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Genesis of a Special Issue

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Genesis of a Special Issue

Daniel Cronn-Mills

The genesis of this special issue has a convoluted history. The concept actually started as a book on forensics by Dr. Crystal Lane Swift Ferguson. In fall 2013, Swift Ferguson contacted me about any interest in a book focused on forensics research and pedagogy. We swapped emails and decided a good approach was an edited chapter book on the broad sweep of forensics (IE and the numerous forms of academic debate).

We sent out a call for proposals in March 2013 on debate and individual event listservs. We were open to a wide range of proposals from contemporary forensic issues to research to pedagogy. The call produced 13 proposals extending from forensics budgets, to forensic judges, to Congressional Debate, to tournament administration. The project struggled when we began the move from proposals to completed chapters. Deadlines were set for manuscript drafts. Many authors had difficulty meeting the deadlines. Extending the deadlines produced little added benefit.

I acknowledge forensic professionals have a demanding life. Most are teaching and coaching during the work week and attending tournaments on the weekends. A 7-day workweek of teaching/coaching/directing/traveling/judging leaves little time for engaging in the production of forensic scholarship. However, scholarship is the “coin of the realm” in higher education. If forensics hopes to maintain its role in higher education; scholarship is a fundamental necessity in which we need to engage.

Fortunately, five of the proposals emerged as completed manuscripts. Unfortunately, five manuscripts was insufficient for a full book. We had no desire to abandon our authors who had followed through with the project. We contacted the editors of the *National Forensic Journal (NFJ)* and the executive board of the Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha (DSR-TKA) which publishes *Speaker & Gavel (S&G)*. We inquired if either journal was interested in a special issue composed of the five manuscripts. DSR-TKA responded with enthusiastic support and the forensic book found new life as a special issue of *Speaker & Gavel*. The five articles in this special issue were generated under my leadership and, thus, my name appears as the guest editor for the issue.

I feel a compulsion—based on the experience of moving this project forward during the past two years—to reiterate a common theme found in our forensic-related journals. Numerous scholars have reinforced the compelling need for forensic professionals to engage in forensic scholarship. The call for more and better forensic research is an oft-repeated theme through the past decades (see Cronn-Mills, 2008; Croucher, 2006; Hample, 1981; Herbeck, 1990; Kay, 1990; Kerber & Cronn-Mills, 2005; Klumpp, 1990; McGlone, 1969; Ryan, 1998; Thomas, 1983; Walwick, 1969).

As I write, my colleagues across the country are busy prepping and submitting papers and panels for the National Communication Association's (NCA) 101st annual convention. Cronn-Mills and Croucher (2013) demonstrated how forensic organizations had more than 50 sessions available for panels and papers during NCA from 2005-2008.

Dozens of paper and panels will be presented in Las Vegas in November 2015. Yet, very few of those papers and panels will ever be submitted to our competitive peer-reviewed forensic journals. Only a small handful people (a larger group, if lucky) will attend most of the NCA convention panels. As scholars, we must take the next step to fully engage in our academic discipline and share the bounty of our scholarship beyond the limiting and constraining walls of a convention. A convention is an excellent place to test an idea, refine a concept, and explore a research framework. Full fruition of the idea/concept/research should be evident in the journals.

Yet most of our forensic-related journals struggle with inadequate submissions. *NFJ* was originally designed to produce two issues a year. Yet a review of the journal publication list at <http://www.nationalforensics.org/research/nfa-journal> demonstrates a struggle to meet the threshold. Many years *NFJ* has only produced one spring/fall issue. As I write in spring 2015, the latest issue of *NFJ* is volume 32, spring 2014. *S&G* has faced similar frustrations to *NFJ*. *S&G* is designed to privilege forensic research, yet the vast majority of the articles come from the other areas within the communication discipline.

A journal editor is only as good the manuscripts submitted to the journal. The editors of the *National Forensic Journal*, *Speaker & Gavel*, *Argumentation & Advocacy*, *The Forensic*, and other journals welcome and implore authors to submit. I urge forensic scholars to accept the opportunity and fully engage all dimensions of forensics—tournaments, conventions, and publications.

Thus, I return to the five articles composing the special issue. The five articles constitute the efforts of six dedicated forensic professionals to share their research, insight and wisdom with their colleagues.

I hope you enjoy the five articles featured in the special issue and put the experience, research, hard work and dedication of the authors to good use in your professional forensic endeavors.

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