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President's Page...The Off-Campus Audience as an Adjunct of the Forensic Program

E. C. Buehler
University of Kansas

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President's Page . . .

"The Off-Campus Audience As An Adjunct of the Forensic Program"

What is the use of debating if you don't have an audience? This question sounds the complaint that we have heard again and again in recent years. We all know that our forensic events do not have a wide audience appeal. Unless we have a visiting team from a foreign country or require the attendance of speech students or promote a debate on some sensational topic, we are contented with an audience of a dozen or two of casual listeners. The fact is that students simply do not turn out for our forensic events.

In an effort to cope with this problem, many of us have resorted to taking our forensic programs away from the campus to the ready-made audience. Although this practice is not new, its fullest possibilities have not been explored. The off-campus forensic activity for many institutions should be an established adjunct of our regular program. It should be explored and developed to a much greater extent.

(1) This expansion is in keeping with the present trend of extending educational and cultural values to the general public. The adult audience can find much information and mental stimulus by listening to a lively debate or discussion on the vital issues of the day. It may derive additional benefits from these programs through the added feature of the open forum.

(2) The off-campus forensic event offers the speakers an opportunity to meet with realistic audience situations. Civic clubs, church groups, and high school assemblies provide the kind of listeners that debaters are most likely to face in real life. A real audience is a real speaking experience. It offers the necessary incentive for adequate preparation and the richness of subject material for the compelling organization of ideas, and it inspires mental alertness and proficiency in delivery. In other words, it brings the basic skills in speech-making into sharp relief.

(3) The off-campus forensic program is an excellent medium for creating good public relations. It gives the public a chance to see that the college is doing something aside from playing football. Here is the concrete example of educational and cultural aims as they are emphasized by our institutions of higher learning.

Furthermore, the college boy or girl speaking before elders enjoys a natural psychological advantage. The parents in the audience who have boys and girls

near the age of the student speakers are impressed with the manner in which these speakers excel in the art of speech-making.

Furthermore, programs of this type are popular with the outside organization. The off-campus listener likes to hear discussions and debates and informative talks by students.

(4) The off-campus forensic program is practical, not expensive, and easy to promote. Clubs and organizations may be found in numbers in any community. Many groups will gladly pay the travel expenses of the speakers; but even if the school has to pay its own expenses, it is much cheaper relatively speaking than the costs of the usual debates sponsored on the campus or otherwise. I do not think I exaggerate when I say that ten typical off-campus engagements of this kind will not exceed the usual cost of one typical debate tournament.

(5) The off-campus speaking projects lend themselves to flexibility and a variety of forensic endeavors. While debates and discussions may be the most common type of speaking performances—extemporaneous and impromptu speaking contests, informative and entertaining talks, orations, and even oral reading may be conveniently used. It is because of variety that other speakers besides the hard-hitting college debaters may be used.

(6) Finally, I recommend the expansion of the off-campus forensic event as an antidote for the present trend toward over-expansion of the college debate tournament. I have no major criticism of the judicious use of a properly conducted debate tournament. The debate tournament is here to stay, and it forms part of the core of our whole forensic program but I do decry the semi-professionalism that has crept into some of our debate tournaments. I speak with much conviction when I say that I do not consider it to be fair for a college to spend more than half of its forensic budget on a handful of debaters who are entered in a half dozen or more tournaments and who debate the same subject forty or fifty times a year thus denying many other deserving students on the campus valuable forensic experiences. I say it would be much better to delete the tournament phase of our activity and expand the off-campus speaking events.

E. C. Buehler

University of Kansas