

SPEAK UP!: A QUANTITATIVE EXPLORATION
OF THE LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF
COMPETITIVE FORENSICS

by

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ABSTRACT

Aristotle wrote about three genres of speaking: deliberative, forensic, and epideictic. Drawing on the teaching of Aristotle, the field of forensics was born, focusing on public speaking and debate as competitive events. Forensics is an over-century old activity that has grown with education in mind. This study utilizes quantitative research methods to analyze the long-term impacts of forensics participation. Former competitors completed a total of 381 surveys, answering a range of questions set to gauge the viability of the skills gained through forensics. The research question for this study seeks to identify what the long-term impacts of forensics, if any. The results supported the research question and all three hypotheses: forensics offers an immense amount potentially positive benefits that can impact a student far beyond their competitive eligibility. With ten skills presented in the Likert-type questions, between 83.5%-98.9% of respondents agreed that forensics has benefitted a specific skill set. Only two of these categories, networking and organization, rated below 94% agreement. An independent samples t-test exposed that women were more likely to perceive positive impacts on organization than men. A one-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference in perceived research abilities between those who competed in high school *and* college, as compared to high school-only competitors. The evidence of the positive long-term impacts of forensics participation on career success offers a strong justification for the continuation of forensics programs.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

For most of us, from childhood, we are told by parents and teachers of the importance of developing strong communication skills for a variety of reasons regarding schooling and professions. As employers continuously seek personnel with the ability to help their respective companies, they note several areas in which colleges and universities need to increase their focus; “1) written and oral communication, 2) critical thinking and analytical reasoning, 3) the application of knowledge and skills in real-world settings, 4) complex problem-solving and analysis, 5) ethical decision-making, 6) teamwork skills, 7) innovation and creativity, and 8) concepts and developments in science and technology” (Hart Research Associates, 2010, p. 9). All of these attributes, in one way or another, are tied to the communication discipline, whether through coursework or extracurricular activities. The field of communication seeks to develop these skills so that students may find success in various areas.

It is clear that “well-developed communication skills will help you better attain personal, academic, and professional success” (Morreale, Supilee, Fogarty & Mello, 2011, p. 1). Consequently, the purpose of this research is to identify and explore the long-term effects of participation in the extra curricular communication activity of forensics.

The main focus is geared toward former competitors at either the high school or collegiate level that have since moved into a graduate program or the workforce and no longer compete in forensics.

Forensics is an activity that, on many campuses, has become invisible, being replaced by more marketable activities that can gain a university widespread national recognition. Furthermore, it is an activity that prides itself on developing crucial life skills in both high schools and colleges by preparing students to effectively voice their opinions, develop decision-making skills and give them the knowhow to conduct fast paced critical analysis. At this point, acquiring specific skill sets is necessary, “the world is changing rapidly and we as Americans must further develop our critical decision-making and communication skills in order to successfully compete in the expanding global economy” (Luoung, 2012).

The realm of forensics is typically divided into two, debate and individual speaking events. The first field of forensics is debate, which is further divided into several different types and styles, but the overarching theme is the same. Students are given a topic that will address a national or global concern, however many debates are given an open ended prompt that is to be decided by students. This calls on decision-making skills, argumentation, speaking skills and a plethora of other skills that enhance one’s ability to effectively communicate.

The second subfield of forensics, which is the focus of this study, is individual events. This emphasis is further divided into several different events that range from extemporaneous or impromptu speaking to acting, or spoken word, events to original compositions in the form of a public address. There are a plethora of events that are

typically included under individual events but they all have one commonality, they all seek to raise awareness, promote social movement or change, or expose problems within our society that need to be reevaluated. It is this premise that represents the benefits of participation; it encourages students to speak for what they believe in, inspires others to do the same or enacts change and develops crucial social and communicative skills that will benefit students far beyond their days of competition. To put it simply, “there is no better activity that will develop essential academic, professional, and life skills than dedicated involvement in speech and debate” (Luoung, 2012).

Rationale

Fostering the growth and development of essential communication skills is particularly important at a time when individuals are continuously losing touch with the physical world, in favor of the virtual world. This becomes problematic because our youth are not being called upon as much to develop or exercise critical communication skills. Individuals who have competed in forensics at either the high school or collegiate level will point to an array of useful skills they have developed through competition and how those skills help in school or other forensics competitions. Unfortunately, there is some uncertainty when looking at the long-term impacts of competition and how or if those skills translate positively into life beyond competition.

Literature Review

The true value of forensics is slightly difficult for outsiders to see, simply because it is an activity that isn't well known. However, for those who are or have been actively involved, it is clear that, “forensics is an educational activity primarily concerned with using an argumentative perspective in examining problems and communicating with

people. An argumentative perspective on communication involves the study of reason giving by people as justification for acts, beliefs, attitudes and values” (McBath, 1975, p. 11). From this assessment, the educational value and learning outcomes for competitors are clear. Chickering & Gamson (1987) go further claiming that students involved in competition do more than what is called upon in most settings, “They must read, write, discuss, or be engaged in solving problems. Most important, to be actively involved, students must engage in higher-order thinking tasks as analysis, synthesis and evaluation” (p.1). Forensics teaches students to do all of this as building blocks to become a better competitor, student and professional.

Forensics, in general, calls on a specific set of skills such as delivery, confidence, strong public speaking, and many others that can be gained through any one of the events offered. However, being divided into three different types of events, limited preparation, oral interpretation, and public addresses, each demand and foster the growth of a more explicit skill set required to remain competitive.

Turnipseed (2005) describes limited preparation events as “intrinsically difficult” (p. 37). The reason behind this descriptor is clear, students are given a very short amount of time before speaking, are expected to deliver a well thought out, organized speech that adheres to the ethical code of forensics competition. Turnipseed (2005) continues, that the nature of limited preparation events requires that students are quick thinking and decisive. They must understand and interpret the extemporaneous question or impromptu quotation and develop a clear thesis and support these ideas with real world situations or examples in a way that best justifies their line of argumentation while also eloquently delivering the speech in a high-pressured situation (p. 37). These skills may effortlessly

streamline into life beyond competition by giving students the ability to think and speak quickly, identify and analyze problems and/or solutions and deliver clear, organized message. This can be easily identified by someone from the outside looking in, but the translation of skills from oral interpretation and public addresses are much less apparent to the naked eye, yet abundant nonetheless.

Oral interpretation events have faced much criticism from forensics community over the past couple of decades for a variety of reasons, but the proficiencies gained from involvement in this style of performance highly undervalued.

The oral performance of literature requires that students understand literary analysis, history, the emotional and intellectual aspects of literature, and effective vocal and physical expression. Students must acquire knowledge of literary form and style while striving to interpret literature with the purpose of enriching the audience's understanding of the human condition. (Orcholski & Cronn-Mills, 2011, p. 174-175).

Perhaps a more succinct explanation would be that oral interpretation is, "the art of eliciting in the mind of a listener the imagistic, intellectual, and emotional potential of a piece of literature through the subtle appropriate use of voice and body" (Holloway, et al., 1982, p. 45). For students, taking someone else's work and creating a performance that becomes visual and relatable to audience members can be a daunting task.

Competitors must be able to comprehend the work of others while allowing others the same level of understanding within ten minutes. This forces students to quickly learn effective physical and verbal cues for different situations and, maybe most importantly, how to simply talk to a group of people to get something across rather than lecturing by

using subtle performative choices made by the competitor that helps their characters to become relatable. It would be safe to say that interpretation events are the most popular, reason being that they are more entertaining, with the exception of After Dinner Speaking. However, the value of interpretation is not limited to its entertainment value. It isn't enough to be the funniest in a round or the most dramatic; oral interpretation is concerned with exposing some of our world's most troubling issues in a way that can be entertaining, representative, relatable and emotionally draining, as such, interpretation events have a lot to offer competitors and audience members alike.

The public address events are very straightforward in terms of the skills that are needed or accrued throughout competition. Students are expected to thoroughly research a topic, decide which arguments for that topic are strongest and write a strong, coherent speech that conveys the intended message. Within public addresses, students are expected to be memorized and be able to clearly deliver the speech. In addition, students are given the opportunity to find something that they feel passionately about and construct a message that makes other care about it as well. These events have become rather stagnant, mainly following a three-pronged approach to analyzing the topic that many claim has stifled creativity, but it is still important to note that skills gained through active participation in public address events hold an immense value to those moving into the workforce, as public address events can give competitors an advantage in terms of crafting a strong, coherent message and the ability to convey that message to a group of people.

Forensics, from all organizations that cater to the activity, has expanded with students and their education as the primary focus. Brand (1998) explains that, "forensics

is an activity that has been connected to the mission of colleges and universities, and it has grown and evolved with the student's education in mind" (p. 1). As a tool used to educate students on how to effectively communicate in a variety of situations, forensics has been instrumental in the development of crucial skills. For students looking toward furthering their education beyond undergraduate work Behnke, Sawyer & Goodyear (1993) contend "oral examinations can provide important and useful information about a student's level of knowledge difficult to obtain through other testing modes" (p. 88). Oral communication, especially as a recital of knowledge is a skill gained through participation in forensics whether it be from exercising skills that require students to be able to effectively communicate or the necessity of students understanding of the material on which they are speaking. The very nature of the activity works to develop these skills regardless of the platform as "students are able to practice public speaking regardless of how much time is spent outside of the tournaments practicing" (Stenger, 1999, p. 14).

Frank (1997) argues that forensics, whether debate or individual events, holds several purposes that should coincide with the goals set forth by colleges and universities. In his examination of the direction of forensics, Frank (1997) holds that of the multiple goals of forensics, at the forefront is the activity's ability to prepare students, most notably, to become responsible citizens through the information gained and the tools to utilize that information as it "should teach informed advocacy" (p. 13). This is of particular importance in today's society that is enriched with social movements through a variety of platforms. Having the skillset that is required to actively seek change through informed advocacy is as important as ever.

Experiential Learning

In order for administrators to understand the true educational depth of forensics, it is imperative to understand the unique educational experiences that occur on a daily or weekly basis within the forensics community. Sellnow (1994) provides a great framework for understanding experiential learning within forensics. She provides three aspects where experiential learning is at its highest in forensics; connecting theoretical knowledge to real-life experiences, valuing and fostering diverse “ways of knowing”, and encouraging life-long learning. All three of these have the same overarching theme; it isn’t enough to remain in the confines of a classroom, experiential education calls on the students’ comprehension of different theoretical perspectives and diverse cultural norms but experiential education can only truly exist if opportunities are presented in real world situations. The last of Sellnow’s (1994) tenets deserves special mention. Encouraging life-long learning is, in short, giving students the tools or desire to educate themselves, “the primary role of education is to help students learn how to learn” (p. 8). It is important that students have questions about the world around them and even more important that they are asked. Learning in the classroom does give students the comprehension of ideas, but being placed in a real world situation gives students the ability to learn how these concepts work in real-time rather than relying on hypothetical situations.

Walker (2011) furthers this idea by explaining the usefulness of experiential learning. He elaborates that the skills called upon from students in the classroom are limited. Meaning, students are expected to memorize, recite or conduct problem solving for hypothetical situations, but the classroom doesn’t facilitate learning how to interact

with others on a variety of levels. Additionally, it is important to note that experiential learning is not limited to the actual time spent on the experience, such as a conversation, but rather, experiential learning is at its peak when students are able to assess the situation and reflect on the events that transpired in order to grow from it and create new ways of overcoming obstacles (p. 8-9).

Discovering the long-term benefits of students' participation in forensics will provide important information that currently is not available. My study seeks to identify those benefits and their impact/

RQ1: What are the long-term impacts of forensics competition?

H₁: Students who have competed in forensics develop and increase important and beneficial communication skills.

H₂: Individuals who have actively participated in forensics activities will have a positive attitude toward the long-term benefits of forensics.

H₃: Participation in forensics provides former competitors and members of the forensics community with adequate preparation for various career fields.

Theoretical Approach

Within the communication discipline, most students are taught how to receive and understand a message through a general model that explains that explains how we encode and decode messages and make meaning out of it. There are also a plethora of communication theories that seek to explain why certain social or behavioral processes take place in order to shed light on human interaction. However, for the purposes of this study, I utilize the action-assembly-theory (AAT) of John O. Greene (2008).

Greene's (2008) action-assembly theory seeks to explain the behavior of individuals, not in certain social settings, but in the mind and consciousness. Greene seeks to unearth the what, how, and why of human behavior and message production, and holds that "our thoughts and overt behaviors are built up out of smaller parts" (p. 27). These smaller parts are what he calls "action features" which are embedded within our memory.

Littlejohn & Foss (2009) illustrate that AAT is rooted in two foundations; procedural records and assembly processes. The mental structures, or procedural records, are explained as "tiny packets of information about what to do", this is where many of the action features are housed (p. 8). The assembly process, also known as the coalition formation, is the process by which similar action features mold together to produce a change in our overt behavior (p. 9). Littlejohn and Foss (2009) use the example of driving a car. While driving, the coalition formation takes place when, "a high-level feature like the abstract notion to turn left meshes with motor-level features for turning the steering wheel and pressing the break pedal" (p. 9). AAT explains that as we are confronted with different task, we learn how to respond to them. We can then call on these memories to understand how to respond to various situations. The action features that we accumulate throughout our lifetime latch onto thoughts that cross our mind and tell our bodies how to respond.

This theory works its way into several areas of life as a forensics competitor. For example, students who compete in impromptu are given a very short amount of time to prepare and deliver a speech. This requires students to enter each tournament with a broad range of examples they could use to help explain their line of analysis. Whenever

students are given a quotation or object that hints at specific theme, they can pull from the examples they have researched or used in the past. These examples used by the students would be the action features. The actual thought processes and lines of analysis within the speech become the assembly process. When one of these examples fits into a specific point, that example becomes an active, working component of a much larger product.

By having these processes firing, your own collective memory becomes the template for your behavior. That is not to harp on the adage of not letting your past define your future, but rather, as Greene (2008) explains, is a way of understanding human creativity (p. 23). Creativity is established because any time a new task or situation presents itself, we often know what do subconsciously.

Whether right or wrong, the mind responds by calling on your collective memory to best help, so each obstacle provides humans with the ability to formulate a unique solution based on memory when needed. This theory is crucial to understanding the long-term impacts of participation forensics as it seeks to uncover how humans interact and behave in certain situation based on their actions that have developed from memory, and forensics is nothing, if not memories.

In forensics, many programs have one question; why? Coaches and students want to, or at least, *should* want to understand why competitors have chosen to do what they do. Why does a student choose oral interpretation over public address, or why is a student performing a certain literary selection or speech topic? The foundation for this question is simple; competitive success and learning outcomes are more likely to occur if those involved have a firm understanding of why they are doing something. The *why* then leads

to the *how*, meaning, once a student finds a reason for doing a particular event, they can focus their practice on how to make that selection speak to others. This is one of the first lessons learned when students join a forensics program because forensics, the community and competition, begins and ends with *why*.

In terms of forensics competition, the action-assembly theory is invaluable as, “one of the great advantages of understanding the processes involved in formulating and producing messages is that we gain insights about how to enhance the quality of our message behavior” (Greene, 2008, p. 26). However, the value of this theory reaches far beyond competition. Former forensicators undoubtedly call upon the skills they gained throughout their days of competition in real world settings such as the work force, continued education and so on.

Methodology

Most research on forensics analyzes a variety of topics from the director’s point of view or the team as a whole. The objective of this research is to expose the long-term impacts of participation in forensics from the former student competitors’ perspective, which is widely neglected. For this study, I employed the use of surveys through Qualtrics for gathering data. The questionnaire includes questions pertaining to the participants’ time competing including the events they were involved in and the skills they gained through their experience. Additionally, questions are asked regarding what the participants have done since graduating and if and/or how their participation in forensics have aided in their endeavors. Participants were initially gathered through convenience sampling via Facebook and email from contacts gathered over 6 years of collegiate forensics involvement and then snowball sampling from there. Participants

must have graduated from college after having actively competed in forensics at the collegiate level.

Because of the nature of the current study in attempting to uncover the long-term impacts of participation in forensics, the surveys used are descriptive. Descriptive surveys help to, “document current conditions and attitudes—that is, to explain what exists at the moment” (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010, p. 185). Additionally, as Wimmer and Dominick (2010) note, pretesting in an important and valuable way to decide, “whether a research instrument is adequately designed” (p. 200).

The length of the survey varied based on participants’ responses, but include no more than 12 items. Questions are asked pertaining to the participants’ experiences throughout their days of competition or involvement in forensics. Questions were derived from numerous studies, however, at the time of creation of the questionnaire, no previous studies have sought the perspectives of former competitors or actively involved non-competitors. Therefore the information regarded in the questions is new in that the survey sought to explore what has previously been unidentified. Although not specifically based on any single prior report, the set of questions presented should provide accurate representation needed for the present study. Not only does it focus on the events they competed in and the skills and attributes they believe they obtained, but also on their program and school as a whole in regards to school type and size, and the organizations their programs competed under. Additionally, the final two questions asked address the participants’ professional lives and the role, if applicable, that forensics had.

Completion of the survey takes no more than 10-15 minutes. Participants could be at risk for uncomfortable feelings due to the process of responding to questions about

their views; however, these are no greater than the risks of every day life, and they are free to exit the survey at any time with no penalty. Thus, there is no liability plan as the risks for participants are no greater than ordinary life. Consent forms were presented before the survey was accessible for completion in order to inform participants of their role in the present study, the risks involved and the purpose of study so that participants may make an informed decision on whether they wanted their responses to be used. The consent form also notified individuals that their participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time.

Chapter One provides an introduction to forensics, a description of some past studies that have contributed to the field, as well as a brief introduction of action-assembly theory. Chapter Two offers a more extensive review of the literature currently available. This section fully explores similar studies as well as documents created by some of the most influential researchers in the field of forensics. Chapter Three focuses further on the methodology used in my study, as well as the measures used for data analysis. Chapter Four reports on the results of the surveys collected. Finally, Chapter Five further discusses the results of the study as a whole and its implications and the limitations of the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the early 1990's, scholars began generating research that redefined forensics as a liberal art. This chapter further discusses academic debate and its role in forensics, the argument between competitive success and educational experience, the students' perspectives of their experiences, participation among students, forensics as culture, and the impact of forensics based on previous research. Up until the 1990's, forensics fit into a laboratory metaphor to justify strenuous competition and scholarly merit. This metaphor explained how students and coaches work in forensics and that competitions were used as a way to test what participants had been working on. Aden (1991) offers that forensics should be viewed as a liberal art. He explains that a liberal arts education, "is designed to produce individuals who are able to think independently rather than relying solely on existing knowledge" (p. 101). When analyzing the impacts of forensics participation and the activity itself, it is clear that forensics gives students the ability to think for themselves, independent from prior knowledge, based on the skills and/or experiences they gain. After redefining forensics as a liberal art, the impacts and effects of participation became exponentially clearer.

Although forensics encompasses both individual speaking and debate events, Croucher, Thornton, & Eckstein (2006) explain that, “It is common for both activities to be taught at the same institution, it is equally common for one discipline to be taught to the exclusion of the other” (p. 1). While this does hold true, there is some discrepancy when examining different programs. While many forensics programs support one or the other, the schools that offer both debate and individual speaking events have two options. Some programs will travel speakers and debaters together, while some larger programs have separate schedules and separate teams. Regardless, as a division within forensics, debate can hold several benefits for the student as well.

Debate

In its entirety, forensics competition brings certain nuances that should enhance the education of the student, and this sentiment holds especially strong with debate. “Competition is the major aspect that separates contest debating from other forms of argumentation pedagogy” (Paroske, 2011, p. 188). This is a result of the high-pressured situation that comes along with competition. Students are, or at least should be, at their very best during competition based on the countless hours of preparation they have made. However, this sort of intellectual clarity may be difficult to come by in a more relaxed setting such as a classroom.

Abrams and Novak (1997) discuss the differences in debate events, citing issues surrounding the speed of delivery and content of arguments. Specifically, they point to the National Debate Tournament (NDT) and the Cross-Examination Debate Association (CEDA) as organizations that have shifted their focus more toward the quantity of arguments, rather than the quality (p. 41). As a result, collegiate Lincoln-Douglas debate

(LD) was structured to give each student an even playing field by giving a particular paradigm by which to compete and judge, making LD one of the only American organizations to follow a format for “educational purposes” (p. 41). This was done by adhering to the stock issues upheld by high school policy debate, being harms, inherency, solvency and advantages. “By forcing debaters to work within certain parameters, the stock issues paradigm situates debaters in a mutually agreed upon argumentative realm” (p. 41). By setting a template for future debates and giving students a particular direction, “debaters cultivate better reasoning skills, learn more about the strategic engagement of issues, and focus more attention on developing and refuting arguments rather than relying on "cards" to make their points” (p. 41).

As explained by Morris and Herbeck (1996), LD debate was introduced for the exact reason of keeping stock issues relevant and giving students a platform to follow an organized debate. In order to counteract the lack of specific arguments and high rate of delivery, among other variables, LD is predicated on the basis of allowing students to have an organized debate with a set of standards that can, “cultivate a persuasive style of speaking” (p. 5). Educators in this field have been divided between trying to win and trying to teach students and seldom do the two mix well together.

Greenstreet (1993) concludes that the educational value of debate lies in a similar aspect to individual events. Where experiential learning is used to explain the educational purposes of individual events, the same can be applied to debate. For students who have been taught how to debate and the thought processes and arguments needed, competition “integrates what they have learned while forcing them to learn more broadly and in greater depth than they would otherwise” (p. 21). This means that students are not only

learning the process and procedural regulations of a debate round, but they are actively engaged in higher thinking by searching for better ways to present ideas, cases and arguments. In short, “the competitive challenge of creating, defending and attacking arguments appears to separate debate from any other educational exercise as a tool for enhancing the student's critical thinking skills” (p. 21).

Unfortunately, both debate and individual speaking events have come under scrutiny as of late. As some forensics programs continue to get larger and become more dominant in competition, many wonder where the educational value still remains. One of the most pervasive struggles surrounding the community is competitive success versus educational experience. Teams across the nation are constantly walking a very thin line of trying to be successful in competition, either for glory or survival, or they are trying to give each student the best educational experience they can possibly obtain. The blurring of this line has forced many scholars and educators to ask which is more important in forensics: education or trophies?

Competitive Success v. Educational Experience

Tyma (2008) examines the current status of forensics and forensics coaching. As with any contest, being a competitive individual sets you apart immediately. However, many questions surround this idea in regards to forensics. “The goals of the coach and the program shifts towards winning tournaments with forensics pedagogy and education perceived in a secondary or tertiary role” (p. 102). This is the root of much of the criticism that forensics has garnered and it becomes difficult to find a precise reasoning. Programs are expected to do well in tournaments to justify their existence, because of that, coaches are expected to establish a competitive team. Some individuals may find

themselves coaching to appeal their own competitive drive and competitive success is simply a byproduct. Some coaches still emphasized education over results. Whichever the approach, the criticisms made are justified, the difficult part is deciphering how or why this occurs and how/if forensics can return the education-centered activity it was established to be.

In a critique of the current direction of forensics, Burnett, Brand and Meister (2003) offer that the promotion of forensics being an educational activity is a myth, presented under false pretenses. They explain that programs will endorse forensics as an educational activity in order to secure team funding or existence, but the very nature of competition diminishes the educational value, as competitive success is the driving motivator for students and coaches (p. 12). Burnett, Brand and Meister (2003) conclude that encouraging the educational value of forensics doesn't actually foster and educational experience, but rather, it creates a nice master story by which our actions become more "palatable" to ourselves, students and colleagues (p. 18).

While there are undoubtedly some programs that focus on competitive success, the assertion that education and forensics competition do not coexist is harmful to the activity. The evidence and literature exists that should disprove any notion that education is absent within forensics. In his response to Burnett, Brand and Meister (2003), Hinck (2003) argues that nature of competition is more valuable than many believe. Competition provides students with the ability to acquire knowledge through experiential learning.

Hinck (2003) warns against removing the competitive aspect from forensics because, "speech performances would be limited to public speaking classrooms, debates

limited to argumentation classes” (p. 71). Students need to be given the opportunity to compete because the theoretical knowledge that is gained through the classroom does not always translate over into the real world. Forensics competition gives students the ability to learn much more than they would if they took a traditional course load and as educators, it is imperative to remember that, “the primary role of education is to help students learn how to learn” (Sellnow, 1994, p. 8).

Hinck (2003) also discusses the benefits of competition even after removing the veil of forensics. He cites social skills as a skill set that develops simply from being a member of a team, finding an identity and exchanging opinions and ideas with fellow team members and other competitors (p. 62). Hinck’s (2003) most inspiring contributions come from the entirety of the article, though. Even if competition does become a focus of students or coaches, the opportunity to learn is still present. Students must figure out how to tailor their messages for all to hear, understand the subtle nuances of competition needed to find success, and have the ability to decipher which topics and information would best in order to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. In other words, competition and forensics fosters growth as it teaches students how to interact with others in a real world setting and how to approach potentially sensitive situations.

Ribarsky (2005) looks at the issue of innovation and creativity within forensics and explains that even though founded and supported on the premise of education, different factors have led to the stifling of bright, young minds (pp. 19-20). She expands on this idea, that some programs follow a winning formula and, in general, the community mimics those formulas in order to remain competitive. As more competitors utilize these methods, they are trapped in a box. The community as a whole doesn’t

always allow for new presentational formats and because of that, students aren't as likely to take risks out of fear of receiving a low score (p. 20). "These real-world speaking opportunities have been lost, as narrower expectations have locked students into one style of presenting in order to please a homogeneous audience" (p. 20).

While this is discouraging for the community, I would argue that this isn't too far off from reality. We are constantly being asked to complete tasks in a particular manner or deal with a variety of complex situations in a way that adheres to some set of standards or social norms. In that regard, forensics prepares students for life beyond school in a way that is unmatched any other activity.

Some scholars, like Gaer (2002), still encourage students to do what they want, how they want to do it. Because this activity was crafted to give students a creative outlet in which to grow and learn from, it is important that students are given that opportunity no matter the approach. "Above all, remember that this is your activity it is designed for *you*" (p. 55). One of the advantages of being able to compete for a full season is that students are given the ability to try new things if they so choose. Gaer (2002) reminds the community that competitors do not need to conform to norms of competition; students need to use their time effectively and figure out a way to make their messages palatable to the rest of the community.

The Students' Perspective

Byrne, Flood and Shanahan (2012) cite one of the biggest problems facing graduates heading into the real world as what they call, oral communication apprehension as "there is increasing recognition that students' failure to develop appropriate communication skills may not be due to the quality of relevant education and training

programmes [sic]" (p. 566). It is this concern that led these authors to conduct a study to further understand why and when communication apprehension occurs. To do this, they strayed away from the traditional route of detailed surveys. Instead, they interviewed several business and accounting students to get a grasp on the participants' point of view. The findings showed many similarities that were divided into different sections that displayed differences in situation. Many of the participants cited differences in communication contexts, the difference between talking to people one-on-one or with friends compared to strangers and coworkers. Some cited a lack of experience relating to formal meetings in the work place while all participants illuminated a fear of public speaking as the root of their apprehension. Different themes also dictated the levels of apprehension.

With this, the findings suggest that the themes present during the time of the communication process hold weight for the experience. Prior experience, fear of peer evaluation and preparation all made significant differences in the level of communication apprehension. The more comfortable the participant felt, the more likely he or she was to be able to effectively communicate with decreased apprehension. What this offers is that, among other obstacles, such as a lack of experience or knowledge on preparation or different ways of thinking, is that a major problem facing students as they attempt to communicate and actively participate is an apprehension to communication. This, along with other obstacles, is something that practice can help alleviate. Participation in forensics keenly attempts to aid students in their endeavor of removing said apprehension.

Littlefield and Sellnow (1994) describe how forensics competition produces high

levels of stress and anxiety. “The tournament context intensifies stress and limited opportunities for relaxation” (p. 18). Along with this, they offer two potential routes competitors may take. Students may either desensitize themselves to the rigors of tournaments, which the authors claim would be a difficult task given the nature of competition, or through positive thinking and relaxing. Regardless, this idea presents another impact that forensics has on its participants. By performing various speeches in high-pressured situations, students must be incredibly self-aware to understand how they might react in certain situations. Students must also learn how to cope with and adapt to varying degrees of pressure so that they can give themselves the best opportunity to find the success they want. Competitors are given the opportunity to practice the skills that they have been developing and take the theoretical knowledge they gained in the classroom and apply it in a creative and constructive way.

Previous research attempting to shed light on the effects of participation within the activity has gathered useful evidence. Targeting gender experiences through the activity, consciousness-raising has been as insightful as anything. Greenstreet, Joeckel, Martin & Piercy (1998) found that participants included in their study experienced a great level of raised consciousness through their participation as women involved in the activity. Specifically, the differences in treatment during their time competing and beyond, they reported the women in the study finding an increased awareness of important social issues regarding gender biases. As a result, a combination of skills acquired and the connections made, they were able to exchange ideas to further the advancement of the activity and their senses of self-identity and worth (p. 11).

Moreover Millsap and Millsap (2006) look at gender differences between

different national tournaments. In the 2000 CEDA National Tournament, males made up 64% of the competition, while the female representation was only 36% (p. 61). While this is still a large gap, the difference has become more balanced over the years when considering the 1990 CEDA National Tournament hosted a female participation rate of only 20% (P. 61). However, for individual events competition at the 2001 AFA- National Individual Events Tournament, there were little to no gender gaps observed.

Manchester and Friedley (2003) documented the changing balance at some of the largest forensics organizations. For the purposes of their study, they compared the participation rates of the 1984 and the 2001 AFA-NIET and NFA National Tournament to decide if individual events have made the strides toward gender balance that debate has yet to see. The 2001 AFA-NIET saw 1,441 participants with 52% male and 48% female (p. 25). This is a substantial increase from 1984, which had a total of 861 participants made up of 58% male and 42% female (p. 27). In 2001, the National Forensics Association held it's annual national tournament for 1,587 participants (p. 29). For this tournament, 47% were male, while 53% were female (p. 29). These numbers mark another growth in tournament size as the 1984 NFA national tournament included 1,096 participants made up of 52% male and 48% female.

As Millsap and Millsap (2006) explain, “while individual events appears to have made some progress in shrinking the gender gap few strides have been made in debate” (p. 61). This discrepancy suggests that there is a reason for the presence of a gender gap in one event, but not the other. Female competitors still struggle to gain the same level of respect and representation as their male counterparts in a setting that encourages the development of new viewpoints, as Greenstreet, et al. (1998) elucidate.

Two additional studies utilize surveys through a quantitative method of exploration. The first study, conducted by Millsap (1998) targeted 129 full time faculty members at a liberal arts institution consisting of 1600 undergraduate students along with 900 continuing education students (p. 19). The goal of the research was to identify the teaching methods used across the curriculum by different departments. The findings conclude that of 263 total classes between humanities, sciences, social sciences and graduate programs, 130 utilize group discussions and 116 classes place an importance on oral presentations (p. 20). This suggests that teaching methods used emphasize several skills gained through participation in forensics. As the field of academia continues to expand, it is important to note that 100 percent of the education courses offered operated with some form of oral presentation (p. 22). This should place added importance on participation in forensics.

The second quantitative study used surveys as well; however the study piloted by Stenger (1999) was aimed at students competing in forensics. The surveys used were divided into three sections; experience through competition, conferences, and future plans. The questions sought to answer what events the participants had competed in, an identification of the conferences attended by the competitors, their motivations for attendance, the skills they gained through forensics that aided them in the conferences and their future plans regarding graduate school (p. 17). The skills cited as necessary for their competition events included organization, knowledge of current world issues and events, analytic skills and quick thinking (p. 18). The services used in conference presentations involved organization, delivery, confidence and time limits, all of which are major components of effective competition (p. 19).

Comparatively, Stenger (1999) used data from previous research to understand the differences between the skills gained through participation in forensics and the major fears of non-competitors. Of the presentation skills aided by forensics, delivery, quick thinking, confidence, nonverbal awareness, time limits and organization were at the forefront (p. 21). The major fears of non-competitors included delivery, quick thinking, confidence, nonverbal signals and time limits (p. 21). This evidence implies that participation in forensics is highly beneficial for students as they work their way through school, conferences or future plans.

Littlefield, Sellnow, and Meister (1994) describe how forensics competition produces high levels of stress and anxiety. “The tournament context intensifies stress and limited opportunities for relaxation” (p. 18). Along with this, they offer two potential routes competitors may take. Students may either desensitize themselves to the rigors of tournaments, which the authors claim would be a difficult task given the nature of competition, or through positive thinking and relaxing. Regardless, this idea presents another impact that forensics has on its participants. By performing various speeches in high-pressured situations, students must be incredibly self-aware to understand how they might react in certain situations. Students must also learn how to cope with and adapt to varying degrees of pressure so that they can give themselves the best opportunity to find the success they want.

In their study on the amount of fun students have in forensics, Paine and Stanley (2003) create several valued themes that may be present during a typical competitive season. These themes are the value of people and relationships, the value of education, tournament experiences, competition and accomplishment, speaking to others, and event

guidelines and risk-taking. The approach these authors took when administering their surveys and collecting their data was to take all of these concepts and identify the strengths and weaknesses of them and how they fit into forensics. Throughout the study, using these concepts, they pinpoint what is pleasant and unpleasant about forensics from the perspective of the coaches/judges, students, and former competitors.

In terms of commitment in general, Paine and Stanley (2003) found that students who were more committed to the activity were more likely to have fun (p. 53). As well, students who had fun were more likely to be committed or become more committed to the activity (p. 53). One of the most interesting findings of this study, though, centers on the topic of professionalism. Students who noted that forensics was “too formal” were more likely to not have as much fun and thus, not be as committed (p. 56). Alternatively, the individuals who found themselves more committed to the activity, or were interested in remaining in forensics as a career choice, were more likely not to take issue with the professionalism of forensics (p. 56).

Overall, the students who were more committed to forensics were less likely to complain about professionalism, travel, and competition and had more fun (p. 58). Students have the ability to end their days of competition just as they began and in forensics, competitors and coaches come and go each year. This activity teaches its competitors essential life skills and responsibilities, but that makes little difference when the students aren’t receptive to the educational messages set forth. The level of student commitment is highly important when attempting to uncover the knowledge gained by the student through their participation. As with any activity, the most committed students have the most to gain, and the performative nature of forensics makes identifying those

who may be more or less committed than others a much less troublesome task. By having committed students within forensics, the benefits, effects or impacts become increasingly apparent.

Student Participation

The amount of students that forensics has been able to reach out to over the years is astounding. However, due to a variety of reasons, the national individual events tournaments have been shrinking in size as of late. Reynolds (1990) analyzed the NFA national tournament entries from 1971-1990 in order to better express what makes up an “average” NFA national individual events tournament. The total entries per event were averaged together for the years 1971-1990 to get a better understanding of national tournament size during that time period. The average NFA national tournament hosted 126 schools with a total of 1,830 event entries.

Today, those figures are slightly different. The 2015 NFA national tournament saw only 79 schools, compared to the average of 126. There were roughly the same amount of entries at 1,646, but that figure also includes Dramatic Interpretation, which wasn’t introduced at the NFA national tournament until the 2007-2008 academic year. When excluding the event, the total number of entries drops to 1,459, a difference of nearly 400 entries and 47 fewer schools than the recorded average.

The 2015 AFA-NIET included more schools than NFA with 86 in attendance, however fewer entries with 1,496. It is important to note, though, that Programmed Oral Interpretation is not an event offered at NFA, so excluding those entries, the AFA total drops to 1,354. The size difference between the two national tournaments may be slightly confusing, but the two have very different qualification procedures, which produces very

different entry numbers. Unfortunately, the AFA-NIET has seen a similar decline in tournament size. There have been 435 different schools attend the AFA-NIET since 1978 (AFA, 2015). Between the years of 1984-2001, there were over 100 schools at each AFA-NIET, however, during the next 14 years from 2001-2015, the total school count has gone over 100 only once, and over 90 just 3 times. Recently, these numbers have hovered between the high-70s into the mid-80s. While this is still an impressive turnout, it is important to highlight the decreasing size of these national tournaments.

Some of the most well-known debate organizations have accrued a tremendous national following as well. NFA also hosts Lincoln-Douglas debate at their national tournament, which added another 84 debaters to the total list of participants. As of 2015, CEDA includes 80 different colleges and universities that hold official memberships (CEDA Debate, 2015). The 2015 CEDA national debate tournament included 232 competitors, making up the 116 competing teams while NPDA has accumulated 203 schools listed on their official membership report (Parli Debate, 2015).

The amount of organizations that cater to forensics on the high school level is immense; therefore, the researcher has chosen only to focus on NSDA, as it is the most prominent national organization for high school speech and debate. The official report states that 193 schools from across the nation are official NSDA members, and of those 193 schools, there are 1,141 active students involved with forensics (Tabroom, 2015).

Each of these organizations holds a national tournament that the students must qualify for. Before students are even granted access to compete at these national tournaments, they must travel and compete during the entire school year. Sadly, due to the competitive nature of forensics, not everybody actually qualifies to compete on a

national scale. Because of this, there may be many more students excluded from these totals. As of 2014, within the United States there were 581 collegiate forensics programs that participated in at least one form of competitive speech or debate, making the task of discovering the real total number of participants incredibly difficult (COFO, 2014).

Simply put, the turnouts of the national tournaments are *not* indicative of the total amount of students involved in the activity, but they *are* imperative to gaining a better understanding of the true scope of forensics.

Forensics Culture

Miller (2005) explores the idea of forensics as a culture. In his article, he discusses forensics as a whole, team systems, as well as regional forensics communities. These regional forensics communities make up microcultures and can form in a variety of ways, whether it's a district, a state, or even a cluster of teams that have a strong connection. "A regional forensics community can be accurately described as a culture within a culture within a culture within a culture" (p. 4).

This portrayal offers that American culture is the broadest in which we interact. After American culture comes the first microculture, regional culture, where a student lives or attends school. How an individual interacts with their community, or rather, how a community encourages its population to act influences the attitudes or behavior of those involved. Regional differences, like the differences between the east and west coasts or northern and southern United States, are the backbone of this microculture

The second microculture is the "academy", or academic institution, that the students attend, this can hold an enormous amount of weight as colleges and universities support their programs differently and have different educational priorities and visions.

However, this microculture runs deeper than the school itself. Each team has their own culture, which is usually directly influenced by a director of forensics or head coach. If a coach finds winning to be the most important part of competition, then the “win at all costs” mentality could be a mainstay for a program and its competitors. This second microculture is subjective to the vision of the school and the purposes and goals of those in charge.

The third microculture is the activity of forensics on a national level. Forensics lives in a bubble, and while the potential impacts of forensics can be easily seen, the culture that has been established within the forensics community is not as clear for outsiders. That is not to say that the culture established is too complex for any reason, but that forensics culture is filled with concepts that most people don’t encounter on a weekly basis such as tournament travel and preparation, ballot use for adjudicating, linguistic choices, “van talk”, “dropping a pen”, the events, and their purposes. All of these, and more, come together for a unique, shared understanding and experience between all members of the forensics community. Unless an individual spends time in the activity and is engaged, these concepts may be difficult to fully understand and remember; similar to the time it takes for a new student to adjust to collegiate forensics.

The final microculture is that of the forensics community on a regional scale. This microculture is more concerned with how programs within the same region interact. Examining the forensics community on a regional scale gives insight to divisions within collegiate forensics. Teams from the same district will often support each other at tournaments as it represents a larger entity than the teams themselves. Likewise, many teams that share a home state will support each other as it represents a larger entity. This

could be viewed as the most distinct microculture of forensics as interstate “rivals” are constantly hosting tournaments together, communicating freely with one another, and even share meals together.

Considering the cultural framework of forensics is key to understanding the potential impacts of forensics at its most basic level. Within the activity, students work in several microcultures. Each of which, students are representing an entity larger than themselves and must understand what their actions and behaviors will communicate to the rest of their community. Starting from the bottom and working up, each microculture becomes broader until it reaches its highest point of American culture. Because each step gets bigger, the actions of the students become magnified. As a result, the students within the forensics community must be aware of the things they do and say and how that could affect them, their team, or their school. In a sense, students learn how to work within a microculture, such as a school, region, or the activity itself, while learning how to adapt and excel within the larger framework of American culture. The impacts of participation should be evident, not only through the development of specific skill sets, but through the experiences of working in several distinct microcultures as well.

Miller (2005) expands, that because these microcultures exist, culture shock does as well (p. 5). Although it may vary in reasoning and severity, this differing of ideas sets the stage for exponential growth. Each region carries its own unique performative subtleties and preferences. Some regions prefer differing stylistic choices or have different ideas on what a certain event should look like. But for many programs, especially the ones who find themselves roaming hundreds of miles each week, these obstacles present an exceptional learning experience. Students are given the ability to see

regional differences in real time and once again, must figure out how to interact and adjust while developing incredibly strong interpersonal skills.

The culture developed through forensics also holds significance for each individual team. As Orme (2012) explains, teams use collective memory to establish some sort of identity and continuity between past, present and future team members (p. 1). This can be done through the use of storytelling. Allowing present and future team members to get a sense of, and understand, the past accomplishments of a team help to create a strong sense identity. Students are able to understand what they have become a part of, what their role is in that program, and what kind of standing their team is in compared to the rest of the forensics community. “Stories are the foundation of organizational sense making. They are the culmination of past experiences connected to present experiences, allowing current members to relate to an organization’s history and legacy, even though they may not have experienced it directly” (Orme, 2012, p. 4).

The cultures that each team has established are unique in their own regard, and while the coach and school have a direct influence over the manner in which teams orchestrate their competitive season, so too do the students. Since the students are actually competing, they have the ability to aid in the establishment of team culture. Although a great responsibility, this idea presents another learning opportunity as students are forced to decide how they want to be viewed by others on their team and the community as whole, which fosters the development of both inter- and intrapersonal communication skills.

The Impact of Forensics

The impacts of forensics participation are plentiful and each person asked would be able to draw from a vast array of experiences to articulate the impact it has had on them. Shaw (1995) provides a shortened list of the impacts of forensics that should never be forgotten, “it can increase student self-esteem, promote leadership skills, increase communication skills, increase communication skills, teach research methods, and provide an outlet for creative expression” (p. 51). Additionally, “it teaches students lessons about language and communication that cannot be taught in the confines of the language arts classroom” (p. 51). These are skills and attributes that students should be gaining throughout their education and forensics provides a platform to experience growth in those areas. Throughout this growth, students learn how to act like, and be responsible, informed, and caring citizens.

Billman (2008) offers three other areas in which forensics competitors may find more advantages; forensics encourages emotional maturity and conflict-resolution skills, forensics encourages civic engagement and political participation, and forensics yields higher productivity and quality of life (pp. 97-98). All of these hold great implications for the individual and their own personal development. Working with a team, learning how to interact with others and how to effectively communicate are all factors that help to develop these skills through participation. By giving students a head start on developing these abilities, “debate instills in teenagers the skills to be competent adults” (Carr, 2002, p. 26).

Holba (2008) discusses the usefulness of academic debate for students and school faculty alike. In her article, she explores two areas in which debate has been beneficial,

continued learning and citizenship. The former is what is of most interest, though. As Sellnow (1994) urges, the primary outcome of education should be to teach students how to learn. Similarly, Holba (2008) explores the “Learning Paradigm”, which holds that teaching and education is not an end, but rather, a means (p. 54). “The Learning Paradigm ends the privilege of the lecturer experience and focuses on the learning experience, which does not end outside the classroom” (p. 54).

Furthermore, Holba (2008) explains that within academic debate, the line between teacher and student is blurred. Rather than instructors taking on a teaching role, educational, competitive activities such as debate allow for students and teachers to work as co-creators during the learning process (p. 54). Each situation offers a unique learning experience for the students and coaches as they learn how to work with each other and with others.

As students leave school and enter adulthood, they met with a variety of challenges, however Carr (2002) gives six more fields in which forensics should have an impact on its participants. Forensics should offer students discipline and organization, how to use theory and evidence, writing skills, speaking skills, lifelong friendships (networking), and how to cope with adversity (pp. 25-26). These are not a result of strictly competition, but of the unfathomable amount of hours put in by the students during practice, the thousands of miles driven throughout competition season, and the experiences gained with teammates and team members of other schools.

As clearly outlined, participation in forensics holds several potential impacts that could be felt by the competitor. So how can students see those impacts as advantageous in the future? In an interview with Cherian Koshy, director of development and assistant

tournament director for the NSDA national tournament, some of the future advantages that forensics should provide students are uncovered. “Evidence shows that college students and employees who have participated in speech and debate are better situated to exceed expectations in collegiate writing and in their careers because of their ability to communicate ideas concisely and persuasively” (Shryock, 2014).

Furthermore, “tournaments through the National Speech & Debate Association bring students from China, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan to compete with students from the United States” (Shryock, 2014). Students are brought together from various parts of the globe so that they can learn how to interact with people from other cultures. In doing so, the students are given a rich, invaluable, and fun educational experience of seeing likeminded students from areas with vastly different traditions and educational systems, which helps to increase the societal awareness of the student.

Each individual will have their own personalized response as to how or to what degree forensics has impacted their lives. There is no doubt that the impacts are present, but to grasp the value of forensics, and hopefully to aid in the future direction of forensics, it is important to understand the past. Not from a historical standpoint, but from the former competitors who have walked the very stages that we use today.

Summary

This chapter provided a literature review focusing on academic debate’s role in forensics, the argument between competitive success and educational experience, the students’ perspectives, participation among students, forensics as culture, and the impacts of forensics based on previous research. Each of these areas was further explored throughout the chapter. An idea of the size of forensics and the lives it has already

impacted was given by looking at participation rates of some of the largest national tournaments. Those impacts include writing and speaking skills, networking, researching skills, ideal citizenship, among many others.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter discusses, in more detail, the procedures by which data for the study was gathered and analyzed. Chapter Three includes a description of the participants and how the survey was distributed, and a description of the survey itself.

Distribution to Participants

Former forensics competitors at either the high school or collegiate level were asked to participate in this study. The potential participants were contacted through the social media website, Facebook, as well as through email based on contacts the author had previously made through networking within the forensics community. Hyperlinks to the survey were also posted on various forensics specific Facebook group pages. The researcher asked for assistance from several colleagues in order to spread the survey to different programs around the nation. In return for their participation, the author offered to share the results and information of this study with those who expressed interest.

Instrument

The instrument used for this study was a 15-item survey created in Qualtrics and included demographic information: age, gender and income, school type and size. As determined by the level at which the participants competed, either high school or college,

participants were directed to appropriate questions in Qualtrics. If the participant only competed in high school, then the survey skipped two college-specific questions. The following two questions directed toward collegiate competitors asked about the type of college, community college four-year university or both, and the division size of that college. This was used to determine if college type or size had a significant influence on the participants' perceived impacts of competition.

The remaining questions became more specific to forensics. After collecting data on the participants' schools, the next point of interest was experience. By knowing the experience of the participants in years, as well as the type of institution they represented during their time as a competitor, the perceived impacts take shape.

After the amount of experience, the type of experience was analyzed. The next two questions asked about the organizations the participants competed under and the events they were most active in. The organizations such the American Forensics Association (AFA), Pi Kappa Delta (PKD) or Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA) helped to determine if the focus of the participants' forensics program was individual events, debate or balanced. Knowing which events the participants competed in, public address, limited preparation, oral interpretation or debate, aided in the understanding of the focus of the individual participant. For those who solely compete in individual events, this information is highly important, as a competitor may be very well rounded or very well versed in one type of event.

Once asked about their experiences, participants were then given a ten-item Likert-type question for the use of statistical analysis. This question sought to uncover the perceived impacts of forensics participation by offering a five-point Likert-type scale.

Participants could choose to strongly agree, agree, that competition had no effect, disagree or strongly disagree. This question was designed specifically to obtain the point of view of the former competitor and to understand the perceived impacts of the individual. The remainder of the survey included questions about the participants' careers, if they continued their education, what category their job falls under, and their current title at their place of employment.

The final question asked participants, if participation in forensics helped them in their professional life or career. This question used a five-point Likert-type scale as well with the same options of strongly agree, agree, no effect, disagree, and strongly disagree. As an extension of the previous question, to conclude, the survey offered an open-ended question so that participants could explain, if they chose to do so, how participation affected their professional life or career. With the 11 Likert-type questions, reliability was tested using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha was .86. Additionally, the participants' comments mirrored the findings of the remainder of the survey, therefore the questions asked appear to be valid.

Data Collection

Once the survey was created and approved by the thesis committee and West Texas A&M University's Institutional Review Board, the author used the social media website, Facebook, to reach out to various contacts. After the initial sampling, snowball sampling was used to accumulate more respondents through the contacts of others. To qualify for participation in this study, the respondent must have competed in forensics at either the high school and/or collegiate levels for at least one full semester. The purpose of this study is to identify the long-term impacts of active participation, and as such, the

meaning of phrase “active participation” is at the participant’s discretion. If the potential respondent feels like he/she gained an immense amount of experience through only one semester of competition, then that information will still be valuable to this research.

Once launched, the survey spread throughout Facebook very quickly, reaching potential participants across the nation. Several individuals shared the survey either through their own personal live feed or drawing the attention of particular individuals that met the criteria. One individual even went so far as to get the survey posted to the Facebook group pages for the Texas Forensics Association (TFA), the National Debate Coaches Association (NDCA), as well as a judges and coaches group for the University Interscholastic League (UIL). As a result, within two days the total amount of respondents climbed to nearly 400. After three days, when the survey was closed, there were a total of 401 responses recorded. A copy of the full survey can be found in Appendix A.

Method of Analysis

Quantitative research methods were used to examine a basic population of former forensics competitors. Once responses were recorded, comparisons were made between several groups using various factors in order to determine the equality of representation within the pool of participants. Descriptive statistics were run to analyze how many participants competed in which organizations and events to discover if either of those had any bearing on the perceived impacts of forensics participation. Understanding the impacts of forensics as claimed by the participants is imperative to this study. However, the additional information will hopefully aid in determining if certain organizations or event groupings foster the development of certain skills more than others. The Likert-type

questions aimed at exposing the perceived impacts of forensics will give an idea of the impacts of forensics while other factors, such as the level in which the participant competed, their experiences and the time spent competing may be used to determine if there is a correlation between the other variable included in the survey and what the participants believe they received from competition.

The survey also included one open-ended question in which the participant was asked to explain how forensics has benefitted their career or professional life. This was done because, as Patton (2002) contends, “the purpose of gathering responses to open-ended questions is to enable the researcher to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through prior selection of questionnaire categories” (p. 21). The initial categories created for the Likert-type questions were based on previous categories and research set forth by different scholars. However, through data analysis, the author was more concerned with developing categories for analysis through the most pervasive themes constructed in the open-ended responses.

Participants

Participants showed minor difficulties when completing the surveys. Several responses were fully incomplete with respondents citing technical difficulties. Others were partially completed but lacking important information to make the data usable. The survey, and subsequently this study, contains a nationally diverse representation. Responses were recorded from several different areas of the United States including Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Washington, California, Florida, Kentucky, Illinois, Ohio, New York, New Hampshire and several others, including one response from Italy.

The total response count was 381 ($N= 381$). The male representation (45.4%; $n= 173$) was slightly lower than female (54.1%; $n= 206$), however these figures signify a fairly even balance. The ages of respondents ranged from 18-65 with a mean age of 28 years old ($SD= 9.8$).

Of the total respondents ($N= 381$), there was also an expected representation of experience. Individuals who competed for one year or less was the smallest grouping (3.9%; $n= 15$); followed by two years of experience (8.7%; $n= 33$), three years of experience (18.1%; $n= 69$), four years experience (29.4%; $n= 112$), and the largest grouping was five years of experience or more (39.6%; $n=151$).

In addition to the amount of experience, the level in which they competed was also analyzed. Participants who only competed in college differed vastly from the other two groupings (5%; $n= 19$), while participants who only competed in high school (46.5%; $n=177$), as well as participants who competed in both high school *and* college (48.6%; $n= 185$) were more even. While these figures do help to make this study more generalizable, it is also important to investigate the type of programs represented through the participants.

Participants who only competed in high school had much fewer options than collegiate competitors. State-specific organizations are seemingly limitless, because of this, the researcher has chosen to only offer the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA) as an option for the question regarding which organizations the participant competed under. For those who competed only in high school or in both high school and college, 287 claimed to have competed for the NSDA while the remaining 94 either didn't compete in high school or were unsure of which organizations they operated

within.

Collegiate forensics becomes a little more confusing, though. There are forensics organization specifically designed for smaller universities and community colleges. Likewise, there are organizations that play well into the hands of larger schools. Because of this, the researcher was also interested in colleges of different types and sizes. Of the 204 participants that competed in college or both college and high school, 15 attended community college, 22 competed at both a community college and four-year university, and 167 competed for a four-year college or university. Of these same respondents, 86 competed for a Division I university, 55 competed for Division II, 28 competed for Division III, and 35 were either unsure or were unable to answer the question due to competing only for a community college.

Many collegiate programs compete in several different organizations and the individual competitors may be active in several different events, therefore many of the following statistics overlap each other. Of the total respondents the American Forensics Association was the largest collegiate forensics organization ($n= 133$), followed by the National Forensics Association ($n= 118$), Pi Kappa Delta ($n= 55$), the American and National Parliamentary Debate Associations ($n= 47$), the Cross Examination Debate Association ($n= 46$), the National Debate Tournament ($n= 36$), the Interstate Oratorical Association ($n= 34$), Phi Rho Pi ($n= 24$), the International Parliamentary Debate Association ($n= 15$), and the National Educational Debate Association ($n= 1$). Along with a fair representation of organizations, the types of events that participants competed in were incredibly even as well.

The limited preparation events of Extemporaneous and Impromptu Speaking

made up the largest group with 208 respondents claiming to have competed in either of the events. 178 participants claimed the interpretation events of Prose, Poetry, and Programmed Oral Interpretation. Lincoln-Douglas and policy debate were next with 173. The public address events of Communication Analysis (or Rhetorical Criticism), Informative, Persuasive, and After Dinner Speaking rounded out the next category with 165. Duo and Dramatic Interpretation had a representation of 163, while Parliamentary Debate only had 66. These figures should help the generalizability of this study. Not only the amount of participants, but the even distribution of different ages, experiences and types of competition allows the results to be generalized to the entire forensics community.

Summary

This chapter focused on the procedures of the study. More specifically, the contributions asked from colleagues, the method of distribution, the creation and structure of the survey, and the method by which the data has been analyzed. Additionally, this chapter provides a description of the participation level, and the events in which they competed.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Once the data was collected, quantitative analyses were used on multiple levels. In order to determine the long-term impacts of participation in forensics, the author developed twelve themes generated by the open-ended responses gathered from the participants. This chapter explores the results within these themes to achieve a greater understanding of the impact of forensics participation.

Results

When analyzing the open-ended responses, several themes began to emerge. These themes are based on the number of responses that mentioned or described specific skills. As a result, the twelve most pervasive themes were selected from a list of 39 total themes developed by the researcher, influenced by the responses received. Some of the themes presented overlap previous research which was used in the construction of the survey, however the author made an attempt to explore new themes present in the forensics community that have been largely neglected in much of the available research. Several of these themes call on information gathered through the tenth survey question that offered a Likert-type scale for participants to rate their experiences. There were five available answer choices, strongly agree, agree, no effect, disagree, and strongly disagree.

Each of the ten items included in the tenth question were represented strongly enough in the open-responses to justify their use as a theme. However, before any discussion can be made, it's important to reflect on the research question, as well as the hypotheses.

RQ1: What are the long-term impacts of forensics competition?

H₁: Students who have competed in forensics develop and increase important and beneficial communication skills.

The ten skills presented in the Likert-type questions each received a high rate of agreement. Between 83.5%-98.9% of respondents agreed that forensics has benefitted a specific skill set. Only two of these categories, networking and organization, rated below 94% agreement. Therefore, the remainder of this chapter addresses the impacts and benefits of forensics participation. The findings of this research also support H₁ to not only be true, but how forensics far exceeds the development of communication skills.

H₂: Individuals who have actively participated in forensics activities will have a positive attitude toward the long-term benefits of forensics.

Given the number of respondents ($N= 381$) and the overwhelmingly positive responses, it is possible that those who participated in the study are avid supporters of the activity. Those who recognize the value of forensics would be more likely to take the time to complete the survey as it addresses an issue they feel strongly about. However, if the individual competed enough to feel the impacts claimed, then the overwhelmingly positive responses support H₂.

H₃: Participation in forensics provides former competitors and members of the forensics community with adequate preparation for various career fields.

As the remainder of this chapter discusses the impacts of forensics participation, the following skill sets have been cited as beneficial for a variety of career fields, however H₃ is addressed directly toward the end of the chapter.

The chosen themes that will be used for analysis include communication skills, public speaking, confidence, awareness, research abilities, critical and analytic thinking, problem solving and decision-making, organization, active listening, networking, education, and interpersonal skills. Each of the following sections presents the significant findings and a discussion for what those findings mean for the forensics community. To discuss additional statistically significant findings, the end of the chapter breaks away from the impact themes to explore a variety of relationships regarding the impact of forensics.

Communication Skills

Of the total respondents ($N= 381$), 98.4% of participants agreed that forensics has impacted their communication skills (75.6% strongly agree; 22.8% agree). A very large portion of respondents mentioned communication skills as a beneficial in their responses (refer to Table 1). One participant summed up one of the fundamental goals of forensics when he/she said, “forensics made me realize the importance of communication and having a voice.” Another offered that, “forensics helped me develop strong, lasting communication skills. I am able to express myself and communicate effectively, which helps in meeting people and maintaining positive relationships.” A summary of the results from the Likert-type responses can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequency of agreement among respondents

Variable	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>N/E</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>
Communication	75.6%	22.8%	1.3%	-	.3%
Public speaking	86.6%	12.4%	.5%	-	.5%
Confidence	74.4%	22.7%	2.1%	.5%	.3%
Awareness	64.8%	29.4%	3.7%	1.6%	.5%
Research	73.2%	22%	3.7%	.3%	.8%
Critical thinking	80.6%	17.1%	1%	.3%	.3%
Decision-making	70.6%	26.2%	2.4%	.3%	.5%
Organization	50.3%	36.3%	11.6%	1.6%	.3%
Listening	66.6%	31.1%	1.3%	.8%	.3%
Networking	44.6%	38.8%	14.7%	1%	.8%

Note. SA= “Strongly Agree”, A= “Agree”, N/E= “No Effect”, D= “Disagree”, and SD= “Strongly Disagree”. These are the percentages of participants who responded accordingly.

Some of the responses touched on another form of communication. One of themes excluded was written communication, which many respondents discussed in the open responses. One participant claimed that, “it made me a much better writer. As an attorney, the ability to concisely and clearly explain complex topics to clients and juries is essential.” Another participant explained that, “It has developed my writing skills and exposure to social issues.”

Forensics is an activity that encourages students to find interests and teaches them how to effectively communicate those ideas to others. Additionally, students are constantly writing whether it’s another draft of an informative speech, an introduction for a prose, or debate case revisions. It makes sense that forensics would impact the

participants' communication skills, but the respondents took this theme one step further in including multiple forms of communication. As written communication was not included in the survey, the number of responses that mentioned written communication shows that forensics benefits both oral and written communication skills.

Public Speaking

Throughout the open-ended responses, many individuals cited an ease and calmness about speaking in front of a group of people for performance, speech delivery or business related presentations. Not surprisingly, 98.9% of participants believe that forensics has positively impacted their public speaking skills (86.6% strongly agree; 12.4% agree). Several participants lauded forensics' ability to prepare their public speaking skills in professional settings. One respondent said that forensics, "made me more aware when I am in public speaking situations – how to hold myself, how to think more quickly on my feet, etc."

Other respondents discussed how forensics brought a sense of calmness when speaking in public; "the confidence in presenting and speaking in front of others I have today is due largely to participation in forensic competitions. It has made me more social, more comfortable in professional situations, and a much more commanding public speaker." While another participant explained that, "it really helped me to become more confident in public speaking and even just speaking to people that I don't know."

Generally speaking, forensics programs travel to a different tournament multiple weekends a semester; in college, this usually means two different tournaments at the same campus, or nearby campuses on Saturday, then again on Sunday. The high rating of public speaking could be indicative of several things. First, because this activity revolves

around public speaking, forensics could simply benefit the skill public speaking. Second, because students are competing every weekend, sometimes twice, they become desensitized to something that frightens the majority of Americans. Third, forensics participation brings a level of confidence and comfort that helps these competitors to avoid communication mistakes resulting from nerves. Or it could be a combination of the three. At any rate, public speaking scored the highest of any other impact. The fact that students have the opportunity to overcome something that is feared by so many is nothing short of beneficial.

Confidence

Confidence was a theme that morphed with each response. Many respondents cited a traditional understanding of confidence, meaning that they believed in themselves. However several responses cited confidence performing certain tasks such as interviewing for a job or managing leaderships tasks. 97.1% agreed that forensics had benefitted their confidence (74.4% strongly agreed; 22.7% agreed). Several participants mentioned confidence in various forms as an impact of forensics participation. One respondent said, “I am able to walk into any interview and do very well convincing the person or people interviewing that I am the correct candidate”. Others mirrored this sentiment, “I feel like I can go into any situation and/or circumstance and perform to the best of my ability”.

Another participant remarked, “not only has my participation in forensics made me more confident in my overall presentation of myself, but it literally sealed the deal when I got my first job out of college.” The translation of skills gained in forensics into the real world is illustrated by one participant who explained, “participation in forensics

has given me confidence and critical thinking skills, both of which are necessary for any type of job.”

Confidence is crucial for young adults entering the workforce or even in school. As long as the determination is there, students are given the ability to perform, revise, practice and perform again until they achieve the performance they desire. The goal is to see the result of all of that work through trophies, qualifications, or touching someone’s life. By having forensics as a creative outlet and a platform to speak their views, students have the opportunity to build an immense amount of confidence. Students who compete in forensics should build confidence in them and in their abilities to perform whatever task may be presented. This is invaluable to young adults as they should be equipped with the proper knowledge to succeed, but should also be equipped with the mentality that they can do whatever it is they choose to do.

Awareness

While the questionnaire targeted social awareness, the theme of awareness generated several different types. Many respondents cited increased social awareness, while several cited self-awareness as well. One participant wrote, “Forensics gave me a deeper respect for cultures and identities other than my own, while simultaneously giving me confidence in my own identities.” Likewise, many other responses included information regarding how they approach different situations and individuals in a mindful way because of the heightened awareness accompanied with forensics, not just socially and understanding what is going within our society, but within themselves as well by understanding who they are, what their place is, and what they can or should do for the betterment of the individual and collective. 94.2% agreed that forensics has positively

impacted their sense of awareness (64.8% strongly agree; 29.4% agree).

A term that emerged frequently in the responses that mentioned increased awareness was empathy, or emotional intelligence. Based on the responses, one could infer that participation in forensics aids in increasing the individuals' awareness of diversity. "It taught me soft skills that have been invaluable to my professional success, such as empathy, teamwork, perseverance, and relationship building. I wouldn't have the level of emotional intelligence that I currently possess without forensics." Other participants discussed personal awareness and a greater understanding of what is happening around them, "it taught me to look at both sides of important issues. It also made me want to be an active voter and citizen." Some participants mentioned political awareness and understanding what is taking place within the domestic political sphere, as well as the international community as a beneficial impact of participation in forensics.

Awareness is another attribute that young adults should possess, as it is important to understand yourself and others. It is equally important that young adults know what is happening around the world, or at the very least, be aware of tense issues. Forensics allows for this to happen. Extemporaneous speaking and debate events are almost always centered on some sort of domestic or international issue. Interpretation events have started a trend of addressing social issues or global outcries for help within their introduction as a way to justify the use of literature. Public address events are constantly introducing new services, ideas, or issues into the forensics community. There is room in every event for each competitor to become more aware of something. Whether it's a means of increasing knowledge through research or self-discovery, forensics seems extremely beneficial in preparing students to become aware, informed citizens.

Research Abilities

Research abilities were one of the largest categories developed by the number of responses that mentioned it. Moreover, research abilities gained through forensics translated easily into a variety of landscapes for the participants. Participants noted that their gained research abilities have them in fields such as schooling, law, business, teaching, and policy. 95.3% of respondents claim that their research abilities grew as a result of forensics (73.2% strongly agree; 22% agree).

While research abilities aren't required for every career path, the responses gathered are encouraging for ex-competitors. Many participants expressed the role of research in preparing for a variety of situations that extend far beyond what the category of research abilities was intended to explore. One participant explained that, "forensics competition has taught me how to research and prepare thoroughly, how to make decisions and execute them at the drop of a hat, and how to confidently portray myself in front of an audience." Another added that, "it gave me practice in high-stress communication and research situations." In regard to the speed of the development of skills, another respondent claimed that, "it has given me the research and communication skills that usually take years of experience to develop."

The only statistically significant relationship for research abilities came when looking at the level in which the participants competed. A one-way ANOVA revealed there was a significant effect of the level at which participants competed on research abilities at the $p < .05$ level for the three conditions [$F(2, 375)=3.63, p= 0.027$]. Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) post hoc test was used to determine that the only significant difference between high school competitors ($n= 177$), collegiate competitors

($n=19$), and those who competed in both ($n=185$) was their ability to research.

Specifically, those who competed in both high school and college reported higher research abilities than those who competed only in high school.

It is important to note that sample sizes may have impacted the results of this test. As the categories of “high school” and “both” were very similar in size, the category of “college” had a very small number. Had all three groups been closer in size, there may have been a statistically significant difference between “college” and “high school” as well. However, it does make sense that those who competed in both would report higher research abilities than those who competed only in high school. College students are expected to take on a higher level of research abilities. Additionally, collegiate competitors are expected to have more sources per speech than high school competitors. It is difficult to determine whether research abilities were impacted by college attendance, forensics participation, or both, but a strong case can be made for forensics’ impact on students’ research abilities.

Originally, the category of research abilities was intended to explore the extent to which forensics benefits one’s ability to prepare other events with research or possibly for schooling. As previously mentioned, the responses guided this category in a different direction as many participants claimed that it has helped them outside of forensics in preparing for presentations, creating lesson plans, or researching opportunities.

All of the events require research at some level. Students must search for interpretation selections and research for a powerful argument to justify their performance. Debate, public address, and limited preparation events all require an immense amount of research in order to be well informed and speak on those topics.

Public address events require constant revisions, which could mean new sources and more research. Additionally, students learn how to conduct personal interviews with the faculty of other colleges and universities, scientists, environmentalists, and many others. For students coming out of school, it is highly important that they have the research skills to find the answers to questions they don't already have. Students who compete in forensics may not know everything, but as indicated by the results of this study, they know exactly how to figure anything out.

Critical and Analytic Thinking

The ability to keenly observe something, break it down, and understand or encourage multiple perspectives is one of the fundamental benefits of active participation in forensics, although it is a difficult skill to master. However, participants rated themselves very high in this regard with 98.4% agreeing that forensics has benefitted their critical and analytic thinking skills (81.2% strongly agree; 17.2% agree).

In the open responses, this category took several forms as well. One participant explained that, "policy or LD debate in particular develop critical skills that help us understand frames of meaning-production. When critical debate is embraced, in particular, we are also able to understand the effectuality of our actions and decisions." Others embraced a more basic understanding of critical or analytic thinking, saying that forensics "increased my capabilities to think critically and solve problems as well as communicate effectively." Another claimed, "my participation in forensics enhanced my critical thinking and public speaking skills. It inspired me to pursue a career in law and forced me to gain more confidence."

During practice and competition, competitors are analyzing every performance

they watch, as well as their own. This involves breaking performances down and determining what worked or what didn't work for that performance and determining what could be done to improve. It also requires that audience members pay close attention to performers to understand what they are saying, or what they are meaning. Competitors are also given ballots at the end of each tournament. The comments left on the ballots by the judges should be, but aren't always constructive. It is then up to the student to understand these critiques and figure out how, or if, to incorporate the suggested changes in a way that best fits the performer and the material.

Competitors should be focused on improving, not winning. The very nature of competitive forensics develops the participants' critical and analytic thinking skills by forcing them to reconsider their own performative choices. Additionally, they are constantly working with teammates or discussing performances with fellow competitors, which forces competitors think critically and analytically.

Problem Solving and Decision Making

The ability to think quickly and put those actions into motion is a skill that can be gained through any one of the event categories, although limited preparation competitors may see these effects sooner than an interpretation competitor. At any rate, forensics had a strong influence on this ability for the participants as 96.9% agree that competition has positively impacted their problem solving and decision making skills (70.6% strongly agree; 26.2% agree).

Several participants reflected the overall rating of problem solving and decision-making. One claimed that forensics "allows for more rapid problem solving by cutting through noise and getting to the t and potatoes of problems." Another participant

explained the most profound impacts that forensics has had on their life is, “problem solving and analytic skills. Forensics teaches you how to approach a problem, how to properly weigh options and possible results, and how to efficiently implement a logical solution.”

Limited preparation events and debate events competitors would seemingly feel more strongly about this category, however problem solving, decision-making, and quick thinking are imperative to each event. With limited preparation, students are given a question, quotation, or object and are expected to deliver a well thought out and supported speech. Debate competitors are either constructing cases 15 minutes before the start of the debate round or formulating arguments in the middle of the round, which requires that they be quick-thinking and firm in their decision making. Similar to critical and analytic thinking, students are forced to consider different performative possibilities and weigh their options until they decide what kind of performative choices they want to make. In terms of more quick-thinking applications of forensics, consider that with the exception of extemporaneous, impromptu, and debate, all events are memorized at the collegiate level and at the very least, partially memorized at the high school level. If a speaker makes a mistake or forgets what comes next, it is up to the competitor to figure out the best way to mend the situation without telling the audience that a mistake was made.

Furthermore, interpretation events, especially at the collegiate level, rely heavily on the use of movement and blocking. During a performance, several things could go wrong. If there isn't enough space in the competition room, blocking is forgotten, or for duo interpretation, if a partner gets out of sync with the other, the competitor must be

aware enough and fast enough to catch the mistake and make the necessary adjustments.

This category is present on multiple levels within forensics competition. Based on the responses, it is clear forensics benefits the participants' problem solving and decision-making, and even goes beyond these two in teaching competitors how to think quickly on their feet.

Organization

Organization was the second lowest rated skill in terms of participant perceptions. Only 86.6% agree that forensics participation has benefitted their organization skills (50.3% strongly agree; 36.3% agree). However, organization was one of the more prevalent themes associated with the participants' open-ended responses. It is possible that there was a misunderstanding of what was meant by organization. Contrary to the organization of material items, this category was meant to explore the organization of thoughts and arguments and if the participants felt that they had a better grasp on how to organize ideas for oral or written presentation that would be best understood by whomever their target audience is. However, it is also possible that those who felt strongly about forensics' impact on their organization skills were the only ones who thought it was important enough to include in the open response.

The only statistically significant difference in regards to organization came between male and female respondents. An independent samples t-test was run to determine if there was a difference in perceived skill acquisition between males and females. The results of this test show that women were more likely to perceive positive impacts on their organization skills ($M = 1.58$, $SD = .84$) than men ($M = 1.75$, $SD = .69$). This was significant with $p < .05$.

Respondents cited an ability to effectively organize their thoughts and arguments in order to clearly communicate with others as forensics, “increased my ability to organize my thoughts and orally present them in a way that will connect with any audience.” Another participant illustrated that, “I am able to organize my ideas and argue persuasively for a position, think quickly on my feet, analyze and critique opposing positions, and deliver a message in the most concise possible way.”

From the very beginning of their forensics careers, students are taught the importance of strong organization when developing a script for performance. Throughout the draft process, students are continuously reordering information or main points so that the information will be easy to digest for the audience. One of the fundamental skills taught by forensics should be organization skills. Graduating students need to be able to effectively organize their thoughts and arguments so that they can effectively communicate with others.

Active Listening

Active listening was another theme that was reinforced by the results of the questionnaire. 97.6% of the respondents agreed that their active listening skills benefitted from participation in forensics (66.6% strongly agree; 31% agree).

Active listening seems like a skill that would be more highly rated with debate competitors, however there was no statistically significant difference between those who competed in individual events, debate, or both. One participant explained that through forensics, he/she “learned how to listen when others speak and understand the main points they are trying to get across, which helps streamline discussions.” Another response adequately illustrated the role of active listening in forensics as they learned “to

listen critically, deconstruct what someone is saying and spot unsupported claims.”

Competitors typically want to see their competition, whether it’s for the love of competition or an attempt to gauge how they stand up against the competition. This requires that students pay very close attention to what is said during performances. They must then quickly decipher the meaning of these messages and make sense of it.

Additionally, participants who compete in debate rely on active listening skills as they must pay close attention to the opposition, understand what they are saying, or what they aren’t saying, so that they may prepare the best fitting argument.

Honing the listening abilities of young adults entering the workforce should never be considered anything other than beneficial. Forensics gives students the tools to stay actively engaged in a situation with an attention for detail.

Networking

With the lowest rating out of all of the Likert-type questions, only 83.5% claimed that their networking had benefitted from forensics participation (44.6% strongly agree; 38.8% agree). Similar to organization, this category rated low compared to other categories, yet received a respectable amount of attention through the open responses.

The reason for this is more than likely that participants who rated networking highly felt more of a need to make mention of it. Several participants discussed recent opportunities that they received due to the networks formed throughout their time competing.

Discussing their new school transfer, one participant exclaimed, “now, I live outside of DC, and I have connections who are already offering me internships this summer, all because this activity gave me the opportunity to succeed.” Another offered that, “it has truly enhanced my networking skills, allowing me to reach people that I never thought I’d

be able to.”

Forensics holds tremendous opportunities for networking if the student allows for it. Although, networking may be more important to collegiate competitors as they should be searching for career opportunities upon graduation. When students join a forensics team, they are joining a team of individuals who have their own networks, they are gaining new coaches with networks of their own, and they are travelling across the state or nation, meeting hundreds of people over the course of a year. It is difficult to tell exactly where these networks may lead, but forensics offers students the ability to form an enormous network, through their own connections, as well as through their teammates, coaches, and friends established through travel and competition. This is highly important for students as they graduate and move forward with their lives. Having a strong network and support system could be the difference between students receiving a plethora of opportunities, or none at all.

In addition to the themes previously mentioned, developed by past research and reinforced by the results of the current study, two other themes emerged. The amount of responses that targeted education and interpersonal skills merits further analysis of these two categories. These two themes have either gone untouched or have not commanded the attention of past studies.

Education

Once competition eligibility has ended, many collegiate competitors reverse roles and become graduate assistants for a forensics program to help coach events and take some of the burden off of the actual faculty. Through the open-ended responses, many participants cited a newfound love or appreciation of education that led to a career in

education. Of the total responses ($N= 381$), many participants ($n= 99$) went on to graduate, doctorate, or law school as a direct result of forensics. However, this doesn't necessarily tell the full story as over a third of the participants chose a career in education. Higher education ($n= 50$; 13.1%) and educators working with kindergarten through 12th grade ($n= 92$; 24.1%) made up 37.2% of the total career field generated by survey responses.

Additionally, an independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the differences between those who continued their education after competition and those who didn't. Those who chose to continue their education as a direct result of forensics were more likely to feel the full impacts of forensics participation, as they rated higher on all of the Likert-type questions. There were statistically significant differences on multiple levels.

Those who continued their education noted higher decision-making skills (continued education: $M= 1.14$, $SD= .49$; not: $M= 1.41$, $SD= .61$) with a significance of $p < .01$, critical and analytic thinking (continued education: $M= 1.08$, $SD= .45$; not: $M= 1.25$, $SD= .49$) at $p < .01$, networking (continued education: $M= 1.59$, $SD= .82$; not: $M= 1.8$, $SD= .79$) at $p < .05$, research abilities (continued education: $M= 1.22$, $SD= .58$; not: $M= 1.37$, $SD= .65$) at $p < .05$, and organization (continued education: $M= 1.45$, $SD= .69$; not: $M= 1.72$, $SD= .78$) at $p < .01$ (refer to Table 2). The final area of significance was found in the last Likert-type question which asked if forensics has benefitted their professional life or career. Those who continued their education were more likely to feel the benefits in their professional life or career ($M= 1.21$, $SD= .596$), than those who decided not to continue their education ($M= 1.41$, $SD= .597$). This was significant with p

< .01.

Table 2

Contrast of perceived impacts by education level

Variable	Pursuit of Post-Bac Degree		No Advance Degree Hours	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Decision-making	1.14	.49	1.41	.61
Critical thinking	1.08	.45	1.25	.49
Networking	1.59	.82	1.8	.79
Research	1.22	.58	1.37	.65
Organization	1.45	.69	1.72	.78
Professional life	1.21	.60	1.41	.60

Note. Mean scores closer to 1 indicate Strong Agreement.

$p < .05$

The results of the t-test aren't necessarily surprising. It would make sense that the competitors who continued their education as a direct result of forensics would feel the full effects of forensics participation. However, there are two possibilities as to why this is. First, competitors who continued their education are likely coaching events for a forensics programs and possibly wanting to choose forensics coaching as a career. If this assumption is correct, then those participants would be more likely to see the potential impacts and benefits of forensics. Second, forensics helps to teach the value of education and have a desire to acquire more knowledge.

Regardless of the reason, this suggests that forensics teaches the importance of education in a variety of ways. This notion was strongly upheld when reviewing the comments in the open-responses. Several participants mentioned forensics' impact on education through a variety of applications. Some noted that it cultivated a love of

education, like one participant who said, “it primarily fostered a life-long interest in learning and continuing education.” Another claimed, “I owe everything I have to forensics. The activity saved my life; it taught me that I was intelligent and that I could from college. I would not have gone to college or graduate school” if not for forensics.

Others noted the role forensics has had on their profession. One participant explained, “forensics has directly effected [sic] me as a high school theatre teacher. It has helped me develop real connections with students with a variety of backgrounds. Forensics has also given me tools to prepare engaging lesson plans.” Another stated, “forensics fostered a love for education, critical thinking, and advocacy. As a high school debate teacher I love working with individuals to provide a platform to speak about subjects they are passionate about. Forensics helped develop my identity as a person and as an educator.”

Whether forensics teaches the value of education or encourages a love of life-long learning, as Sellnow (1994) suggests it should, it is clear that forensics not only benefits the education of the students, but alters the perceptions of education as well. Students are given all of the tools to learn and grow within a forensics program. Forensics participants are also, or should be, speaking about topics they are passionate about. In doing so, all of the research that goes into preparing an event only helps to expand the mind of the student, forcing them to become well versed on a topic by uncovering new information or new ways to search for information. Forensics positively impacts the education of its participants in multiple ways.

Interpersonal Skills

Several participants described how their interpersonal skills had been developed through forensics participation. Some said that it helped them to learn how to work on a team, speak with clients and coworkers, interact with authoritative figures throughout interview processes, connecting to students and teachers, and relating to other people. When further analyzing the career categories chosen by the participants, interpersonal skills are in high demand for several of them. Health ($n= 24$; 6.3%), law ($n= 24$; 6.3%), K-12 education ($n= 92$; 24.1%), higher education ($n= 50$; 13.1%), and entertainment and fine arts ($n= 23$; 6%) are all career fields that call for a heightened level of interpersonal skills. The only two exceptions to this list are business ($n= 55$; 14.4%) and other ($n= 112$; 29.4%).

Several participants mentioned heightened interpersonal skills and an ability to interact with others. One respondent from the health care profession explained that, “forensics has led to a heightened ability to read people and provide excellent service to patients.” Several others mentioned the role of interpersonal skills in the interview process. One participant summed this up perfectly, stating that, “interview skills have the most direct link to my participation in forensics. I am consistently complimented on my interview abilities although I have never spent any time perfecting or researching those skills. They came naturally thanks to my years of speech and debate.”

It’s difficult to tell exactly where participants receive heightened interpersonal skills because there are a number of possibilities. Forensics tournaments are great places for students all across the nation to meet. Overall, forensics is an incredibly social activity. Students make connections to teammates, other competitors, coaches, and judges

during the entirety of the academic school year. The social aspect of forensics could be the root of heightened interpersonal skills. However, it could also be a result of heightened confidence in their communication skills that leads students to feel more comfortable in interpersonal communication settings. The responses tended to discuss comfort and confidence when communicating in interpersonal settings. Because this activity is predicated on the communication process and interacting with others, increased interpersonal skills could simply be a cumulative side effect of several other skills gained such as confidence, awareness, communication skills, or any other skills previously mentioned.

In analyzing the data related to interpersonal skills, evidence supporting H_3 also began to emerge.

H₃: Participation in forensics provides former competitors and members of the forensics community with adequate preparation for various career fields.

As previously discussed, several career categories were represented through the questionnaire including K-12 education ($n = 92$; 24.1%), business ($n = 55$; 14.4%), higher education ($n = 50$; 13.1%), health ($n = 24$; 6.3%), law ($n = 24$; 6.3%), entertainment and fine arts ($n = 23$; 6%), and other ($n = 112$; 29.4%). Additionally, several respondents mentioned adaptability in their responses. They noted an ability to quickly adapt to new jobs or situations. One said, “I am able to on my feet, adapt to every group or professional setting I am in, and communicate effectively to ensure clarity.” Another explained that, “the skills learned through participation have made me more well-rounded and able to adapt to a variety of professional positions.” In search of a reason for why participants feel this way, one respondent was a little more descriptive, stating that:

Forensics has been invaluable to my professional life and career. My public speaking and interpersonal skills that I have gained from forensics have given me an edge when entering new career. I have found that I have been able to adapt to jobs much faster than my colleagues and I attribute that to my ability to communicate with my supervisors, coworkers, and the people I supervise.

With several different participants working in different job categories and the ability to adapt, as mentioned by the respondents, it is safe to assume that forensics adequately prepares students to work in a variety of professions. The skills listed throughout this chapter are not exclusive to forensics competition or education and should not benefit one career field over the other. All of these skills are important for young adults to possess regardless of profession, and forensics helps to develop said skills.

Event Groupings

One additional relationship garnered attention. Many of the statistically significant differences came when analyzing the link between events and perceived impacts. The original event groupings were “Communication Analysis, Informative, Persuasive, and After Dinner Speaking”, “Impromptu and Extemporaneous Speaking”, “Prose, Poetry, and Programmed Oral Interpretation”, “Duo and Dramatic Interpretation”, “Parliamentary Debate”, and “Policy or Lincoln-Douglas Debate”. There were no statistically significant differences between the event groupings so the categories were collapsed into three new groups (Group 1: individual events; Group 2: debate; Group 3: both). Once regrouped, there were significant differences on the perceived impacts on six

levels. All of the following differences were observed using one-way ANOVA with comparisons made using Fisher's LSD post hoc test.

Decision-Making

First, there was a significant effect of event groupings on critical decision-making skills at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 375) = 3.93, p = .020$]. A post hoc comparison showed that those who competed in both individual events and debate were more likely to perceive positive impacts than those who exclusively competed in individual events.

Critical and Analytic Thinking

Second, event groupings showed an effect on critical and analytic thinking at the $p < .01$ level [$F(2, 375) = 6.45, p = .002$]. The post hoc comparisons indicated again that those who competed in individual events *and* debate were more likely to perceive positive impacts on their critical and analytic thinking skills than those who competed only in individual events.

Confidence

Third, event groupings showed an effect across the board on confidence at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 373) = 3.15, p = .044$]. The post hoc comparison showed effects between each group. Those who competed in individual events reported higher confidence than those who competed in debate. Similarly, those who competed in both individual event *and* debate rated higher in confidence than those who only competed in debate.

Public Speaking

Fourth, different event groupings had an impact on how participants rated their perceived public speaking skills at the $p < .01$ level [$F(2, 374) = 9.68, p = .000$]. An assessment of the post hoc test showed that debate rated lower on the perceived impacts

on public speaking than individual events competitors and those who competed in both. However, there was no significant difference between those who competed in individual events and those who competed in both.

Networking

Fifth, networking was effected by event groups as well at the $p < .05$ level [$F(2, 375) = 4.12, p = .017$]. Post hoc comparisons showed that there was a statistically significant difference between individual events and debate, as well as between individual events and both. Individual events rated higher perceived networking than both other groupings.

Communication Skills

Sixth, there was a significant effect of event groupings on clear communication skills at the $p < .01$ level [$F(2, 375) = 6.07, p = .003$]. The LSD post hoc test uncovered that there were two statistically significant differences, both involving debate. Those who competed in individual events perceived a higher acquisition of clear communication skills than those who competed in debate. Similarly, those who competed in both reported higher communication skills than those who competed in debate.

Although debate rated low in the majority of these comparisons, it is important to note that several debate events have fallen into trends, and critiques have followed. Many within the forensics community argue that debate rarely caters to the audience in the way that individual events do. This is not implying that debate is any less significant than individual events, but rather, that debate and individual events are uniquely different, yet equally beneficial.

Consider that during competition, debate participants are focused on listening to

their opponent(s) and formulating arguments to put them in the best position to win the round, or at the very least, to test the effectiveness of different arguments and tactics. The competitors then communicate with the judge, as the judge decides who wins or loses. Unfortunately, this typically means that the students *only* cater to the judge, rather than potential observers. Comparatively, this immediately separates individual events and debate. Individual events, especially interpretive performance, cater to the audience and invite others to listen.

Debate is highly competitive, and as a result, is constantly evolving. There are several types of arguments that unless you are involved in debate, will be difficult to fully understand. Additionally, delivery methods such as spreading (speaking very quickly) do not bode well with audience members lacking a background in debate. Again, this is not to imply that debate is any less significant, just to illustrate the wildly different platforms in which the two groups speak. Keeping this in mind, it would make sense that debate would score lower than the other two groupings simply based on the fact that the communication processes is slightly different in terms of the intended audience. There are still some debate organizations that attempt to keep debate rounds inviting for observers, however, the more competitive debate gets, the more factors play into a round, thus, creating more confusion for audience members lacking a related background.

Because individual events consist of a single performer, or two for duo interpretation, students are given exclusive rights to a performance space with no interference. The students are then able to perform whichever event they are entered in and put exactly what they practiced into motion. There is something self-gratifying about forensics, which is nearly impossible to decipher. It could be that competitors are able to

see the fruits of their labor in terms of trophies. Or possibly that just having a platform such as forensics, where students can gather for a shared cause, share with each other, and enjoy the pleasures of performance helps students to find comfort in being eased into skills that terrifies the masses. As indicative of the results previously discussed, forensics is highly beneficial to the students who participate and as shown by the former competitors that took place in this study, the impacts of forensics participation will be felt long after student exhausts their competitive eligibility.

Summary

This chapter focused on the results of the data collected. It also makes several comparisons and discussion of the significant results that emerged. Material was found in support of the research question, proving all three hypotheses to be accepted regarding the impacts and benefits of participation in forensics. The impacts discussed include communication skills, public speaking, confidence, awareness, research abilities, decision-making, organization, active listening, networking, education, and interpersonal skills. This chapter also explored the relationship between individual events and debate. Each of these was presented with supporting evidence and a discussion of the interpretation for what these mean for former forensics competitors.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Participation in forensics can significantly benefit the students who choose to compete; this is something that scholars have agreed on for decades. This study sought to explore the long-term impacts of forensics participation and if the skills gained through forensics can translate well into life beyond competition.

The information gathered supported the research question, as well as all three hypotheses. Participants rated the perceived impacts of forensics to be highly beneficial through 10 Likert-type questions. Former competitors overwhelmingly agreed across the board that forensics offers several beneficial impacts. Participants noted several areas that forensics helped to improve and how that has impacted their professional life or career.

Chapter Four illustrates exactly how overwhelmingly positive the responses were. In seeking an understanding of the long-term impacts of forensics participation, analyses were conducted on a number of levels. Understanding the former competitors' perceptions of the impacts of forensics are extremely important and because this is an activity for the students, it is crucial to understand how the activity impacts its students.

Analyses were also conducted to find relationships of significant differences between several groups, most notably, the relationship between individual speaking

events and debate. Overall, those who competed in individual events were likely to see the impacts of forensics as more beneficial than those who competed exclusively in debate. This information could be incredibly useful to a school interested in establishing a forensics program on their campus. The findings of this study could also help an existing program decide between individual events and debate if forced to choose.

The perceived impacts discussed throughout chapter four seem to reflect the thoughts that Aden (1991) holds for the purpose of a liberal arts education. Because a liberal arts education attempts to produce students who know how to think and act on their own, as Aden (1991) suggests, it would appear as though forensics reflects the goals of a liberal arts education.

Additionally, Sellnow (1994) and Greenstreet's (1993) notion that individual events and debate both pull from experiential learning appears to be supported by this research. Consider that all of the perceived impacts discussed throughout the findings of this research, as well as the responses of the study's participants, were all acquired through competition. This means that students have put their theoretical knowledge in motion and are actively practicing and developing the skills taught to them. This also indicates that former competitors have not only acquired these skills, but have maintained them long beyond their competitive eligibility.

Stenger (1999), Shaw (1995), Billman (2008), Holba (2008), and Carr (2002) all discuss the potentially beneficial impacts of forensics participation. The skills they discuss throughout their respective works are supported by the findings of this research. These findings also extend on the list of perceived impacts of forensics participation. All of the skills discussed by these authors were present throughout the course of this study,

and then some.

If a forensics culture truly does exist as Miller (2005) suggests, then there may be no better representation of this sentiment than the support of this research. Nearly 400 participants were gathered in less than 3 days due in large part to the entire forensics community embracing this research and passing it along to others. This group of students, judges, and coaches work tirelessly for the activity they love. They have developed a general, shared set of behaviors, symbols, values, and thought processes. By definition, forensics is a culture. It is unlike any other extra- or co-curricular activity in that it provides a safe place for students to practice being an informed, productive member of society.

Overall, the findings of this study could be very helpful to coaches and administration under almost any program-threatening circumstances. Whether there are issues surrounding budget, administration struggling to justify the existence of a program, or when decisions have to be made in terms of which events to compete in. This research clearly outlines the impacts that forensics can have on those who compete.

Limitations

There were two limitations to this study that emerged upon data collection. These limitations included an underrepresentation of one group in particular, and the construction of the survey.

College-only Competitors

While there was an adequate level of representation everywhere else, there was a significant lack of college-only competitors. With former high school competitors ($n=177$) and competitors who competed in both high school and college ($n=185$) receiving

such high sample sizes, the fact that college-only competitors ($n= 19$) made up such a small portion of the total sample size could have misconstrued the results. Had there been more of a balance, it is entirely possible that there would be more statistically significant differences when analyzing the level of competition and its effect of perceived impacts. In order to remedy this, the researcher would need to specifically target former competitors that only competed in collegiate forensics. However, this may have happened because this is what naturally occurs in the forensics community. High school competitors are either recruited or decide to compete for collegiate programs, or end their forensics competition at the high school level. Therefore, one reason for the underrepresentation could be that students rarely become involved during college with no previous forensics experience.

Survey

Just to clarify, the survey itself utilized the correct question and targeted the desired information for this study. However, there seemed to be some issues with a lack of answer choices. For example, when categorizing their jobs, 29.4% of participants chose “other” ($n= 112$). Additional categories would have been incredibly helpful when analyzing the career fields that former competitors ended up in. Having more detailed information could have given clearer results, especially within the interpersonal communication section and the discussion of H_3 in Chapter Four.

Also, one respondent noted that Public Forum Debate (PFD) was not included as an option for participants to choose when selecting which events they competed in. This likely wouldn’t have altered the results too drastically since the events were collapsed, but it could have netted additional participants for the study as several high school

competitors may have only competed in PFD.

More skills listed in the Likert-type question could have proven to be beneficial as well. A pre-test would have helped to determine which additional skills to include as participants noted a variety of skills in their open-responses. It would be interesting to see how participants perceived forensics' impact on a few unexpected skill sets if, for no other reason, than to gather additional descriptive information. This could have also aided in the development of new themes for analysis.

Implications for Future Research

Because this study was focused on forensics in general, future research could utilize the same premise of this study but search for more specific relationships. The number of significant relationships between individual events and debate merit further analysis. Splitting the study into two parts could be beneficial. One part could specifically target individual events to determine which impacts, if any, are specifically tied to individual events that aren't present in debate. Likewise, a survey that more directly addresses debate events could be used to determine if there are any impacts that are tied to debate and not individual events. Or a condensed version of this survey could be used with additional impacts generated by the open responses of exclusive individual event and debate competitors.

Also, a more concrete comparison between high school and collegiate competition could garner more significant results, however it would be difficult to obtain this information without manipulating the participants of the study and how these populations naturally occur in the forensics community. The survey could be altered to target more competition level variables such as high school size classification, team sizes,

or the competitive level of the circuit the participants competed in to determine if there is a difference regarding the competitiveness of the program they competed for. This could help to provide a more accurate, specific representation of the impacts of high school competition, college competition, and competition in both.

Similar studies could take several different routes in exploring the factors that affect the long-term impacts of forensics participation. For future research, the most important thing is to acquire more specific information regarding the variables that have an influence on the perceived impacts.

Summary

This chapter offers a brief overview of some of the significant findings of the study, limitations of the study, and implications for future research. This research encourages the embracing of forensics at any level. As outlined, there are an immense amount of positive impacts that forensics can have on those who compete. With the shrinking attendance of some of the largest national forensics tournaments, it is imperative that coaches and administrations do not lose sight of what forensics offers the student. To those who question the value of the participation in forensics activities, consider the advice offered by a college student returning to speak at her high school about the value of speech and debate:

I encourage you all to keep a mental list of the lessons and skills you're learning. It's fantastic that you, at some point, made the decision to enroll in speech and debate, but what is it that keeps you coming back? The answer will be different for everybody, but also the same in the respect that your future experiences and success will depend on it. Debate

prepared me for “the real world” in ways I never could have anticipated as a high schooler, sitting where you are now.

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APPENDIX A

Forensics' Impacts Questionnaire

1. What is your age?

2. Sex?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

3. What is your total annual individual income?

- ☐ Less than \$10,000
- ☐ \$10,000 to \$19,999
- ☐ \$20,000 to \$29,999
- ☐ \$30,000 to \$39,999
- ☐ \$40,000 to \$49,999
- ☐ \$50,000 to \$59,999
- ☐ \$60,000 to \$69,999
- ☐ \$70,000 to \$79,999
- ☐ \$80,000 to \$89,999
- ☐ \$90,000 to \$99,999
- ☐ \$100,000 to \$149,999
- ☐ \$150,000 or more

4. At which level did you compete in forensics?

- ☐ High school
- ☐ College
- ☐ Both

*(If participants answer “High school”, the questionnaire will skip to question 7)

5. What type of college did you compete for?

- ☐ Community college
- ☐ 4 year university or college
- ☐ Both

6. What size university/college did you attend?

- ☐ Division I
- ☐ Division II
- ☐ Division III
- ☐ N/A

7. How many years did you compete in forensics?

- ☐ 1 year or less
- ☐ 2 years
- ☐ 3 years
- ☐ 4 years
- ☐ 5 years or more

8. What individual events organization(s) did your program compete in? (Check all that apply.)

- ☐ National Forensics League/National Speech and Debate Association (NFL/NSDA)
- ☐ American Forensics Association (AFA)
- ☐ National Forensics Association (NFA)
- ☐ Interstate Oratorical Association (IOA)
- ☐ Phi Rho Pi
- ☐ Pi Kappa Delta
- ☐ Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA)
- ☐ American/National Parliamentary Debate Association (APDA/NPDA)
- ☐ International Parliamentary Debate Association (IPDA)
- ☐ National Debate Tournament (NDT)
- ☐ National Educational Debate Association (NEDA)
- ☐ Not sure

9. What individual events were you most actively involved in? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Communication Analysis, Informative, Persuasive, or After Dinner Speaking
- ☐ Impromptu or Extemporaneous Speaking
- ☐ Prose, Poetry, or Program Oral Interpretation
- ☐ Duo or Dramatic Interpretation
- ☐ Parliamentary Debate
- ☐ Lincoln-Douglas or Policy Debate

10. Participation in forensics has benefitted my...

	Strongly Agree	Agree	No effect	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Critical decision making skills					
Critical and analytic thinking					
Active listening					
Networking					
Research abilities					
Organization					
Confidence					
Strong public speaking skills					
Increased social awareness					
Clear communication skills					

11. Did you continue your education into a graduate or doctorate program as a direct result of forensics?

- ☐ Yes

- No

12. What category does your current job fall under?

- Health
- Law
- Business
- Education (K-12)
- Higher education
- Entertainment/Fine arts
- Other

13. What is your current job title?

14. Participation in forensics has helped me in my professional life/career?

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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**If participants choose “Neutral”, “Disagree”, or “Strongly disagree”, they will be directed to the end of the survey. If “Strongly agree” or “Agree” are chosen, the participants will be directed to question 15.

15. If yes, how has your participation in forensics helped you in your professional life/career?

APPENDIX B

IRB Consent Form

Thank you for your participation in this study about the long-term impacts of participation in forensics. I appreciate you taking the time to help us by sharing your honest opinion.

Your participation is voluntary and your responses herein will remain completely confidential and will be kept on a password-protected computer.

In signing this consent form, you acknowledge that you are at least 18 years of age and wish to participate in this study conducted by Michael Lawton. You will be asked a series of questions during a survey regarding your participation and experience in forensics and how it has impacted you since concluding your competitive career. If you have NOT competed in forensics, you may still complete the survey if you feel that you have been actively engaged in the activity at either the high school or collegiate level.

You understand that you are free not to participate. If you choose not to participate, you may opt out of this research project by checking "No" below. You understand that you could be at risk for uncomfortable feelings due to the process of responding to questions about your views of these topics; however, these are no greater than the risks of everyday life.

All information collected during this research will remain confidential and be stored on a password-protected computer. Research reports or publications will ensure that individual responses will not be identifiable and pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity.

This research has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at West Texas A&M University. If you have any concerns about this study or your rights, you can contact the dean of the graduate school and research, Dr. Spaulding at 806.651.2731.

Thank you again for your participation. Should you have any questions, concerns or wish to request further information, please contact me at 940.395.5966.

Michael Lawton, West Texas A&M University

I have read the above statement and agree with the terms listed herein.

☐ YES, I agree to participate in this study. ☐ NO, I do not wish to participate in this study.

APPENDIX C

July 16, 2015

Dear Michael Lawton:

Your research proposal titled, **“Speak Up!: A Quantitative Exploration of the Long-term Impacts of Competitive Forensics”** was submitted to the full membership of the West Texas A&M University IRB on **June 18, 2015** for **expedited** review. The IRB may (i) approve, (ii) approve conditionally, or (iii) disapprove proposed protocols and consent forms. The decision of the IRB regarding your proposal was:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Approve
<input type="checkbox"/>	Approve Conditionally
<input type="checkbox"/>	Disapprove

Approval is extended for one calendar year. Should data collection proceed past one year, or should you make changes in the methodology as it affects human subjects, you must resubmit the study to the IRB.

Assuming all IRB training requirements have been met, procedures involving human subjects may now proceed.

Upon verifying your successful completion of all training requirements, an official letter of approval from the Graduate School is forthcoming. Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well in your research project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gary Bigham, IRB Chair