study exploring the impacts of participation in forensic individual events, the author asserted, "It is possible that a dearth of scholarly investigation in the area hinders arguments to maintain forensic programs at a time of declining financial support for higher education" (p. 111). As extra curricular programs face increasing pressure to assess student learning outcomes, a lack of data addressing student learning outcomes stemming from forensic participation may leave forensic programs in a precarious position, one in which administrators may see no benefit of continued financial support.

Additionally, and perhaps most strikingly, coaches and directors of forensics have few places to turn to determine which common forensic outcomes are most useful to former competitors in their current careers. Many forensic programs follow no set curriculum. Essentially, today's forensic coaches have no place to turn in answering the question, "Are we teaching students skills they will need once the competitive experience is over?"

Many former participants have attested to the fact that they would not have otherwise acquired a number of the skills they attained



through forensic competition, but little academic research supports this notion. Several works have examined the benefits of forensic participation on students currently competing, and some have surveyed current participants to determine the perceived benefits students have derived from forensic participation (Billings, 2011; Billman, 2008; Kuyper, 2011; Littlefield, 2001; Quenette, Larson-Casselton, & Littlefield, 2007; Rogers, 2002; Williams, McGee, & Worth, 2001). Most of these studies, however, have sought to determine the impacts on current competitors and not the effects on those individuals who competed at one time but no longer participate in forensic competition. Additionally, no exploration has occurred which seeks to determine the forensic skills that former competitors find most valuable in their day-to-day lives and the extent to which the teaching of those skills pervades collegiate forensic programs. This study seeks to explore the transfer of forensic experiences and training specifically to the careers of former competitors. The information will be provided directly by former competitors.

This study will have value for several reasons. Without a study regarding the lasting impacts that forensic participation can have on competitors, schools may continue to struggle for an answer to the question of whether or not to fund a team. Providing high school and college administrators with a summary of the impacts of forensic participation can help them to determine whether a forensic program fits their institution, or, if a team already exists on campus, whether that team should continue to receive financial and faculty support. Additionally, this study will seek to identify the emphasis that particular programs place on the recognized benefits of forensics. Current coaches and directors of forensics can use this information as a guide to identify areas of improvement within their own programs.

## **Literature Review**

### *The Value of Competition*

Multiple works have examined the benefits to current forensic participants. Hinck (2003) noted that the activity can teach students the value of competition, and the author stated that competition can enhance the educational experience for participants. Jensen and Jensen (2006) echoed this sentiment, noting “although the value placed on awards and honors varies with individuals and programs, there is no escaping that the competitive context is the source for feedback which contributes to skill development and the laboratory in which performance, argumentation, and advocacy is practiced and perfected” (p. 24). As Warriner (1998) noted, “Beyond skill attainment, the competitive nature of forensics stimulates desire, commitment, and high motivation in students” (p. 29). White (2010) stated, “Healthy team cultures include team members who willingly embrace the joy of competition. Forensics is at its core a competitive activity. In my experience, when a team loses sight of the gratification competition can provide, the health of the team culture starts to falter” (p.



160). Clearly, researchers who have previously examined the impacts of forensic participation on students have noted that forensics is a competitive activity.

### *Communication Skills*

The activity of competitive forensics and the field of communication will always be intertwined. Many forensic programs are housed within a higher education institution's department of communication studies. At the high school level, forensic classes are often offered as part of a communication or language curriculum. As Phifer (1963) explained, "Forensic experiences provide invaluable training in oral communication." (p. 305). Freeley and Steinberg (2005) stated, "Debate is an educational activity that provides students with the opportunity to develop proficiency in writing, thinking, reading, speaking, and listening" (p. 29).

Williams et al. (2001) noted that the most frequently cited benefits of participation in debate for current students are enhanced speaking and communication skills. Likewise, Littlefield (2001) reported that enhanced speaking and communication skills were among the top three self-reported benefits of forensic participation. Shaw (1995) also noted the benefits of forensic participation and the correlation between participation and the development of communication skills. As a language arts teacher, the author offered a unique perspective on forensics, stating that forensic participation can increase self-esteem, promote leadership skills, increase communication skills, teach research methods, and provide an outlet for creative expression. Most coaches and students can enumerate these benefits, but I think forensics goes beyond this: it teaches students lessons about language and communication that cannot be taught in the confines of the language arts classroom. (p. 51)

Scholars agree that participation in forensics can enhance students' general communication skills. Therefore, when examining literature that highlights the impacts of forensic participation, one cannot ignore the importance of strengthening one's communication skills.

### *Critical Thinking Skills*

Most researchers would agree that the development of critical thinking skills is essential for high school and college students. Chaffee (1994) stated, "Successful thinking enables us to solve the problems we are continually confronted with, to make intelligent decisions, and to achieve the goals that give our lives purpose and fulfillment" (p. 2). Simpson and Courtney (2008) explained, "Many authors...support the view that critical thinking is more than a set of skills. Critical thinkers can provide justifications for their actions—they have the ability to think through, project, and anticipate the consequences of those actions" (p. 450). Seeking to pinpoint some of the key traits of critical thinkers, Carey and McCardle (2011) stated, "Practicing self-awareness, tolerating ambiguity when faced with



ethical dilemmas, and applying knowledge gained from multiple sources are all key components of critical thinking" (p. 358). Yang and Chou (2008) claimed critical thinking involves judging in a reflective way what to do or what to believe.

Previous forensic literature is replete with scholars who agree that forensics provides drastic acceleration in the development of critical thinking skills. Freeley and Steinberg (2005) noted:

Competency in critical thinking is a prerequisite to participating effectively in human affairs, pursuing higher education, and succeeding in the highly competitive world of business and the professions. Since classical times, debate has been one of the best methods of learning and applying the principles of critical thinking. (p. 2).

Williams et al. (2001) conducted a survey of collegiate debaters to ascertain participants' perceptions of the benefits of being involved in college debate. Respondents overwhelmingly noted that the development of analytical and critical thinking skills was the second most important benefit of debate participation, just behind the development of communication skills. These findings led the authors to state, "The long-held claim that debate fosters the development of analytical skills and critical thinking is shared by today's debaters" (p. 204).

Similarly, Quenette et al. (2007) surveyed student participants in the activity of forensics to gauge participants' perceived advantages to collegiate forensic individual events. Of the 273 students who responded to the study, 133 stated that participation in forensics enhances academic achievement. As the authors explained, academic achievement "was in the form of enhanced research skills, better critical and analytical thinking, and a greater knowledge of the world and literature" (p. 15). As Parson and Harris (2000) explained, "Historically, forensic events, like the classical rhetorical exercises, focused on developing skills in critical thinking, constructing and presenting effective arguments" (p. 62).

### *Leadership Skills*

Much has been written about the relationship between forensics participation and the development of leadership skills among participants. Colbert and Biggers (1985) cited a 1960 study of political leaders including members of Congress, senators, and Supreme Court justices. Ninety percent of respondents called their high school or collegiate debate experiences "very helpful" or "invaluable" in developing their careers as leaders.

Bartanen (1998) noted that often the value of forensics programs in developing leaders is overlooked. The author claimed that it is not uncommon for forensics programs to be considered expendable by educational administrators, but that they provide exceptional laboratories for students to learn crucial leadership skills. As the author stated, "as they foster leadership skills of reflection, connectedness,



and advocacy, forensics programs are valuable models of learner-centered pedagogy, and underutilized resources for diversity education on the liberal arts campus" (p. 1).

Briscoe (2009) advocated leadership development through forensic participation as well. The author claimed that the skills one employs in forensic competition can help students to become civic-minded leaders in their various communities. As the author states:

The course of study, alongside co-curricular competition, promotes civic education and enhances the standard curriculum by helping students explore myriad topics from multiple angles and find the truth in each, fostering civic participation, advocating civic engagement, promoting authentic discussions on issues of real importance, and emphasizing the principles that are essential to a liberal democracy. (p. 49)

Briscoe went on to state, "Citizens in a democratic society are often called upon to persuade others of the best course of action, whether as political leaders, citizens engaged in discussions with peers in informal settings, or in a typical business setting" (p. 47).

Previous literature illustrates the importance of competition; the development of communication skills; the development of critical thinking skills; and the development of leadership skills. Literature has also demonstrated that participation in forensics is a viable avenue for attaining these various qualities. Previous literature demonstrates a correlation between participation in forensics and the development of communication skills, critical thinking skills, and leadership skills among current student participants in speech and debate activities.

### **Method**

The purpose of this study is to identify the areas of forensics participation that former competitors feel are most beneficial and the extent to which those outcomes were emphasized in their forensics experience. To accomplish this, the following research questions were posed:

Research Question 1: To what extent do former forensic program participants use key forensic speech, debate, and public speaking outcomes as part of their current job?

Research Question 2: To what extent do former forensic program participants believe key forensic outcomes were emphasized in their college forensic program?

Because this study seeks information from former forensic competitors, the researcher identified former competitors who have been out of the activity of collegiate forensics for a minimum of two years. Coaches/directors of forensics at colleges and universities nationwide aided the researcher by distributing surveys to their alumni. Additionally, former participants who were present at the 2012