

# The Forensic

## *of Pi Kappa Delta*

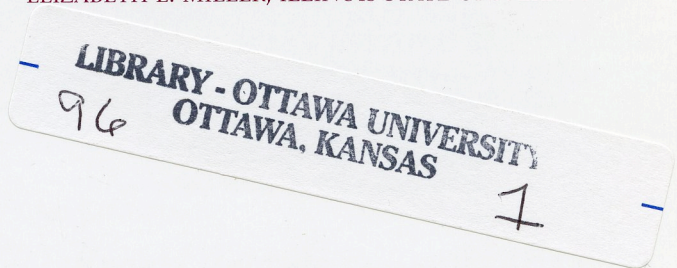
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### Themed Issue: Dynamics of Managing Collegiate Forensic Programs

"Buddy Ryan, Can We Stop by the Liquor Store on the Way Home?" Negotiating Tensions as a Young Forensic Coach via the Instructional Humor Processing Theory  
RYAN LOUIS, OTTAWA UNIVERSITY

Fistful of Sand: Quantifying the Intangible Benefits of Forensic Participation  
CHAD KUYPER, FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE AT JACKSONVILLE

...And the Lord Spoke Unto Me: A Competitor's Perspective on Motivation and Forensics  
ELIZABETH L. MILLER, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY



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- 1 "Buddy Ryan, Can We Stop by the Liquor Store on the Way Home?" Negotiating Tensions as a Young Forensic Coach via the Instructional Humor Processing Theory  
RYAN LOUIS, OTTAWA UNIVERSITY
- 17 Fistful of Sand: Quantifying the Intangible Benefits of Forensic Participation  
CHAD KUYPER, FLORIDA STATE COLLEGE AT JACKSONVILLE
- 25 ...And the Lord Spoke Unto Me: A Competitor's Perspective on Motivation and Forensics  
ELIZABETH L. MILLER, ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

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 Manuscripts submitted by undergraduate students and previously unpublished scholars will also receive serious consideration.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.

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All works must be original and not under review by other publishers. Submissions should conform to **APA guidelines** (Most recent edition). **Authors should E-mail submissions in Word format only with no specialized formatting.** (Hard copy submissions are acceptable; contact editor for directions for these submissions.) Manuscripts should not exceed 25 double-spaced typed pages, exclusive of tables and references; books reviews and educational materials should be 4-5 double-spaced pages. 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, [moorenj@appstate.edu](mailto:moorenj@appstate.edu) or Department of Communication, Appalachian State University, Boone, NC 28608. **Do not fax submissions.** Send electronic submissions to: [moorenj@appstate.edu](mailto:moorenj@appstate.edu). Authors should have an editorial decision within 3 months.

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# “Buddy Ryan, Can We Stop by the Liquor Store on the Way Home?” Negotiating Tensions as a Young Forensic Coach via the Instructional Humor Processing Theory

RYAN LOUIS, OTTAWA UNIVERSITY

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**Abstract:** *Studying the communicative value of humor can favorably impact pedagogy. Humor and rapport may work together to achieve significant results in educational settings. One important way to achieve classroom outcomes is the employment of humor as a tool to enhance rapport. Though co-curricular activities, such as forensics, engage students beyond the traditional classroom, they are regardless held accountable to outcomes associated with traditional classroom instruction. Forensics uniquely incorporates individual relationships into its curriculum; thus, potential exists to attend to institutional and community-based exigencies through the analysis and enhancement of rapport through various means. Here, I advocate for special attention to humor communication theory as a way to affect course outcomes via the Instructional Humor Processing Theory proposed by Wanzer, Frymier, & Irwin (2010).*

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It's late at night, our long tournament over. Though our hometown is less than two hours away, everyone seems to be gearing up for a long haul. I usually find the post-tournament drives fairly peaceful. Tired and with considerable homework due the following week, my students tend to keep to themselves. On this particular night, however, I hear a massive groan when pulling into a gas station (as if, instead of a simple gas stop, this delay portended the apocalypse). A couple of students unburdened themselves from the van for, what I presumed to be, a smoke break. After filling the tank, I crawl back into the van. Before I take my spot behind the steering wheel, one of my students pulls me aside, an innocent grin on her face. “Ryan,” she starts, “can we stop at a liquor store on the way home?”

Obviously impacted by my contorted facial expressions (how do I describe what she saw—shock, fear, disgust?), she continued: “But since we’re in Missouri, the tax is so much cheaper than in Kansas. Plus, all the liquor stores will be closed when we get home.”

Though these two arguments seemed to be fair, my authoritative position caused my face to become a grotesque statue of conflicted emotion. Being a debater, she created additional rationale to build her

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case: "I'm 21. You wouldn't be buying for me. It's just down the road. You're a cool guy, so you *must* understand."

Ottawa University is a small, liberal-arts campus in eastern Kansas. American-Baptist affiliated, the institution is very clear on vice. That is, alcohol may not be the Devil, but it's certainly not appropriate for co-curricular activities.

My status as a "Cool Guy" now under threat, I pondered the possible "Cool Guy" responses. "No" seemed too simple, defeatist even. Lecturing her seemed inappropriate. I knew belittling this request had the potential to alienate this student as well as others who might disagree with an official stance on alcohol. Instead, I went with humor. I started laughing: belly-laughter that emanated deep from within my chest. Gaining composure, realizing she was taking my mockery seriously, I retorted, "Yeah. And why not stop for an 8-ball, too. Maybe there's a nice crack-head in Kansas City who could hook us up."

I have to give my student credit for accepting that answer as a definitive "no." I credit the total absurdity of my response for her quickly re-boarding the van. No conflict, no more explanation. My strategy worked.

The spectacle of my response brings to mind Ionesco's *Theatre of the Absurd*, "celebrating the meaninglessness of life and the impotence of man in an uncaring universe" (Bothamley, 1993, pp. 5-6 ). I was the "Man," empowering each student to continue their existential crises unabated. The unfair and unsatisfying Universe had won again [*curses!*]. My absurd response, though *totally* pro-establishment, muzzled all potential and explosive angst that could have ruined my post-tournament peacefulness.

"No" may mean "no," but it can also mean "maybe, if you spend more time convincing me" to a college student. My inference that stopping for liquor was on par with a midnight cocaine-run seemed to do the trick quite efficiently.

In that moment I saw the promise of a new day in conflict resolution. Perhaps this event could spark a new-ish strategy for coaching: the exploitation of humor communication theory.

\* \* \*

Studying the communicative value of humor can favorably impact pedagogy. In the traditional classroom, for example, several scholars attempt to relate the effectiveness of incorporating humorous instruction into the structure of a class in order to synthesize disciplinary knowledge with student retention. Wanzer, Frymier & Irwin (2010) hypothesize the *Instructional Humor Processing Theory* (IHPT) as a method to gauge the effectiveness of specific types of humor used by instructors in their classrooms. They conclude that the appropriateness of some humor plays a vital role in student participation, involvement, cognition and retention. Likewise, Frisby & Martin (2010) demonstrate that the enhancement of *rappor*t between instruc-

tor and individual students directly triggers similar outcomes. Limitations of rapport research, however, have “focused on student perceptions of instructors. The classroom setting is not an environment restricted to one-on-one interaction, and the dynamics and perceptions of multiple relationships should be considered” (p. 147).

Humor and rapport may work together to achieve significant results for an individual course. Though humor in itself “is not sufficient for enhancing student learning,” (Wanzer, et al., 2010, p. 15), it is a means to achieve a critical end. Rapport augments student learning because it directly influences “affective learning. Building rapport can be a substitute for, or work in conjunction with, immediacy or other instructor behaviors...to promote affective learning” (Frisby & Martin, 2010, p. 158). Frymier, Wanzer & Wojtaszczyk (2007) draw upon the work of Welker (1977) to declare that a systemic use of appropriate humor results in the enhanced quality of student teacher relationships (p. 2). Thus, one important way to achieve classroom outcomes is the employment of humor as a tool to enhance rapport.

Though co-curricular activities—like forensics—engage students beyond the traditional classroom, they are regardless held accountable to outcomes associated with traditional classroom instruction (e.g., recruitment and retention). Bartanen (2006) argues the forensic community will be held increasingly accountable to achieve tangible results. In his vision, when directors assess the success of their programs they need to justify “their continued presence and increase the likelihood of funding at a level sufficient for achieving the program’s...goals in a university environment where marginal schools, departments and programs will be eliminated or de-funded” (p. 33). Similarly, Jensen & Jensen (2006) express an impetus for concern: “It is becoming important to be able to tell stories which effectively sell forensics within campus communities that are increasingly experiencing budget cuts and proliferation of extra co-curricular activities that compete for limited resources, students, and recognition” (p. 17-18). Responding to the pressure of achieving program success, directors need to continually concern themselves with future budgets, internal team affiliations as well as external reputation.

Jensen & Jensen further contend, that unlike “the typical classroom wherein there may or may not be strong, nurturing relationships between teachers and students, strong mentoring relationships are more of a natural part of the forensic educator/student relationship” (p. 25). Forensics uniquely incorporates individual relationships into its curriculum; thus, potential exists to attend to institutional and community-based exigencies through the analysis and enhancement of rapport through various means. Here, I advocate for special attention to humor communication theory as a way to affect course outcomes.

This article presents three issues for consideration in the Forensic “classroom”:

1. I discuss and adopt humor, generally, and the IHPT specifically, as practical antecedents to reaping the positive effects of high-quality rapport. That is, humor becomes a tool to achieve positive outcomes like a connected classroom environment, high expectations of participation, cognitive enhancement and program retention.
2. Moreover, I intend to show that humor enhances the ethos of a young instructor of forensics. The ability for young coaches and graduate assistants to lead effectually is often precluded by negligible age differences. Millennial students are conventional in their view of authority figures. Jensen (2010) reminds instructors that these students have “a healthy sense of self-worth nurtured by frequent praise and accolades” (p. 102). Coaching (sometimes *fellow*) millennials creates unique challenges. Appearing credible without looking the part of conventional systems of authority (i.e., people who look like parents—the ones who nurture Millennials with abundant praise) is grueling.
3. Lastly, this article offers suggestions—both anecdotal and theoretical—for implementing the IHPT as a model for forensic pedagogy.

## I. Forensics as Epistemology

I accept Robert Littlefield's (2006) argument that forensics is epistemic as a premise for this article. A goal of forensic education must be to induce students to be more involved “and act with certainty to the world in which they live than they would have been without the forensic experience” (p. 4). Littlefield pedestals a philosophical approach to forensic education so as to move beyond traditional arguments that forensics should either be seen in a competitive or educational purview.

Forensic educators cope with budget constrictions in addition to resistant administrations; thus, arguments in defense of their programs often utilize doggedly pragmatic language in order to enhance persuasion (“if I stay with friends at NCA this year and walk to the next tournament, Mr. Head-of-My-Business-Office, we'll save enough money to pay for student meals!”). This view does not belie the perception of forensics within the realm of epistemology, however, because a philosophical approach contributes to a discourse on experience- and knowledge-formation. My contention is that a discussion of this magnitude will undergird the practical exigencies of policy makers within a school's administration (no matter how dogmatic they may be). Because of this, forensic educators should accept Littlefield's (2006) argument and learn to apply its tenets in practical ways. That is, the benefits gleaned from forensics-as-epistemic contribute highly to specific outcomes such as retention and engagement. Not to say the specific outcomes associated with a forensics-as-competition (trophies and hardware to indicate success) or forensics-as-education (research competency and effective strategies of public address) outlook are harmful. Rather, these goals are espoused by the philosophical approach. They are part of a bigger

picture. As Littlefield concludes, "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" (p. 11).

In addition to enhancing individual competitive and education goals, forensics provides a foundation for positive and effective future relationships, both personal and occupational. In order to maximize the potential for future successes, educators need to facilitate a team environment that enculturates students by providing for their social and cultural needs, thus motivating them to successfully grow in the competitive and educational realms.

Jensen (2010) documents a positive correlation between his enacted policies and team retention rates. By employing strategies that clarify competitive expectations, continually inviting students to participate in team-associated social events and providing opportunities for civic participation, Jensen achieved pedagogical outcomes via an epistemic approach. Though the outcomes of forensic competition often include physical trophies as well as strengthened mental acuity, Jensen focused on the role of experience in forensic education, where competitive success was a byproduct.

Extending this train of thought, the epistemological value of forensics is a robust platform from which educators can initiate team policies. Jensen & Jensen (2006) provide recommendations to enhance mentoring, cultural communication and conflict management. Mentoring is important, particularly because it contributes directly to building team relationships. As young scholars necessarily look to us for guidance, it is pertinent for forensic educators to emulate a model of mentorship. Extending White's analysis about the proclivity for forensic educators to become "life coaches," Jensen & Jensen report that "the amount of time students spend with their forensic educators makes it logical for those same educators to become advisors on career, academic, and even social decisions" (p. 22-3). The sheer amount of time spent with forensic students (have you ever driven 15 hours in a 12-passenger van?) often requires the educator to play multiple roles. This especially presents several challenges to the young educator. Authoritative positioning can be difficult for those who are close in age to their students. As stated previously, Millennials rely on traditional authority figures to provide affirming guidance. If students perceive their instructors' experiences as parallel to their own, their instructors' ethos may be diminished.

Becoming a mentor to similarly-aged students is a tight-rope covered in egg shells; walking along it can be both acrobatic and terrifying. To remain credible, one must maintain a separation of sorts, establishing authority via boundaries, while letting down your personal guard now and again to enhance interpersonal bonds. Put another way, students can always smell a rat. If a young educator creates too many barriers as a means to compensate for his or her age, it

may appear pretentious and unnatural. Likewise, if an educator removes all barriers, there is less opportunity to maintain the authority necessary when needing to exact consequences.

Models of mentorship provide suggestions for positive leadership results. Particularly, Young and Cates (2005) advocate “playful communication.” This may include non-serious banter as well as various “informal communication that includes humor, telling stories, teasing, and gossiping” (qtd. in Jensen & Jensen, 2006, p. 22). This mode of mentoring, they argue, eases tensions and helps create positive rapport between parties. As a policy, this style of mentorship is interpersonally engaging and may help to establish authority.

Johnson’s (2003) definition of mentoring is very similar to the concept of rapport (in Jensen and Jensen, 2006). Used as the premise for Jensen & Jensen’s (2006) discussion, the role of mentor requires educators “to engage in a dynamic, emotionally connected and reciprocal relationship with the protégé” (p. 22). Frisby & Martin (2010) offer an erudite definition of *rapport*: “an overall feeling between two people encompassing a mutual, trusting, and prosocial bond” (p. 147). Because the role of mentorship may be perpetuated (the mentored often become mentors), providing for positive rapport contributes to the life experiences and knowledge formation of a potential procession of students. Likewise, teaching and incorporating these traits into a forensic program are neither competitive- nor education-specific. Rather, they are components of an epistemic activity. As such, they have the ability to aid in the achievement of practical outcomes such as retention and intellectual engagement. Thus, further discussion of the role of the forensic instructor (i.e., forensic *mentor*) as the facilitator of rapport is merited.

## II. Rapport

Frisby & Martin (2010) hypothesize and test outcomes they associate with high rapport in a classroom. They declare that “little is understood about the construction of connectedness in the classroom and the differential roles of both students and instructors in eliciting positive student outcomes including affective and cognitive learning” (p. 147). Their study attempts to fill in this research gap by examining student and teacher relationships. The study concluded that only a positive rapport between instructor and individual students consistently predicts classroom participation and affective & cognitive learning. The authors point to a previous study by Lowman (1984) that linked rapport and intellectual excitement to positive classroom experiences as a reason for these high correlations. Additionally, they highlight how the role played by the instructor is far more powerful in establishing classroom rapport than students, because “even if students can fulfill their relational goals with either students *or* instructors, only instructors can simultaneously fulfill students’ relational and rhetorical goals” (emphasis original, p. 157).

The conclusions of this study are relevant to forensic educators

who, although not always teaching within the confines of a traditional classroom, nonetheless rely on similar relationship variables: student-student, student-instructor and instructor-group. As mentioned earlier, desired outcomes in forensics are often comparable to those in traditional classrooms. Participation is essential in forensics to both motivate students (especially students new to the activity) and hold them accountable to team standards. Cognitive growth is necessary for debate and limited preparation due to the breadth of knowledge each event requires for competitive success. Likewise, prioritizing affective learning is vital to master an event. Students must internalize effective speaking skills in order to persevere. In traditional classrooms, these three outcomes pertain to a specific subject matter. In forensics they pertain to a much broader scope of knowledge and experiences. Therefore, if rapport is an important predictor of enhanced participation, cognitive learning and affective learning, in the traditional classroom, it is *critical* to the forensic classroom.

Instructor behaviors shape classroom rapport. Frisby & Martin (2010) detail a series of studies that show mixed results about which behaviors correlate with positive affective and cognitive learning. These mixed results highlight the misconceptions and "inconsistencies in relationships between instructor behaviors and the mechanisms through which...learning is achieved" (p. 151). Behaviors such as confirming correct answers, creating immediacy, and being attentive to clarity positively influence cognitive learning, but not necessarily affective learning. Likewise, though participating in self-disclosure, dressing and looking attractive and creating homophily may increase affective learning, they do not necessarily influence cognitive recall. Humor may be a behavioral strategy that has the potential to positively affect both cognitive and affective learning.

Although appropriate humor is overwhelmingly seen as a positive form of communication, humor *enactment* is rarely the focus when planning both curricula and outcomes. Martin et al. (2003) set up a rather large series of positive psychological effects accompanying the use of appropriate forms of humor. Though lengthy, it warrants our attention:

[T]he use of humor to enhance one's relationships with others refers to interpersonal humor that "oils the wheels of communication and permits the establishment of social relations with a minimum of conflict" (Ziv, 1984, p. 32). Thus, it relates to the use of humor in a dyad to increase the other's feelings of well-being, reduce conflicts and strengthen ties between individuals, and increase one's attractiveness to the other. In a larger group context, it relates also to the use of humor to raise the morale of group members, enhance group cohesiveness and identity, create an atmosphere of enjoyment, reinforce group norms, and so on (p. 52).

Humor has the potential to enhance individual as well as group rapport because its existence is based on several premises. For humor to