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A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF THE PROFESSIONAL CLIMATE OF FORENSIC EDUCATION, PART II

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In Part I of the report of the survey project on the professional climate of forensic education (published in the Summer 1996 *Forensic*), I argued that one of the most important challenges facing intercollegiate forensics in the years ahead is the task of strengthening professional support for forensic educators. The responses to questions about goals and objectives, professional preparation, job description and expectations, campus support, and program and position status demonstrated perceived strengths and weaknesses in the professional development of forensic teachers, information which will be helpful in systematic planning of professional development work. This segment of the report contains the balance of the survey results, including responses to broader climate questions about expectations for students; field support; lifestyle, diversity, and political issues; and morale.

Description of the methodology of the survey and a profile of respondents is contained in Part I of the report. In brief, the survey was mailed to directors of forensics at PKD, CEDA, AFA NIET/NDT, NFA, and PRP schools. Completed surveys were received from 193 respondents, which included forensic educators from 23 major research universities, 72 public four-year colleges, 59 private four-year colleges, and 34 two-year colleges.

Quality of and Access to Forensic Activities

Forensic educators value their work in developing students' critical thinking and communication skills. Questions in this section of the survey sought to gauge respondents' perceptions of student performance as well as the ability of new participants to enter the activity.

Expectations of students. Respondents expressed satisfaction with the expectations of students in the activity. The quantity of work expected of students was perceived as "about right" (responses of 3, 4 or 5 on the scale) by 78% of the sample, while 80% so rated the intellectual level of work. Responsibility and independence in research, writing and speaking expected of students was perceived as appropriate by 76% of respondents. The quality of student performance in public speaking was perceived by 76% of respondents to be comparable to five years ago, and nearly the same proportion (71%) rated the quality of oral interpretation as similar in quality to that heard five years ago. There was greater variance in the perception of the quality of debate, with only 56% reporting that the quality of debate was comparable. Nearly one-third of respondents rated debate as much lower in quality (responses of 6 or 7) while only 14% perceived the quality of debate to be much better (responses of 1 or 2) than that heard five years ago. In contrast, only 5% rated public speaking performance as qualitatively improved and 10% rated oral interpretation as better than five years ago.

A7. The quantity of work expected of students in forensics is

far too				about right				far too
high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	low
	7	28	58	74	12	6	1	NR = 7
	4%	15%	31%	40%	7%	3%		Mean 3.4

A8. The intellectual level of work expected of students in forensics is

far too				about right				far too
high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	low
	2	5	24	87	40	23	7	NR = 5
	1%	3%	13%	46%	21%	12%	4%	Mean 4.4

A9. The responsibility and independence in research, writing, and speaking expected of students in forensics is

far too				about right				far too
high	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	low
	0	11	23	75	42	28	6	NR = 8
		6%	12%	41%	23%	15%	3%	Mean 4.4

A10. The quality of debate I hear at present, compared to five years ago, is

much				similar				much
higher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	lower
	8	15	21	37	4	34	21	NR = 17
	5%	9%	12%	21%	23%	19%	12%	Mean 4.5

A11. The quality of public speaking I hear at present, compared to five years ago, is

much				similar				much
higher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	lower
	1	7	24	81	35	22	15	NR = 8
	1%	4%	13%	44%	19%	12%	8%	Mean 4.4

A12. The quality of oral interpretation I hear at present, compared to five years ago, is

much				similar				much
higher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	lower
	1	14	29	66	20	23	8	NR = 32
	1%	9%	18%	41%	12%	14%	5%	Mean 4.2

Entry Barriers. One indicator of the health of the forensic activity is the ability of new participants to gain its benefits. It is troubling to note that 62% of respondents saw new programs having greater difficulty entering forensic now than seemed to be the case five years ago. Nearly half of respondents (47% and 49%, respectively) saw new coaches and new students facing higher entry barriers than in the past. Some comments suggest that barriers are largely financial, while others suggest that increasing specialization in events make the entry of newcomers difficult. Several comments also point to restrictions which limit tournament participation to full-time students as elitist barriers to non-traditional and poorer students who have family and/or employment responsibilities.

A13. Entry barriers for new programs entering forensics, compared to five years ago, are

much higher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	much lower
	19	52	36	45	13	10	1	NR = 17
	11%	30%	21%	26%	7%	6%	1%	Mean 3.1

A14. Entry barriers for new coaches entering forensics, compared to five years ago, are

much higher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	much lower
	10	35	34	61	17	12	2	NR = 22
	6%	21%	20%	36%	10%	7%	1%	Mean 3.5

A15. Entry barriers for new students entering forensics, compared to five years ago, are

much higher	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	much lower
	15	33	41	53	19	15	6	NR = 11
	8%	18%	23%	29%	10%	8%	3%	Mean 3.5

Field Support

This segment of the survey sought input regarding respondents' perceptions of support from within the forensic community itself. Responses indicated that regional colleagues and regional organizations play the largest role in supporting individual programs. Forensics educators generally reported a good understanding of the organizations of which they are members; most felt well integrated into the organizations to which they belonged. A summary of the ratings for various sources of support to forensics educators is contained in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Sources of Support for Forensic Educators

Sources of Support	Mean Rating
Other coaches in the region	3.1
Departmental colleagues	3.5
Regional forensic organizations	3.5
College/university administration	3.7
National forensic organizations	4.1
Alumni of the forensic program	4.2
Colleagues in other departments	4.7

Narrative comments suggest some significant concerns with the national organizations (CEDA, NDT, NFA, NIET). Several writers voiced opinions that the national organizations do little to reach out to new or small programs, and that more could be done to assist and to welcome "fledgling" coaches.

- E1. How much support and encouragement for your work do you receive from forensic colleagues in your region?

much support	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	little support
	36	45	45	28	11	12	13	NR = 3
	19%	24%	24%	15%	6%	6%	7%	Mean 3.1

- E2. How much support and encouragement for your work do you receive from national forensic organizations?

much support	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	little support
	13	21	34	47	23	30	20	NR = 5
	7%	11%	18%	25%	12%	16%	11%	Mean 4.1

- E3. How important is a regional forensic organization in supporting your program?

Very important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	not very important
	39	31	44	18	15	12	28	NR = 6
	21%	17%	24%	10%	8%	6%	15%	Mean 3.5

- E4. How important is a state forensic organization in supporting your program?

Very important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	not very important
	21	31	21	17	10	14	73	NR = 6
	11%	17%	11%	9%	5%	8%	9%	Mean 4.6

- E5. How important is NDT support to your program?

Very important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	not very important
	9	4	3	3	4	16	140	NR = 14
	5%	2%	2%	2%	2%	9%	78%	Mean 6.3

- E6. How important is NFA support to your program?

Very important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	not very important
	20	8	16	16	7	20	99	NR = 7
	11%	4%	9%	9%	4%	11%	53%	Mean 5.4

- E7. How important is NIET support to your program?

Very important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	not very important
	22	17	13	21	12	14	82	NR = 12
	12%	9%	7%	12%	7%	8%	45%	Mean 5.0

E8. How important is CEDA support to your program?

Very important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	not very important
	34	31	19	28	7	10	54	NR = 10
	19%	17%	10%	15%	4%	6%	30%	Mean 4.0

E9. How important is a forensic honorary (Pi Kappa Delta, DSR-TKA, Phi Rho Pi) in supporting your program?

Very important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	not very important
	32	25	25	26	20	10	49	NR = 6
	17%	13%	13%	14%	11%	5%	26%	Mean 4.1

E10. How important is the support of other forensic organizations in supporting your program?

Very important	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	not very important
	18	20	17	42	15	15	58	NR = 8
	10%	11%	9%	23%	8%	8%	31%	Mean 4.6

E11. I feel that I have a good understanding of the forensic organizations of which I am a member.

Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strongly disagree
	60	50	35	20	14	6	4	NR = 4
	32%	27%	19%	11%	7%	3%	2%	Mean 2.5

E12. I feel well integrated into the forensic organizations of which I am a member.

Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strongly disagree
	39	37	39	32	20	10	12	NR = 4
	21%	20%	21%	17%	11%	5%	6%	Mean 3.2

Lifestyle Issues

This portion of the survey allowed respondents an opportunity to address common complaints regarding the demands of being a forensic educator. More people wrote comments in this than in any other section of the survey. Some suggested that the survey questions were "whines" and that forensic educators always have choices about how they conduct their programs and their lives. Testing the intensity of complaints, however, seemed to offer the potential of revealing remedies by which the community might better retain its teachers. Further analysis could explore the interaction of responses in this section with results regarding morale and intent to stay in the profession.

Tournament Demands. A majority of respondents supported, with varying degrees of intensity, the assertions that the forensic season is too long (56%), that judging demands of tournaments are too high (55%), that time schedules are too demanding (64%), and that tournament travel is too wearing (67%). Responses varied most on the question of the length of the tournament season, with 56% somewhat to strongly agreeing that it is too long (27% marked "strongly agree") and 25% somewhat to strongly disagreeing with that assertion.

F1. The forensic season is too long.

Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strongly disagree
	52	33	22	38	9	22	16	NR = 1
	27%	17%	12%	20%	5%	12%	8%	Mean 3.3

F2. Judging demands of tournaments are too high.

Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strongly disagree
	38	36	31	42	14	16	14	NR = 2
	20%	19%	16%	22%	7%	8%	7%	Mean 3.3

F3. Time schedules of tournaments too demanding.

Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strongly disagree
	44	44	35	34	15	12	8	NR = 1
	23%	23%	18%	18%	8%	6%	4%	Mean 3.0

F4. Tournament travel is too demanding.

Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strongly disagree
	41	40	49	32	8	11	11	NR = 1
	21%	21%	26%	17%	4%	6%	6%	Mean 3.0

Health and Fitness. Most respondents reported that neither fitness nor diet are enhanced by their work in forensics. Only about one-quarter perceived that they have ample time for physical exercise and fitness. Nearly 4 in 10 reported that their forensics related eating habits are unsatisfactory.

F5. Forensics leaves me ample time for physical exercise and fitness.

Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strongly disagree
	15	12	18	21	33	33	55	NR = 6
	8%	6%	10%	11%	18%	18%	29%	Mean 4.9

F6. Forensics contributes to unhealthy eating habits.

Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	strongly disagree
	73	50	28	14	4	6	15	NR = 3
	38%	26%	15%	7%	2%	3%	8%	Mean 2.5

Family and Relationships. The demographic profile of the survey respondents showed 64% married, 5% with an unmarried partner, 7% divorced or separated, and 24% single. Sixty-percent were parents (57% dual parent, 3% single parent). This profile provides context for the responses concerning family