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Rhetorical Criticism in the Classroom vs. in Competition: A Consideration of the Impact of Context on Student Scholarship

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Abstract

A battle has long waged in forensics between those who would define it as an "educational activity" and those who see it first and foremost as a "competitive game." Others have asserted that this dichotomy is a false one, and responded to the question by conflating the two concepts, arguing that competition automatically produces learning while learning paves the road to success. This paper argues that both of these perspectives are flawed, and asserts instead the image of a continuum of choice which is anchored at one end by "pure competition" and at the other by "pure learning." This view considers both ends of the continuum to be chimerical illusions, "pure constructs" which are (virtually) never really embraced in their absolute forms by coaches and students whose actual behaviors fall somewhere on the wide range of positions running across the center of the continuum – but yet also recognizes the constructs of "competition" and "education" as distinct and meaningfully different influences. Understanding this, it is the responsibility of each forensics programs (and the leaders thereof) to develop, in this age of "educational accountability," student learning objectives which consciously make choices among educational/competitive goals as they fashion for themselves a learning profile which serves the best interests of each individual program, the school it represents, the forensics community, and broader civic cultures. This paper applies these general ideas specifically to the competitive event variously titled "Rhetorical Criticism" or "Communication Analysis." Noting the differences between rhetorical criticism as it is practiced by academic scholars and "Rhetorical Criticism" as it is enacted by student competitors, this paper argues that they diverge from each other in terms of such elements as: (1) the artifacts they study, (2) the chronological order in which the steps of scholarship are pursued (and thus also the basis upon which the rhetorical constructs included in the analysis are selected), and (3) the "weighting" accorded to each of the basic elements of the critical essay/speech. As a result of these points of divergence, it is suggested that the forensics community closely examine and consider modifying the ways in which competitive Rhetorical Criticism is practiced.

General Background
Education and Competition as Philosophic Influences

"Is forensics in essence an educational activity, or a competitive activity?" This is perhaps the most basic and essential question that all of us are ultimately forced to confront when we step back and analyze our activity. The controversy has raged for decades, continues to burn bright, and shows no sign of being resolved anytime soon. As often phrased, the question at hand appears to make the prima facie assumption that education and competition are dichotomous categories, thus forcing forensics practitioners to align themselves with one position *or* the other. Historically, many have defended forensics based on the idea that it is above all else an "educational laboratory" (McBath, 1975; Ulrich, 1984; Whitney, 1997) while others claim that the shibboleth of "education" should be set aside and the reality of "competition" honestly embraced (Burnett, Brand and Meister, 2003). Either way, the dichotomization of education and competition creates a tension-filled reality. Some view education and competition as mutually threatening opponents, at war for the control of the hearts and hands of forensicators. If the competitive paradigm "wins," then ("educators" argue) the activity will become hollow, vapid, ethically vulnerable, and lose any justification it might have for continued support by academic departments and educational funding. On the other hand, if the educational paradigm "wins," then ("competitors" argue), we can expect to see quality decline, mediocrity rewarded, and work ethics lost.

Yet, as many have observed over the years, the original question itself is essentially flawed. Those who challenge this dichotomy as false rightly argue that students learn many things from the experience of competing. Therefore, they say, it is impossible (and needless) to separate the two concepts from each other. Competition inevitably produces learning. Education is an automatic by-product of engagement in the competitive arena. Students who work hard to learn will inevitably experience competitive success. Thus, when we try to separate competition from education, we become an animal feeding on itself, ripping out its own guts in an attempt to separate the inseparable.

Unfortunately, while this stance has much to recommend it, it is itself deeply flawed. By too completely conflating the concepts of "education" and "competition," some seem to imply that detailed discussion of the general topic is not only misguided but also downright unnecessary and perhaps even impossible. The unstated assumption overshadowing this position seems to say: "Since education and competition cannot really be separated from each other, since students learn a lot from competing, let's skip over this whole question and get back to the work of preparing and presenting high-quality products." The impact of simply conflating "educational" and "competitive" goals is clearly expressed by Richardson and Kelly (2008):

> ...competition in speech may reference a variety of activities. The compelling question that demands our attention is at what are we competing? Unfortunately, through the years, the question has been answered with brief event descriptions, minimal rules, educational and enlightening convention panels, and tournament practices that tend to enhance the "playing of the game" while ignoring the pedagogical concerns of forensic ed-

ucators. Athletics exists within the game, which is exactly the way that forensics has been treated. Regardless of what is being taught, the game and the competition, in and of itself, is seen as a worthy endeavor: What wins is good, and what is good, wins. Thus, from a Burkeian (1945) perspective, the forensic drama that ideally features the purpose of education through the agency of competition is upstaged by a drama whose purpose is winning (p. 115)

The dismaying products of this conflation are legion. One of particular concern is the operationalization of forensics as an "insular community...[in which] students are being prepared for the next competition, not for public speaking in natural world contexts" (Richardson and Kelly, 2008, p. 116).

So if education and competition are not dichotomous opponents, but are also not conflatable synonyms, where does that leave us? I will argue that there is real value in viewing them as the end-points on a wide continuum – polar anchors which delimit a widely varying range of intermediate points. While it is possible to imagine "pure competition" and "pure education" as points on a line, it is much easier to imagine practices that lie somewhere between these two pure extremes. Thus, while any given practice is informed to some degree or another by both competition and education, elements of both are usually identifiable. Any given coaching strategy, any given performance choice, any given student's goals, any given program's orientation, can be located somewhere on the continuum. And, of course, both individuals and programs can vary across this range at any given point in time. Student "A" may choose to approach her Impromptu Speeches primarily as a competitor seeking to "win," but approach her Prose Interpretation as a lover of literature who simply wants to "learn more" about how to interpret texts, express her feelings, appreciate the texture of language, and so on. Alternatively, she may devote herself primarily to educational goals while preparing for her first tournament in Rhetorical Criticism, but focus on "winning" in that same event when she prepares for Nationals. Any given person or program may well have a "normative" approach (a tendency to seek educational and/or competitive goals to a certain degree), but norms are nothing but statistical averages that can incorporate wildly diverse responses at any given point in time. Some learning outcomes may be sought in order to simultaneously achieve *both* educational and competitive learning objectives. Other learning outcomes may be connected more narrowly to "purely" competitive vs. "purely" educational objectives.

If we buy into this view of a continuum, what can or should we *do* with it as forensics professionals? In order to attempt an answer to this question, I will begin by noting the basic process by which teachers are encouraged to develop and implement their learning objectives.

Educational Learning Objectives and Learning Outcomes (Overview)

According to classic practice, the first step in the process of developing educational (learning) objectives and the learning outcomes related to them is to note that Bloom's taxonomy of learning highlights the importance of three learning domains: the cognitive, the affective, and the psychomotor. To clarify this discussion, we can hypothetically develop a set of learning modules for an introductory debate course. In relation to the cognitive domain, we might decide that it is important for our students to "understand" (know about) such topics as terminology, organization, research, critical thinking, and case construction. But it is also important to us what our students "feel." Thus, we might develop objectives primarily operative in the affective domain associated with ethics, social relations, self-concept, academic attitude, and staying informed. Finally, due to our concern with psychomotor skills, we might spell out objectives focused on speaking, listening, and argumentation performance. As we develop these various learning (educational) objectives, we might wish to develop objectives which (among other things): (1) teach students general abilities/perspectives considered valuable within the liberal arts and/or professional/technical traditions, (2) teach students general abilities/perspectives considered valuable by one academic field or another (most likely, but not necessarily, the field of speech communication), (3) teach students general abilities/perspectives which we believe will contribute to their roles as citizens, professionals, and/or "members of the human family" in the years to come, and/or (4) teach students general abilities/perspectives which tend to produce competitive success (within the insular community of forensics and/or within broader competitive contexts).

In recent years, the pressure applied to educators at all levels has been to consciously think through, develop, refine, implement, and defend the accomplishment of the educational (learning) objectives they strive to help their students attain. Thus, the necessary first step in the implementation of educational objectives is the conscious act of *identifying* those objectives. Sometimes this is done by a group (an entire department or school system), and sometimes it is done by an individual. In most cases, even when a collection of objectives is designed by a group, individuals are inevitably called on to modify, expand, or select among the group-supported pool of goals. In any case, the process is a *conscious and deliberate* one. It is typical for teachers to reveal to their students at least some of the objectives being sought, often very overtly (perhaps on the first page of a course syllabus, for example). The basic philosophy behind this approach is obvious: we can't get anywhere in particular unless we know where we're trying to go. Educational learning objectives provide us with a road map for the educational journey. By following certain strategies (taking certain routes), and connecting those strategies to other strategies and building them on top of each other, we anticipate our ultimate arrival at a particular "place" (goal).

Thus we arrive back at our original question: in developing the philosophies of the programs we lead, in guiding our students on their forensics journeys, should we select educational learning objectives which frame our activity as "competition" or "education?" I would argue that, if we wish to be responsible members of our profession, we cannot escape acting on several levels. First, we must make some conscious choices. We should not ignore the ideological tension which exists here, and we should not just "go along with the crowd" and "play the game" in a non-theoretical way. We cannot avoid committing ourselves to a set of values (objectives). If we ignore the responsibility to choose, we will have chosen by default. We will, with careless and unthinking abandon, have opted for the (often unstated and unidentified) learning objectives which underlie current forensics practices – objectives chosen by who-knows-who and implemented by unclear means in order to achieve unidentified outcomes. As Larry Schnoor is famous for saying, each forensics program has the freedom to choose its own course. And with freedom comes responsibility. We can do what everybody else does, or we can strike out on our own path. But ultimately, we will (consciously or unconsciously) make a choice of *some* path. Thus, my first claim is that the path we take should be deliberately selected and not simply a lock-step march to the music of default. Second, as we make these conscious choices, we should take multiple constituencies into account. As employees of educational institutions, we have responsibilities (whether we like it or not) to multiple masters: our students, our academic discipline, our departments, our administrators, our schools, our society/culture, and our world. We must think about who and what will be "best served" by the objectives we choose to pursue. These choices often will be very difficult ones, because what is "best" for one of the groups we serve may not be "best" for another of them. As the leaders of our programs, we must be aware of the eyes that are watching us, the expectations they have for us, and the responsibilities we have to them. Third, we must recognize and respect the difference between "program-based" and "circuit-endorsed" objectives. It is true that each of us heads a particular program with its own particular needs and its own right to make its own choices. It is also true that each of our programs operates as a member of community – a community in which the choices of any one program influence and delimit the opportunities available to other programs. Fourth, we must recognize that we can and are choosing between (theoretically) purely competitive, (theoretically) purely educational, and (practically) education/competition-mingling goals. We must recognize that our choices have consequences, and be ready to explain to ourselves, our community, our students, our departments, our administrators, and our world what choices we are making and why.

Specific Application
Scholarly vs. Competitive Communication Analysis

One of the many arenas in which we can see the philosophical struggles noted above being played out is our community's approach to the teaching and evaluation of the event variously labeled "Communication Analysis" or "Rhetorical Criticism." This event is often held up as an example of forensics at its theoretical best. Students are introduced to core concepts in our (arguably) home discipline of rhetoric/communication, asked to think like scholars, and told that the work they do here will serve them well if they choose to go on to graduate school. The general image of this event is that it is particularly challenging to the intellectual acumen of competitors and judges alike, and at times we may think of it as perhaps the most "scholarly" of all public address events. One primary justification often mentioned for the inclusion of Rhetorical Criticism (Communication Analysis) within the pantheon of forensics events argues that contest rhetorical criticism is intended to teach students about the nature and function of the scholarly endeavor of rhetorical criticism.

But does it really? Does Communication Analysis as practiced on the forensics circuit truly reflect the way rhetorical scholars pursue their work? While it would certainly be possible to identify many ways in which competitive and scholarly criticisms reflect each other, it is also apparent that some basic and essential differences distinguish the two styles from each other. I will argue that the analytic frameworks that are currently favored in the event are inconsistent with the scholarly criticisms of the communication discipline. While far from constituting an exhaustive list of the distinctions which divide these styles, at least three key points of separation deserve to be noted. The observations here build on those offered in a previous essay which I presented at the 2008 National Developmental Conference on Individual Events, and thus some issues which are examined in some detail there are touched on more lightly here. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to the two approaches to writing communication analyses as "the forensics style" and "the scholarly style." These labels do <u>not</u> intend to suggest that the "forensics style" is completely devoid of scholarly work, or that forensics students are not "scholars" in a very real sense (because in many respects, they certainly are).

Point of Distinction #1: Type of Topic Selected for Study
A clear contrast exists between the type of rhetorical artifacts being examined by forensics competitors and publishing scholars. The artifacts studied in our published literature vary widely in type. In comparison to the artifacts which tend to be examined by forensics competitors, however, the artifacts considered in our professional journals are relatively more likely to consider: (1) older artifacts (there is no expectation that published essays must consider artifacts currently "in the news" – in fact, the artifacts examined in our journals are often decades or centuries old), (2) acts of rhetoric drawn from the realm of politics, and (3) broad rhetorical movements. Other points of difference could also be noted, but these three serve as a starting point for discussion. Meanwhile, as Andy Billings noted a few years ago in a paper he presented at NCA, successful forensics competitors tend to choose "sexy topics." The prevalence of online artifacts, contemporary artifacts, "unusual and striking artifacts that the average person probably has not heard of," and so on is apparent to judges who frequently adjudicate rounds

of Communication Analysis. While I cannot document this claim, it is my sense that forensic rounds are disproportionately more likely to consider rhetorical artifacts which are in essence the ephemera of pop culture (and less likely to examine the major rhetorical acts which receive wide media coverage). As judges of the event, how many times lately have we heard a previously unheard of website examined? In contrast, how many times have we heard a major speech by President Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton analyzed?

As a result, forensic students are being pushed to look at ephemera more than at topics possessing long-term significance, to look at topics that are relatively narrow (a single artifact) rather than comparatively broad (a movement or multiple related artifacts) in nature, and to select artifacts tailored to appeal to jaded audiences/judges who too often find Rhetorical Criticism to be a comparatively difficult or boring event rather than reach out to a scholarly audience who wants to see big principles in action. Granted, this oversimplifies the situation and "paints with a broad brush" a diverse collection of forensics adjudicators (many of whom do not fit the preceding profile at all). But on the whole, the types of artifacts selected by scholars vs. competitors – and the differences in the challenges and opportunities that essay writers in each arena consequently face when asked to dissect the artifacts they have selected – clearly separate the scholarly and competitive venues.

Point of Distinction #2
The Order in Which the Steps of the Work are Conducted (and the Consequent Process by which the Rhetorical Constructs to be Studied are Selected)
As I have previously noted (Paine, 2008), the chronological order in which work done in the scholarly style proceeds markedly differs from the step-by-step ordering used in the forensics style. As outlined by Foss (1996), rhetorical scholars follow this sequence:

(1) *formulate a research question and select an artifact* (either may appear first, or they may appear simultaneously).

(2) *select a unit [or units] of analysis.* As explained by Foss, here "the critic must decide on the aspects of the artifact to which to attend in order to answer the research question. The critic cannot possibly examine all of the rhetorical features of any artifact, so a unit of analysis on which to focus must be selected (p. 15)." Note that the term "unit of analysis" is **not** synonymous with the term "rhetorical method." A "rhetorical method" is a broad perspective toward criticism. Feminism, cluster criticism and genre criticism are examples of "methods." Meanwhile, a "unit of analysis" is a particular rhetorical construct such as word choice, alliteration, constraints, situational details, and so on. Critics pursuing any given method may be relatively more likely to study some units of analysis than they are others, but the units of analysis which can be studied under any given method constitute a "pool of possibilities" rather than a narrow and prescriptive "list of requirements." Meanwhile, any given unit of analysis may be of interest to scholars approaching arti-

facts through muliple methods. For example, both feminist criticism and narrative criticism might be interested in examining the "stock character" known as "the damsel in distress." Foss goes on to explain that "[i]n some cases, more than one unit of analysis is needed to allow a research question to be answered. ....Many different   kinds of units may seem to be appropriate and useful...rhetorical theory provides an infinite number of constructs that may function as units of analysis (p. 15)." According to Foss, it is often the case that the units of analysis which the scholar finds most interesting have not previously been noted by other researchers, and/or connected to each other within the perspective of any extant method. Foss explains that "[i]n such cases, the critic needs to generate or create units of analysis – ones not found in formal methods of criticism....This kind of criticism is *generative* in that the critic generates units of analysis rather than selecting them from previously developed, formal methods of criticism (pp. 15, 483-484)."

Ott (1998) likewise highlights the distinction between rhetorical "methods" and what he calls "controlling terms" or "rhetorical tenets" (p. 62). Like Foss, he emphasizes that the selection of a general method of approach does **not** "lock the scholar into" the use of a narrowly prescribed list of tenets (units of analysis). As he notes, "methods are unified, not by a set of narrow rhetorical tenets, but by a general outlook...All of these methods exist, not as a narrow set of controlling terms, but as a general perspective on discourse...there is no single, prescribed way to do feminist [or any other methodological type] of criticism (p. 62)."

(3) *analyze the artifact.*

(4) *write the critical essay*. According to Foss, this essay "should include five major components: (1) an introduction; (2) description of the artifact and its context; (3) description of the unit of analysis; (4) report of the findings of the analysis.

(5) Discussion of the contribution the analysis makes to answering the research question.

Our immediate interest is with the ordering of the first two steps. As described above, scholarly research begins with the critic's absolute freedom to formulate a research question. This question may be provoked by intriguing aspects of a particular artifact, or arise separate from the consideration of such an artifact, but in any case the critic is free to ask any question she/he wishes. After this, the critic then decides how this question can best be answered. He/she chooses a rhetorical method and/or individual theoretical constructs which appear useful. Crucially, the choice of a method does not force the critic to use a delimited "list" of constructs. Nor does the selection of a viable set of constructs compel the critic to select an existing "method." Indeed, the critic retains immense freedom to shape their own "version" of a method's approach or to develop a new "method" of their own.

Meanwhile, forensics students proceed along a somewhat different path. This may be described as:

(1) *select a rhetorical artifact.*

(2) *discover a scholarly work (article, book, or paper) which has previously analyzed a relatively similar type of artifact.* Note that steps one and two are potentially reversible.

(3) *read the scholarly work in order to identify the list of individual constructs which the scholar used to dissect the rhetorical artifact they were interested in.*

(4) *look for exactly this set of rhetorical constructs in the rhetorical artifact the student has selected*

(5) *write up the speech.*

Somewhere along the way, following contemporary practice, the student will have to create a "research question." However, this step may potentially arise at any point in the process. Because the student is locked into using the rhetorical constructs selected by the original author, the student's choice of a research question is narrowly proscribed. Because it must be a question which the previously-selected constructs can "answer," the student's research question is likely to be the same as (or highly similar to) the research question posed by the original scholar in their original work. The more the forensics student diverges from the original scholar's question, the more likely it is that the list of constructs examined will prove to be unable to adequately "answer" the "new" question.

Clearly, then, the scholarly style differs significantly from the forensics style. Scholars are free to ask any research question they choose. Forensics students are essentially compelled to duplicate the questions asked by a previous scholar. Scholars are free to choose from among a vast array of units of analysis (theoretical constructs), while forensics students are limited to the use of constructs chosen by others. Scholars are obligated to choose constructs which, in their judgment, ideally unlock the mysteries of a particular artifact. Forensics students are obligated to apply to a new artifact the list of constructs used to unlock a somehow "similar" but yet obviously "different" artifact. Scholars are free to create new "methods" whenever they choose. Forensics students are generally expected to demonstrate that they are using a method whose credibility is "certified" by its previous use in publication by an established scholar.

The impact of this on the learning objectives which can be pursued by forensics students seems fairly obvious. Since the challenges they can face are severely delimited compared to those available to other scholars, so too the learning objectives they can seek to pursue are delimited. Constrained in the areas of creativity and original thought, forensics students often find themselves doing "cookie cutter criticism." While there are undoubtedly many learning ob-

jectives being pursued by forensics students, these objectives *do not* and *cannot* fully parallel the types of learning objectives which can be pursued by rhetorical scholars in other contexts. In an insidious way, forensics students may in fact be learning misinformation. Confusion concerning the meaning of the technical term "rhetorical method" is one point of concern. Another is the fact that forensics short-circuits the learning process by denying students the opportunity (and the obligation) to either ask genuine and original research questions or conceptualize, consider, and sort through vast arrays of "units of analysis" as options in relation to any given "method."

Point of Distinction #3
Weighting of Essay/Speech Components
As noted above, Foss (1996) identifies five major components which should be included in an essay of criticism: "(1) an introduction; (2) description of the artifact and its context; (3) description of the unit of analysis; (4) report of the findings of the analysis; and (5) discussion of the contribution the analysis makes to answering the research question (p. 16)." However, nothing that Foss says asserts or even implies that an essentially equal amount of time or attention should be devoted to each of these components. In fact, an examination of the "sample student essays" she includes in her book instead demonstrates that she does not expect a "balanced time allocation" in essays of criticism written by undergraduate students. This lack of balance is similarly evident in the essays published in our field's scholarly journals. A quick examination of published articles immediately reveals that scholars typically spend far more time on Foss' fourth component than they do on any of the other components – and that Foss' fifth component is typically touched on relatively briefly (and/or woven indistinguishably into the fourth component).

The forensics style adheres to a different pattern. Perhaps informed by the typical wisdom which demands that "all main points in a speech should be relatively equal" (have a balanced amount of time allocated to them), the national forensics circuit tends to: (1) skip Foss' second component (or insert it forcibly into either the introduction or the early stages of component three), (2) define Foss' third, fourth and fifth components as "the main points in the speech," and (3) require that an approximately equal amount of time be allocated to these "main points." The impact of this is a radical skewing of the pattern normally found in scholarly articles. The significance of components two and four are severely reduced (in comparison to the approach of the scholarly style), while the importance of component five is massively inflated.

This impacts the work of forensics students in several ways. For example, the prevailing competitive style actively discourages them from conducting detailed analysis of the artifact under component four. In addition to the severe time restrictions already imposed by the dominant 10-minute time limit competitive speeches operate under, the demand that students apply multiple theoretical constructs to their

artifacts within only about two-and-a-quarter minutes of speaking time means that students seldom have time to do more than name a tenet, identify or assert a simple instance of it's appearance in the artifact, and then move on. The "big picture" of what is happening in the artifact at large becomes less important than the need to identify single exemplars. While these examples may or may not be equally important or frequent in the original artifact, the forensics style "levels the playing field" and implies an equality of significance among them. Meanwhile, students are pressured to respond to component five by coming up with apparently new and insightful answers to research questions shaped by the interests of other scholars (as well, in many cases, as methodological and/or rhetorical and/or social implications connected to those answers). Whereas the typical journal article may or may not do any of these things, the forensics competitor is pressured to attempt them. In a convoluted way, the methodological "freedom of choice" granted to scholars <u>prior</u> to the initiation of their analysis is offered to forensics students <u>after they have completed</u> their work. Essentially, when offering methodological conclusions, the competitor may be encouraged to say "here are the units of analysis I would have liked to have used if I had been allowed to create my own version of this 'method' of criticism – I hope somebody else will have the chance to make use of these concepts in the future." Such methodological conclusions assume that the original scholar "missed something" – whereas in fact, the likely scenario is that two different researchers (the original scholar and the forensics student) studying two different artifacts found a reason to consider different units of analysis within a shared approach/method/school-of-criticism.

Again, we find that the learning objectives which can be pursued in the classroom may overlap with but are necessarily not equivalent to those learning objectives which can be pursued in forensics (at least as it is currently normatively practiced). Students working in the two contexts are pursuing divergent paths of learning – and therefore, a simple equivalency between conducting rhetorical criticism in the classroom and on the circuit cannot be assumed.

Learning Objectives and the Criticism of Rhetoric

As part of an online conversation about "new ideas in forensics" (conducted via the IE-L in the summer of 2010), Dave Nelson of Northwest Missouri State University expressed his opinion (in an e-mail dated July 28, 2010) that "[s]tudents are just doing what brings them success which brings up the elephant in the room is this activity about education or winning?" In response, Brendan Kelly of the University of West Florida stated (in an e-mail dated July 28, 2010):

> You raise an important question, although the answer is not one or the other. From my perspective, the question our community must answer is "what are we trying to teach?" What theory or foundations inform pedagogical practice. Are the products of forensics pedagogy aligned with pedagogical goals (rooted in the rhetorical

tradition of the discipline)? At NFA 2010, the membership received a technical report authored by the Committee on Pedagogy (commissioned by the NFA Executive Council in fall 2008)....it attempts to prod the collective conversation past the theme of competition v. education and embrace the realities of the 21st century in higher education. The fact is that forensics pedagogy is a resource intensive mode of teaching...The survival on (sic) this form of pedagogy (or any for that matter) will increasingly be based on proving efficacy and demonstrating "value-added" programmatic outcomes in relationship to institutional assessment."

Kelly stresses in his e-mail that this document absolutely does not end the conversation about this topic. But it does provide us with useful information to consider at this juncture. The introduction to this document notes that:

> For decades the assessment of what constitutes "quality performance" in collegiate forensics has been rooted in a mysterious and unsupported collective conception of unwritten rules and performance practices related to a very narrow and instinctive set of standards. This casual system for documenting the efficacy of teaching practice in collegiate forensics is insufficient to meet the standards and expectations for higher education *assessment* in the 21st century. What was formerly a trend toward considerations of assessment in higher education has become the dominant model demonstrating the relationship between teaching and learning outcomes. This document marks a concerted attempt by the National Forensic Association to move away from assessment standards that reflect the tapered view of a specific community, and toward pedagogical prerogatives fully relevant and strongly tied to the foundations of the Communication discipline (p. 2).

Clearly, this document decisively rejects the idea of forensics as a self-contained or "insular" community. In essence, it contends that the scholarly style and the forensics style (as those terms have been used in this paper) must demonstrate substantial overlap in terms of the educational objectives they pursue. It identifies three "tier one" comprehensive learning objectives that it argues should apply to all forensics events (including, but not only, Communication Analysis).

The first tier one learning objective asserted in the document is "praxis founded in disciplinary principles: comprehensive performance evaluation as 'best practice' in forensics pedagogy (p. 5)." Here, the NFA Committee on Pedagogy argues that "speech and performance critics should guard against the tendency to let any one learning objective – the desire to stay 'in time,' the desire to see students speak 'without notes,' etc. – dominate the judging decision to the exclusion of other important learning objectives (p. 5)."

Next, the committee holds that "the audience must always be taken into account (p. 9)." However, when discussing

this objective, the report notes that a student's ability to demonstrate the accomplishment of this objective is profoundly influenced by the classroom (or real world) vs. tournament context in which she/he performs:

> Unfortunately, the challenge to develop audience analysis skills is severely constrained by the current nature of forensics tournaments, where students are challenged to speak to basically the same amorphously defined audience of professional forensics coaches mixed with widely assorted lay judges week after week. This constraint is made still more daunting by the fact that contest rules generally require public address speeches to be fully researched, composed, and memorized in advance. The ability of students to make on-the-spot audience adjustments mid-presentation is thus somewhat limited. This draws our attention to a consideration of the similarities and differences between "the audience of the moment" (the particular judge or judges in the room) and the larger more extended community or audience who the critic is being asked to represent, and reminds us of the responsibility of adjudicators to prioritize the targeting of audiences-as-groups over the targeting of audiences-as-individuals. This also suggests that tournament organizers and judges can promote the educational needs of students in this area by looking for innovative ways to confront students with diverse audiences (mock or real in nature) (p. 9).

Finally, the third tier one learning objective promoted by the document states that "the specific occasion must always be taken into account." While the speaking situations in which forensics competitors find themselves tend to be repetitive in many ways, each is also typified by unique twists or characteristics. Thus, the Committee on Pedagogy argues that "a demonstration of a speaker's consideration of occasion must be reflected in all performance choices (topic choice, physical and vocal performance variables, etc.).

Going beyond these three general "tier one" learning objectives, the NFA committee's report also offers nine learning objectives linked specifically to the realm of public address. These learning objectives consider: (1) audience analysis, (2) analysis of the occasion, (3) topic selection, (4) research, (5) organization, (6) language (style), (7) vocal delivery, (8) physical delivery, and (9) memorization (pp. 12-19).

To date, the NFA has not yet developed or adopted a set of learning objectives uniquely specific to Communication Analysis itself. The ideas considered previously in this paper suggest that any attempt to develop such learning objectives will necessarily prove to be time-consuming, difficult, and controversial. The organization's avowed intention to "move away from assessment standards that reflect the tapered view of a specific community, and toward pedagogical prerogatives fully relevant and strongly tied to the foundations of the Communication discipline" provide the trigger to this struggle. To date, the forensics community appears to be attempting a delicate theoretical juggling act. We view ourselves as "grounded in communication" – but also

consider ourselves to be a "unique form" of communication. "Rules" and "expectations" that apply in other contexts simply do not apply in the forensics world – and vice versa. For example, the forensics community expects Communication Analysis speeches to stay strictly within a 10-minute time limit. While classroom speeches do typically impose time limits on speakers, the exact amount of available time varies, and relatively few "speech classes" expect students to "perform" rhetorical criticisms aloud. More typically, classroom students write out their rhetorical criticisms, as do advanced scholars who attempt to get their work published. These written essays, if read aloud, would consume <u>far</u> more than ten minutes of reading time. Meanwhile, competitive speeches are expected to be memorized word-for-word. As others have noted, this often causes classroom students to find forensic speeches stilted and artificial when they watch them on tape. When rhetorical criticisms are written on paper, of course, the whole issue of "memorization" evaporates. Thus, when it comes to the category of Communication Analysis (Rhetorical Criticism) specifically, it will not prove to be easy to decide which learning objectives to pursue. As we attempt to be "realistic" about what can and cannot be done in this venue, as we attempt to establish clear and shared learning objectives that yet allow adequate room for individual and programmatic diversity, we will face substantial challenges.

For the present, the current paper offers several suggestions.

First, we must accept the fact that the classroom and the competition room are indeed related and yet distinct performance venues. Whenever possible, we should develop learning objectives that are the same as those we might pursue in the general communication classroom. Beyond such objectives, we should also develop learning objectives which take advantage of the unique learning environment provided by forensics tournaments. At no time should we develop or enact learning objectives which run counter to essential tenets or foundational principles of our (historic) home discipline. For example, we should never develop learning objectives which violate codes of ethics generally accepted by the field of communication. Finally, we need to consider developing objectives aimed to serve the needs of the other primary constituencies we are responsible to – our schools, our cultures, our world, and so on.

Second, recognizing that competition and education are interwoven constructs which interact along a continuum, we should develop learning objectives only after carefully considering the educational "vs." competitive components of those objectives. In general terms, I will argue that objectives which tend toward the "educational" side of the continuum should be heavily preferred over those which edge toward the "competitive" pole. A much fuller discussion of our role as educators vs. "coaches" is relevant at this point.

Third, we must take advantage of the opportunity the development of these objectives will offer us in terms of review-

ing, reconceptualizing, and redesigning our approach to competitive Communication Analysis. We need to spell out the "unwritten rules" we play by and decide which of those rules are viable and desirable – which of those expectations further the cause of effective pedagogy – and which do not. For example, as I have argued elsewhere (Paine, 2008), I am convinced that we must eliminate the use of research questions in this event. As noted in the present paper, issues related to such concerns as topic selection patterns, time allocation, the emphasis on and the types of "conclusions" expected, and so on all need to be deliberately examined.

Much work remains to be done. And at this juncture in the history of American education, we must accept the fact that this work can no longer be avoided. In a time of shrinking budgets and increasingly insistent calls for "accountability," we must develop clear connections between what we "do" as a community and what we therefore have the right to say our students "learn." We are fully capable of pursuing these questions. And what is more, we *should* do so in order to view ourselves as fully responsible educators.

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