
TRAINING FORENSIC GRADUATE ASSISTANTS:
A DEVELOPMENT COURSE

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Possibly one of the greatest resources an individual events program can have is a graduate assistant. In addition to serving the team in a coaching capacity, an assistantship provides a training ground for future forensic educators. In order to make the graduate experience worthwhile and educational, proper training is required. In 1974, the National developmental conference on Forensics noted the importance of providing training for forensics scholars" (McBath 38). However, as noted in a 1986 SCA convention paper presented by Jeffrey Brand and Judy DeBoer, little has been done to fulfill this need (Brand and DeBoer 1). Studies which have been offered usually focus on a specific program or practice at a given university. While this is necessary and offers insight into various techniques, it fails to create a program which can be effectively implemented in some fashion by most universities. By offering a structured course for forensic graduate assistants, a more rounded understanding of forensics and coaching can be achieved. Creating such a Plan, therefore, is the focus of this study.

The importance of effective educational programs is noted in all areas of training. An article entitled "How Do Your Trainers Grow" printed in the June, 1980 edition of the Training and Development Journal notes that effective training programs combine both on the job training and structured informational sessions. This allows trainees, in this case graduate assistants, to benefit from a formal class while gaining valuable first hand experience. Not only does such a class help the assistant become familiar with the "world of forensics" from a coaching point of view, studies show that such programs

help make the transition from "student" to "teacher" an easier one (Andrews 259).

Given this information, we have created a course which is geared towards helping the forensic graduate assistant. The focus of the course is the role of the individual events assistant; however, changes can be made to adapt to an assistant who helps with a debate or combined forensics program. A suggested course outline is offered, as well as specific information and activities pertaining to the basic areas of study within the course. Following this, further suggestions and considerations are offered.

SUGGESTED SYLLABUS FOR INDIVIDUAL EVENTS CLASS

Week 1

1:1 Introductions

General Overview of Course

1:2 Goals Considered

1) Team

2) Individual/Year Projects for Team

1) Discussion of the Nature of the Various Projects

2) Assignments

1:3 Understanding the School's Program

1) History

2) Student Population

3) Affiliation

4) Rules, Regulations and Expectations

a) coaches

b) students

Week 2

2:1 Role Conflict

1) General Discussion

2) Types

3) Sharing Session

2:2 Problems of Role Conflict

1) Student/Coach

2) Competitor/Coach

3) Competitor/Judge

4) Teacher/Graduate Student

5) Coach/Friend

2:3 Solutions for Problems with Role Conflict

1) Generate Solutions

2) Plans for Implementing Solutions

Week 3

1:1,2 & 3 Application and Extension Activities

Week 4

4:1 Coaching

1) General Discussion

2) Coaching Styles

3) Sharing Session

4:2 Problems Encountered with Coaching

1) Time Management

2) Personality Clash

3) Objectivity

4) Staff Differences

5) Discipline

6) Motivation and Teambuilding

4:3 Solutions for Coaching Problems

1) Handling Different Situations

2) Developing a Coaching Style

3) Sharing Session

Week 5

5:1, 2 & 3 Application and Extension Activities

Week 6

6:1 Administration Considerations

1) General Overview

2) Responsibilities

3) Recruiting

6:2 Financial Tasks

1) Acquiring Funds

a) University

b) Alumni

c) Fundraising Projects

d) Corporate

2) Managing the Budget

3) Scholarships and other funding concerns

6:3 Tournament Travel Management

1) Going to a Tournament

a) paperwork

b) lodging considerations

c) transportation

Week 7-8

7:1 Running a Tournament

1) Background Preparation

2) Intermediate Preparation

3) Final Preparation

7:2 Continuation of Running a Tournament

7:3 - 8:3 Create Tournament (Actual or Mock)

Week 9

9:1 Judging

- 1) General overview
- 2) Impartiality and Objectivity

9:2 Establishing Criteria

- 1) Interpretation Events
- 2) Public Address Events
- 3) Limited Preparation Events

4) Novice vs. Varsity

5) Preliminary rounds vs. Elimination Rounds

9:3 Constructive Criticism

- 1) Written
- 2) Verbal

Week 10

10:1,2 & 3 Application and Extension Activities

Week 11

11:1 Ethics and Philosophies

- 1) Overview
- 2) Considerations
- 3) Establishing a National Ethical Code for Individual Events

11:2 Ethics

1) Behavioral

a) coaches

b) students

2) Discipline

11:3 Philosophy

1) Opinions

2) Sharing Session

Week 12

12: 1,2 & 3 Application and Extension Activities

Weeks 13-15

13 - 15 This period can be spent in a variety of ways

- 1) Further Developing any of the Previously Discussed Areas
- 2) Work on Individual Projects
- 3) Evaluation of actual coaching sessions
- 4) Work on a Final class project or presentation

INTRODUCTION TO COURSE

This first week should be spent familiarizing the students with the course. In addition to addressing such items as grading system, class attendance policy etc... goals and team projects must be considered. Students should first consider their individual goals for the year. This should include academic goals, personal goals and team goals. Once this is accomplished, the staff should

collectively consider goals for the team. Of course, the team members themselves must be allowed to give input for the team goals; however, the staff must have goals that they themselves work towards. Once these goals have been identified, a typed list of them should be made available to each staff member. They should be re-considered throughout the course as well as through out the year.

In addition to goal setting, the first week of the course can be used to assign team projects. This may include such things as public relations, fund raisers, recruiting, and coach travel schedule. Once again, deadlines for these projects should be made. Any additional information pertinent to the course or the team should be considered at this time.

ROLE CONFLICT

The transition from undergraduate student to graduate student is one which can be quite difficult for any individual continuing his or her education upon completion of a bachelor's degree. The graduate assistant may have an even more difficult time with this transition because s/he must perform on a student level as well as a professional level. In addition to this change the forensic assistant must deal with the transition from competitor to coach and judge. For these reasons, we felt it appropriate to include a section on "Role Conflict." By understanding the various demands and expectations which will be placed on the forensic assistant, he or she will be more prepared to cope with the transition. Addressing role conflicts (coach/competitor, coach/student, student/friend...) enables the students to understand the stress, pressure and the various responsibilities which may at times become overwhelming. This in turn can help not only the student him/herself, but also help the team members.

There are several activities which can be used to extend this section on role conflict. One which works particularly well is "mock" role reversals. Students in the class can act out various scenarios in which role conflict would occur. Examples of this include a unrehearsed team member demanding time from an assistant who has a ten page paper on Aristotle due the next morning, or a faculty member who regards the assistant as "just another student" who wants to get out of class when in actuality he or she must travel with the team to an out of state meet. Of course, a wide variety of scenarios can be developed. After they are "performed," comments and suggestions about how the situation was handled can be discussed. Another activity which may be used to further enhance this section is having the students create a tentative time schedule. This schedule would allow for coaching time, study time, class time, "other forensic" time, teaching time, free time, and other activities in which the assistant may be involved. This can serve as a "plan" to help organize valuable time.

COACHING

The reasons for including this as a section in the course are quite straight forward. In order to run a successful and competitive program, strong coaching skills are imperative. Coaches of individual events have many responsibilities. Among those included are "maximizing the learning experience, serving as an effective advisor, and developing in the students a sense of fairness and professionalism" (Faules, Rieke and Rhodes 75). To develop understanding of these responsibilities, the following areas have been included for discussion: time management, personality clash, objectivity, staff differences, discipline, motivation and team building.

It is important that the student realize he or she must develop his/her own coaching style. These areas discussed can stimulate the student into determining his/her own style. Inclusion of additional material greatly depends on the students enrolled in the class and the amount of experience each has previously had with coaching.

There are several activities which can help develop coaching skills. One activity which might prove useful early on in the coaching experience is "mock coaching" sessions. This would require participants in the class role-playing students and coaches in practice sessions. Students may enact a wide variety of personalities. Some suggestions are: the "difficult" student, the "social" student, the reticent student or the student who does not want any negative criticism. The coaches can then work with these "students" in front of the rest of the class as if they were involved in a normal practice session. After this, class members can offer critical comments and suggestions. Another activity which can be incorporated is evaluation of an actual coaching session. Either the instructor or another member from the class can serve as the evaluator. In order make sure the session is run as a normal session, the evaluator can tell the student being coached that he is merely observing. After the session is over, an evaluation can follow. These activities will allow "rookie" coaches to get practical experience as well as beneficial criticism.

ADMINISTRATION

Perhaps one of the most important and least enjoyable aspects of running a forensics program is the administration of the program. The effectiveness and success of a program is a direct result of the administrative decisions that are made and how well a coach fulfills the capacity of "planner, organizer, financier, salesperson, and manager" (Klopf 11). Because the course is designed to train graduate assistants to become forensic educators, a section of the training course must be devoted to dealing with administrative concerns. We have divided this section into four topic areas for discussion: a general overview of administrative responsibilities (including a discussion of recruiting techniques and practices), financial planning and recording, tournament management, and running a tournament.

In order to become better forensic educators, graduate assistants must un-

derstand the vital role that administrative concerns play within the program. Graduate students should be made aware of how the team acquires funds from not only the college or university and from student associations, but from alumni and corporate donations. Graduate students should be given experience in fundraising activities. Studying past budgets, preparing sample budgets, analyzing and performing recruiting techniques, and discussing the distribution of scholarship money are all relevant topics and activities.

In addition, graduate assistants should be introduced and have a working knowledge of the individual school's hierarchy and should be taught how to properly execute the mandatory paperwork required for tournaments, traveling, lodging, transportation, etc... An ideal exercise to achieve this goal would be to implement the "director for a week" plan. With this plan, each student would fill the director's role in the planning, preparation, and paperwork for and the actual traveling to a given tournament. The student would be responsible for hotel reservations, transportation to and from the tournament, traveling considerations for students, and budgeting for the tournament. Also, that student should make any administrative decisions that arise during his/her tenure as "director," with input from the director and coaching staff. These decisions can be as mundane as setting a leaving time to deciding which students are eligible to attend a tournament. In this way, the student gets first-hand experience at being an active director.

Another beneficial activity to enhance these skills would be to have the students prepare either a mock or actual tournament. The director can guide the students through all the stages of tournament preparation from acquiring facilities to sending invitations to hospitality to scheduling the tournament to running the tabulation room. Again, students have the benefit of hands-on experience that will be invaluable when the student is director of his/her own program. Additionally, the program can benefit from such an activity because the preparatory work for the program's own tournament is completed and the students who will make up the tournament staff have gained some experience.

JUDGING

As an individual events assistant, graduate students will often be required to travel with the team and serve as a tournament judge. Because judging is a tremendous responsibility, we have included it as an area to be addressed in the course. One very important aspect of this section is the topic of objectivity. In order to develop this topic, articles from various speech communication journals may be used (see Appendix A).

To help the students feel more secure with their judging capabilities, criteria for the various events may be discussed. In addition to this, guidelines for judging novice and varsity competitors and preliminary and elimination rounds can be considered. It is not expected or recommended that the class come up with a set of "rules" for judging. However, discussion of these topics

will help the students identify their personal judging standards.

One activity which may be particularly useful is evaluation of actual speeches. In order to do this, tapes from the National Forensic Association final rounds may be used. After viewing the tapes, students can "rank" the speeches and support their decisions. Of course, there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. However, each student should be able to identify reasons why they ranked the speeches in the order he or she did. Another activity which may be helpful is evaluation and criticism of ballots. Students can note the differences between useful and irrelevant comments. This may help students when they are required to fill out their own evaluations. In addition to this, class participants should become familiar with various studies regarding judging and evaluations.

PHILOSOPHIES AND ETHICS

All activities are derived from a theoretical or philosophical basis. Decisions regarding these activities, whether educational, administrative, or competitive stem from what one considers to be vital to the development of the activity. Since forensics teaches competitors how to communicate effectively, coherently, logically, and credibly, future forensic educators must be able to clearly articulate a philosophy of forensics. How and what competitors learn is a direct result of how s/he was taught by his/her coach; and how a coach teaches is dependent primarily upon his/her philosophy. Thus, it is of vital importance for a complete education of graduate assistants to include philosophical considerations.

In addition to philosophical concerns, ethics must also be addressed. The need for ethical standards in forensics is a highly debated topic at present. It is of paramount importance that graduate assistants be made aware of not only the common ethical practices of the individual program, but of ethical practices that currently exist in the forensic community.

Attempting to determine what constitutes ethical and unethical behavior is at best difficult. The Second Developmental Conference on Forensics recognized that ethical behavior should be based on and should promote the educational goals of the activity (Parsons 14). Therefore, in order for a graduate assistant to develop into an ethically aware and concerned forensics educator, s/he must fully understand the ethical dilemma the community faces and s/he must understand his or her own role in that dilemma.

The purpose of these discussions is to enhance the graduate assistant's critical thinking and writing skills in relation to the activity of forensics. We suggest that the application and extension exercise in this topic area be geared toward the writing of a paper. The paper should clearly state the individual's philosophy of forensics and should address such topics as the role forensics plays within the department and the university as well as within the discipline of speech communication, the ethical and moral choices of students and

coaches and how those choices affect the program, how an individual coach's philosophy affects the way in which the program is run, and how a personal code of ethics within the forensics activity operates.

As a supplement to the training course we have previously outlined, we have prepared a bibliography of potential course materials that may enhance the understanding of the topic areas (see Appendix A). We also suggest that some other courses be taken by the graduate assistant in order to further develop his/her understanding of the issues the course addresses. These classes are usually core courses in most master's programs, but by looking at them from a forensics standpoint, additional benefits can be derived. Courses in Interpersonal and Small Group communication will enhance the student's understanding of group and dyadic communication and can allow the student to study role conflict from a theorist's view. Courses in persuasion, Rhetorical Criticism, and Political Rhetoric will provide a sound theoretical background for writing, coaching, and judging public address events and to some extent limited preparation events. We also recommend a course in Oral Interpretation. A course such as this provides the graduate assistant with the proper perspective in the theories of drama and literary interpretation. Since judging is highly subjective, a background such as this will provide a "rookie" judge with a little more confidence.

A FINAL CONSIDERATION

Granted, our training course is not for every forensics program that has graduate assistants. Time restrictions, faculty availability and budgetary restraints may prevent your program from implementing our course as outlined. But this training course may be adapted to any college or university with an active forensic and graduate program. Perhaps the course can be offered as an independent or directed study and changed to fit a program that has only one or two graduate assistants. The course could also be opened up to high school forensic educators. If none of these suggestions fit your needs, perhaps portions of this program can be implemented as part of the weekly staff meetings. Whatever your situation may be, it is imperative to the future and growth of the activity that our field's next group of leaders be formally trained to become highly motivated educators.

As Brand and DeBoer pointed out, a forensic coach is a teacher, counselor, and professional, but little is being done to prepare graduate assistants to assume these roles (Brand and DeBoer 2). Coaching forensics is an experience that can be overwhelming at times even to those "seasoned" professionals. Day to day challenges encountered by the forensic educator can be both intellectually rewarding and problematic. In order to deal with such challenges, the forensics community needs leaders who are well-trained, educated, and dedicated to the field. Such leaders could only enhance the scholastic excellence and healthy competitiveness of the forensic activity.

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APPENDIX A

The following bibliography is a compilation of readings which may be used to develop the areas of discussion in the course. Although they are listed in alphabetical order, the symbol preceding each citation denotes which section it is most appropriate for. The key for identifying each is as follows:

/ Overview

* Role Conflict

= Coaching

\$ Administration

+ Judging

> Philosophies and Ethics

~ Other

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