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## Volume 35 - Editor's Note

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## Editor's Note

In our new roles as editors of this journal, we express our gratitude to our immediate predecessors, R. Randolph Richardson and Kathy Brittain Richardson. We begin our journey with the final challenge they issued in their "Editors' Note" in the Spring of 2016. A little over a year ago, they reminded all of us that "as programs face funding challenges across the country and as full-time faculty appointments become less common, it is imperative that we continue to demonstrate that the field of forensics is one integrally tied to teaching, learning and the creation of knowledge." Indeed, the need to demonstrate the value of forensics to the larger academic community (and the world in general) has never been greater. As budget cuts slice ever-closer to the bone, as students are tempted to invest their available time in newly diverse options, and as the value of a college education itself comes under increasing attack, it's crucial that we understand what our activity has to offer. It's not enough to offer programs that are just "fun" or "collect lots of trophies" or "have P.R. value." We need to demonstrate that we have something substantive to offer. We need to understand ourselves, and be able to explain to others, the transformative power of our activity. Doing so can equip us to defend our programs to those who would put them on the sidelines. Doing so can enable us to respond to the call to assess ourselves and demonstrate valuable learning outcomes. Doing so can energize our community by reminding us of why we're doing what we're doing, and why all the hours we invest in forensics are "worth it."

The essays in this journal all contribute to this quest. Karen Morris, the current president of the National Forensic Association, offers a frame for this issue by providing a "State of the Organization" overview. In addition to outlining recent changes, she also highlights some crucial ways in which the organization continues to express its distinctive identity, including its dedication to forensics pedagogy in the hands of forensics educators.

The emphasis on pedagogy is at the heart of our lead article, an outstanding longitudinal study conducted by Rogers, Freeman, and Rennels. As the latest fruit of a research effort begun in 1997, they assess the long-term benefits of participation in debate. In addition to providing a useful and detailed review of the research done by others, they employ the quantitative-research approach to argue that people now fifteen years out of college continue to demonstrate the transformative power of debate in their lives. Their data, which compares debaters to non-debaters, connects participation in debate to higher levels of social responsibility, psychological adjustment, cultural tolerance and understanding, positive moral/ethical commitments, improved professional life and career choices, and long-term benefits to society. This research equips us with statistical support for our oft-asserted claim that forensics really does change lives.

Building on the theme of forensics changing lives, White employs a different research approach (autoethnography) to explore a different set of learning outcomes: the humanistic values associated with participating in Individual Events. In the process of exploring the impact of our activity on the personal growth needs of our students, White argues (among other things) that our activity can help students to learn self-authorship, gain increased self-confidence, and shape the direction of their lives. While in the past forensics researchers have tended to talk about various forms of cognitive learning, White draws our attention to the importance of affective learning as well.

An emphasis on affective learning continues in the exploratory analysis of Young, Henry, and Koch. They explore the relationship between competing in Individual Events and learning emotional competence, and challenge us to find ways to collect more data and do further analysis in order to learn more about this link. Again, pursuing research efforts that query the accuracy of commonly held perceptions is a path we must tread in order to better defend our activity.

We close with an essay by Richardson which is both inspiring and cautionary in its exploration of the role of the forensics educator. Given that our students are engaged in an activity that can and does change their lives, we need to recognize the power of those potential transformations at the same time that we respect the individual integrity and personhood of those students we are helping to transform. As both Spider-Man and the Supreme Court remind us, “with great power comes great responsibility.”

Finally, we also express our great appreciation to Alexander Pabon, formerly a student at North Central College and now a student at the University of Kentucky Law School. Alexander served as the editorial research assistant for this issue of the journal, and we deeply appreciate his painstaking, detail-oriented, and cheerfully completed work.

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