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Accreditation Criteria and Forensics: Essential Principles for Directors of Forensics

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Abstract

Assessment pressures abound for all institutions of higher learning. During her tenure as Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings frequently called for transparency and greater accountability in our colleges and universities. This paper review each of the criteria for accreditation established by the Higher Learning Commission, putting our teams and events to the test to determine our activity's ability to meet each of the criteria and contribute to our academic mission, vision, and objectives. The skills and knowledge derived from forensics, in particular the limited preparation events, provide evidence of engaging and challenging our students and creating effective learning environments for students who "live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society."

Introduction

Colleges and universities in the United States voluntarily seek accreditation from one of six regional accrediting agencies recognized by the Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. Since 1895, the regional North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA), with colleges and universities in 19 states, "has been committed to the improvement of education at all levels through evaluation and accreditation" ("FAQ," 2010). Accreditation provides "both a public certification of acceptable institutional quality and an opportunity and incentive for self-improvement" ("FAQ," 2010). The regional agencies provide criteria for accreditation in categories that range from the mission and integrity of the institution, to student learning and practices of effective teaching, to ensuring that institutions have sufficient resources and planning to carry out their mission (NCAHLC, 2010). Reaffirmation of accreditation must take place no more than ten years after prior accreditation. These institutions of higher learning gather materials, write self-reports, and undergo site visits from the accrediting agencies. Based upon the institution's mission, vision, and goal statements, the accrediting agency evaluates the materials and determines whether an institution is accredited. If an institution is weak in one of the criteria, the review team may ask for follow-up reports or other types of information and return to the campus to conduct a focus visit in relation to that specific criterion.

Although this process is voluntary, nearly every college and university in the country pursues accreditation. Inspection of an institution through the regional accrediting agencies provides a statement of public transparency and trust. Students cannot receive federal financial aid from schools that fail to meet standards for accreditation. Due to the tremendous importance of accreditation, institutions typically spend several years gathering materials and authoring reports in anticipation of the site visit. Failure to meet criteria would be unacceptable to trustees of the institution. Thus, college and university officials focus considerable attention on accreditation, particularly with regard to any changes or proposed changes within the criteria.

Although the forensics community might initially see accreditation as something of concern only to deans, provosts, and presidents, this could not be further from the truth. Institutions invest tremendous resources to ensure that criteria for accreditation are met. All stakeholders of the institution play a role, even in small ways, in providing evidence of student learning, appropriate resource management, and long-term planning. Forensics provides unique opportunities to shape student learning and engagement.

This paper is a tool of advocacy for directors of forensics. It consists of a review of each of the criteria for accreditation as provided by NCA's Higher Learning Commission (HLC), which oversees the accreditation of colleges and universities. The paper provides recommendations for actions that directors of forensics can take to link program objectives and outcomes to these criteria. Each regional agency (such as the NCA) is technically independent of the others, although they work together, and each recognizes accreditation of schools provided by the others. Due to this independence, it is recommended that directors of forensics review their accrediting agency's website for more information.

There are five major headings of the criteria for accreditation. Each heading features a criterion statement, which are the "necessary attributes of an organization accredited by the Commission,"; core components, which consist of "reasonable and representative evidence of meeting a criterion"; and multiple examples which illustrate "the types of evidence an organization might present in addressing a core component" (NCAHLC, 2010).

Before detailing the criteria, core components, and examples of evidence, I want to make something known and clear. In order to prevent the need to cite NCAHLC, 2010 at the end of every other sentence throughout the remainder of the document, and to encourage direct application of HLC's specific language and phrasing, I liberally use the language of the criteria, core components, and examples of evidence without formal citation being applied. Thus, I encourage those who quote freely the text of this paper to please consult the original text of the criteria, core components, and examples of evidence for clarity.

Criterion One: Mission and Integrity

The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and pro-

cesses that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

1a. The organization's mission documents are clear and articulate publicly the organization's commitments.
Universities and colleges must adopt clearly-articulated statements of mission, vision, values, and goals that provide a foundation for the institution and direction for future growth and development. Directors of forensics need to identify the institutional mission statement and review the specific vision and goals provided. A key piece of evidence that institutions are actually meeting this criterion includes documentation to the public, particularly to enrolled (and prospective) students. Thus, there should be abundant information online to meet the goal of transparency for the accreditation review process.

Mission statements themselves are often very broad. At a baseline philosophical and educational level, most forensic organizations and individual teams readily meet the same goals as the institution. For example, consider Ripon College's mission statement (Ripon is a private, four-year liberal arts institution of approximately 1050 students):

> Ripon College prepares students of diverse interests for lives of productive, socially responsible citizenship. Our liberal arts curriculum and residential campus create an intimate learning community in which students experience a richly personalized education (Ripon, n.d.).

Directors of forensics should note the key trigger points in the mission statement that link to the forensic activity in general and the individual team's philosophy in particular. My team has very, very diverse interests. In fact, part of the appeal of Ripon as an institution is that students can express their views openly and participate in a number of activities alongside forensics. Thus, a member of the forensics team might also be involved in Student Senate, a fraternity or sorority, be a lead in a theatre production, play for an orchestra, have a show on the radio station, or write for the campus newspaper. This also fits the philosophy of Ripon's program to provide opportunities for competition at a level comfortable for the individual student. Other triggers include the liberal arts, for which I argue that forensics is the strongest of the co-curricular activities in the development of student knowledge and skills in the humanities (literary criticism), natural sciences (a substantial percentage of informative speeches), social sciences (oratory/extemp), and fine arts (performance of literature). I strongly believe that extemporaneous speaking is liberal arts in action. Forensics by its very nature is part of an intimate learning community and provides a richly personalized experience.

> The University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire is a comprehensive university whose purpose is to foster the intellectual, personal, social, and cultural development of its students. The University provides an academic environment designed to encourage faculty-student interac-

tion and promote excellence in teaching and learning, scholarly activity, and public service. Its residential setting fosters personal and social development through a rich array of co-curricular activities (Eau Claire, n.d.).

Although our neighbor to the north is larger than Ripon, public, and part of the massive University of Wisconsin system, the mission statement's forensic triggers are clear. Our events foster intellectual, personal, and social development of students, and can, in certain circumstances, also affect cultural development. In addition, forensics uniquely engages faculty-student interaction and collaboration. Students can take their scholarly activity and apply it to their events. Some teams require or highly recommend public service. The key is to identify the specific triggers within the mission statement that apply to your team.

Individual teams should offer mission statements and place them on the web, on social networking sites, and in literature (such as brochures). Directors of forensics are often unaware of, or don't seriously consider, university mission statements in the development of their team. However, they are missing a great opportunity to link the activity and their team's philosophy to the mission of the institution. This information then informs current and prospective students, the administration, and faculty from all disciplines and campus locations, many of whom don't necessarily understand the activity and its benefits. Most teams have a particular philosophy of participation, competition, and/or education that truly represents excellence at all levels. Unfortunately, these mission statements often remain unstated or shared only with team members. Directors need to be very clear to link the mission of the team to the institution's mission, in particular as forensic education relates to the curriculum, learning goals, and activities of students.

1b. In its mission documents, the organization recognizes the diversity of its learners, other constituencies, and the greater society it serves.
Forensics often draws a very diverse student base. It is important to celebrate diversity and note the various ways forensics as an activity welcomes diversity in all its forms. Directors must not limit themselves to the interpretation of diversity as a matter of race/ethnicity or learning styles exclusively. Diversity of thought, appreciation for other cultures and ideas, and understanding of contemporary world issues through the lens of various national and international agencies affords forensics a unique place in the consideration of diversity on campus.

Diversity also recognizes the institution's function in a multicultural society. The institution must demonstrate a commitment to honor the dignity and worth of individuals. Forensic programs can provide evidence of this, following codes of behavior that reflect well upon the institution and which celebrate the dignity and worth of individuals. Oral interpretation of literature, in many ways, serves this purpose uniquely. As the institution needs to provide evidence of strategies to address diversity, teams should take the op-

portunity to promote the activity to a range of groups, both on campus and off, and inform the administration of their efforts to enhance diversity on campus.

1c. Understanding of and support for the mission pervade the organization.

In essence, this means walking the walk – for the institution itself and the forensic teams as well. We must live our mission statements. This means that the mission is posted in multiple places, both internally (e.g. squadrooms or coaches offices) and externally (online, including Facebook and Twitter). The central argument to be made is that, when team members understand their mission, they can become empowered to make ethical, competitive, and event decisions through that lens when questions arise. This behavior can have a powerful impact on the team. Is it acceptable to make up a source on the fly in extemp? Is it more educational to consider a variety of organizational structures in impromptu instead of just repeating one? Can I take a politically unpopular stance on a topic and support it? Students should be able to answer these questions, in part, by reflecting on the spirit of the mission. Coaching decisions should also be approached through this lens.

Directors of forensics need to understand that institutions, under this section of the core component, must provide evidence that strategic decisions are mission-driven; strategic decisions which involve planning and budgeting flow from and support the mission of the institution. By living the mission statement, teams which need administration support, or which need to defend themselves from the threat of program elimination, will be creating very strong arguments that the activity in general, and the team specifically, provide valuable evidence that the institution truly is meeting its mission, vision, and goals.

1d. The organization's governance and administrative structures promote effective leadership and support collaborative processes that enable the organization to fulfill its mission.

This section provides an opportunity to support a program that is under consideration for elimination. If the director of the program reports to someone who is ill-informed or apathetic toward the activity, or just in the mindset to cut budgets to bring numbers in line, then the structures of administration and support should be carefully considered and evaluated. For example, some teams work well through student activities budget lines and support, but others prefer budgets that are not subject to the political will of a student body. If the director reports to a department chair, is that chair well informed? How does that chair respond to the organizational structure? As institutions are evaluated, in part, on their mission and integrity as reflected in the category of effective leadership and collaborative processes, the director of forensics has the opportunity to argue that faculty and other academic leaders share responsibility for governance and demonstration of effective leadership. Institutions are called upon to evaluate structures and processes regularly and make appropriate adjustments. Directors of forensics

must understand these structures and how programs overall fit within the system in order to make appropriate arguments in support of their students.

In addition, directors of forensics are urged to carefully consider their own team's leadership structures and articulate the means by which teams will develop effective leadership and support collaborative processes. As one example, extemporaneous speaking, with a team's file system, requires students to collaborate, coordinate, and share a knowledge management system that effectively supports the team's educational and competitive goals. To enhance students' leadership and collaborative engagement in team decision-making, I created an advisory board at Ripon College (one student affectionately refers to the group as my "Cabinet") which consists of the six team officers and two students chosen at-large for any given meeting. These students provide advice and perspective on issues related to team management, team policies, and budgets. This provides ownership, transparency, and an example for the administration of how student leadership can be fostered (and then used as one piece of evidence by the institution as meeting its core mission, vision, and goals).

1e. The organization upholds and protects its integrity.

This final section of Criterion One is dedicated to ensuring that the activities of the institution are congruent with its mission. Legal, ethical, and fiscal responsibilities are a critical component of living the mission. Specifically related to forensics, the institution is concerned with the integrity of its co-curricular activities and that it supports structures and processes which demonstrate that integrity. The institution must represent itself accurately and honestly to the public and any complaints/grievances (in particular from students) must be documented and responded to in a timely fashion. The team should clearly state how student concerns are addressed. Directors of forensics simply may wish to adopt their institution's specific statements and procedures as they regard harassment, behavioral policies, and ethical responsibilities. These should be provided in writing (or with specific reference to where policies can be accessed in written form). If these procedures are lacking at an institutional level, the director should craft statements and share them with other constituents of the campus (with supervisor approval, as necessary).

Each director of forensics must ensure that the statement of their team's mission, vision, and goals are consonant with the practices of the team in order to uphold integrity. This applies to the practice of all competitive events. Directors of forensics need to identify specific learning objectives/outcomes for each of the events (or grouping of events) so that students understand their goals. It is easy to mistake competitive goals (I want to win the next tournament and get that last leg to qualify for nationals) with learning goals (I want to demonstrate a clear understanding of this topic and argue persuasively for my position). The learning objectives/outcomes become evidence for the demonstration of integrity as the students can read, reflect

upon, and internalize the director of forensics' desired outcomes.

I will use the limited preparation events as an example. Source fabrication in extemp (in which students feel the need either to create a false attribution for source diversity, or simply forget specific sources/dates due to limited time to memorize during prep) is a strong temptation. The director's tolerance for such practices on the team and the ability to detect and correct for these types of ethical lapses should be linked back directly to the mission statement and specific learning objectives/outcomes established for the event. If students cannot memorize, accurately, the source citations, then the student may need to use a notecard to ensure integrity of the event's outcomes (presuming that one outcome might be to handle evidence appropriately, in context, and with accurate citation). The notion of canning in impromptu, in which speeches are essentially prepared in advance and then forced to fit a quotation, demands that the program director and other coaches have frank discussions about the nature of the event and the need to link the specific language of the topic to the speech content to ensure integrity. Whatever the learning objectives/outcomes set by the director (hopefully in concert with the team members or a cross-section of team members), the team's integrity should not be compromised due to competitive goals trumping educational goals.

Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future
The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

2a. The organization realistically prepares for a future shaped by multiple societal and economic trends.
Although the forensics program may not be able to have an enormous impact on the preparation of an entire university or college system for accreditation, it is important to reflect upon best practices that can be considered by the director of forensics to meet the goals of the home institution. This criterion asks programs to look forward. Thus, the director must continue to keep in mind the mission, vision, and goals, as well as the learning objectives/outcomes of the events, and indeed the program as a whole, while making plans for the future.

One example of a piece of evidence that might be used by the institution, and thus the team, is planning based upon capacity. Programs vary tremendously in regard to philosophy, requirements, and resources available for travel. Directors of forensics need to examine the number of students, events, tournaments, and other important characteristics to determine capacity. The best place to argue the ideals (as well as the probable ranges of participation/competition) is in a program's annual review. If you are not required to write a review, write one anyway. Articulating specific goals, and sticking to them, as they regard team capacity, is

of value to the director whether an administrator evaluates the document or not. In fact, having a plan available demonstrates initiative, thoughtfulness, and attention paid to resource availability. View this planning document as an opportunity, not a threat, to further the goals of your program. As all faculty and staff members must have annual performance reviews, take the opportunity to discuss with supervisors your program's goals and objectives as they relate to team capacity. Linking to mission statements and core learning outcomes will make a very, very positive impression in the eyes of any supervisor, in particular if this action is not a requirement or even a suggestion that comes from the supervisor's office.

Use these reports to plan for the program's future. If directors do not currently have scholarships available, for example, track the capacity and use the planning documents to make arguments for why scholarships are essential to forming and/or sustaining a team. If there are too many students demanding extensive coaching that isn't supported by staffing levels, make the argument to increase resources for staffing, or recommend that caps be in place in terms of the number of students who actively travel and compete. For example, on-campus tournaments can be hosted to provide students a learning experience, and traveling team members may serve as judges to provide feedback to the non-traveling members. Many students can be involved without cost to the team's budget. In addition, if the director of forensics does not have a formal performance review, then ask for one. Directors will want the documentation that their supervisor supported their efforts and that they met expectations.

Outside of capacity, evidence in support of this core component may include planning documents that take into consideration emerging factors such as technology, demographic shifts, and globalization. Our teams frequently explore contemporary issues that pertain to these three categories. Extemporaneous speaking, by its very nature, examines the future as it is shaped by societal, international, and economic trends. Additionally, the institution's planning documents likely demonstrate its role in a multicultural society and effective environmental scanning as part of this core component. By encouraging administrators to attend showcase events which reflect upon these topic areas, or by holding an extemp round for administrators in which the administrators come up with specific questions for students to analyze and answer, it may signal that the administration is serious about innovation and change. After these experiences, the relevance of the program will be made stronger; as students engage in discussion with these officials after the speeches, there is an ownership created. The institution should also incorporate those aspects of its history and heritage that it wishes to preserve and continue. Demonstrating a commitment to programs like forensics certainly could be an important extension of the institution's identity and potentially result in further support.

2b. The organization's resource base supports its educational programs and its plans for maintaining and strengthening their quality in the future.

Although resource bases vary from institution to institution, directors can certainly do their utmost to ensure that resources are used effectively. Shifting to electronic files often saves teams volumes of paper and ink. Students who are on food-service contracts can request boxed meals to be provided to take to tournaments. Identifying discount rates at hotels, working with advancement offices to assist in fundraising efforts, and hosting high school tournaments to enhance admission efforts and raise money are just a few ways for a team to build a resource base and demonstrate a shared commitment to responsible use of resources for the future. In addition, the institution needs to provide resources that are adequate for achievement of the educational quality it claims to provide. Thus, making arguments and providing evidence that the team's budget is managed responsibly and in consonance with its mission is a critical element to the team's success in the eyes of the institution.

In addition, human resources are crucial in the focus of this core component. The director of forensics must review the planning documents and determine where forensics is seated in the context of the future of the institution. Carefully examine coach impacts on FTE (full time staffing equivalency) and the delicate balance among teaching, research, service, and coaching/travel. If the director meets other obligations outside of faculty appointment, ensure that the auxiliary or primary appointments outside of forensics meet institutional goals. Note the number of hours that coaches volunteer their time. Document each and every time a member of the campus or community serves as a guest judge or coach. All of these pieces of evidence contribute to the discussion of human resource allocation.

2c. The organization's ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.

It is a rare forensics team that holds a formal assessment of its students. Typically students travel when they sign up, or when coaches deem an event "tournament worthy," but what assessments are used to ensure learning objectives/outcomes are met? We often look to the final results to determine success. However, much as a letter grade on a single assignment does not ensure that a student has actually mastered the unit outcomes, so also single scores do not match goals for event outcome assessment. We often reward competitive behaviors instead of tuning in to educational objectives when evaluating students in tournaments. In limited preparation events, for example, students may perceive that they will be more successful in extemp if they memorize the speech. If an outcome consists of being able to deliver a speech with spontaneous language choices and from limited notes, then scores may not inherently reflect the learning objectives/outcomes desired by the program. The key with assessment is that a feedback loop is created so that improvement can be demonstrated. Thus, hosting mock tournaments in which community members serve as judges and provide feedback to students, may actually serve the interests of assessment better than a specific tournament result.

I also want to encourage tournament directors to consider placing learning objectives/outcomes in tournament invitations and attaching criteria for evaluation to the ballots to encourage more targeted assessment. Bradley University's Norton Invitational last year encouraged research and modified tournament practices to assess certain behaviors (such as requiring use of a notecard in extemp). These assessments help to shape the activity and provide valuable feedback, which assists individual programs and the forensics community, as a whole, in forming a process of continual improvement for the team.

2d. All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

Directors of forensics need to dedicate time to long-term team planning. As part of that planning, directors should reflect upon educational practices, student learning, and their budgets. Long-range planning by institutions typically will provide sufficient flexibility so that institutions can make adjustments depending upon the financial conditions of the college or university at the time. As a result, forensic programs will always be in a situation to defend their practices, to prove benefits, and to promote their missions. This will not change. Programs that are prepared to defend themselves, even in a tight economic environment, will better be able to weather the storm by asserting evidence in support of the institution's mission, vision, and goals through long-term planning.

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**Criterion Three: Student Learning
and Effective Teaching**
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The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

3a. The organization's goals for student learning outcomes are clearly stated for each educational program and make effective assessment possible.

The key at this stage is to develop program-level learning outcomes. As mentioned earlier, it is very easy to confuse competitive outcomes with learning outcomes. Program-level outcomes determine if a director's philosophy has been developed and sustained in the program, if all students who desire access can have that access, or if all students should meet specific requirements in order to compete. Directors must ask themselves, outside of trophy counts and sweepstakes points, what does a successful program look like? The goal of this component sought by accrediting agencies is often confusing – it is not to dictate *what* learning outcomes must be met at the program level. However, it does indicate that a program must *possess* learning outcomes and identify ways to measure those outcomes. Out-

comes must regularly be evaluated to determine success in meeting the stated objectives.

Event learning outcomes should also be established, as noted earlier. Ultimately, while finishing first in a competition is enjoyable, desirable, and beneficial to both one's esteem and the program overall, it does not ensure that students have actually developed a particular skill or mastered a particular field of study. Tournament results are indirect measures of student learning. We cannot assume that something has been learned when students meet a certain level of success. If learning objectives in interp, for example, consist of student selection, analysis, cutting, and development of a piece(s) of literature, and the student wins because a coach selected, cut, composed, and even wrote the introduction word-for-word, we might say that competitive success was achieved, but none of the learning outcomes materialized.

Likewise, students might meet some learning outcomes and develop valuable and measurable skills, yet are not rewarded with final round placements. Ranks and scores on their own don't measure learning outcomes. A clear rubric with specific points of analysis regarding specific skills can serve as direct assessment. In fact, if tournament directors placed learning outcomes on ballots and asked judges to measure specific outcomes at the contest, those comments could be considered direct assessment. The status quo suggests that one *could*, in theory, earn that type of ballot. However, without the specific learning objectives/outcomes directly stated, "nice shoes" might alone dictate who received the "1" compared to the "3" in the round. In essence, in the absence of clear criteria, judges simply create their own. Official rules typically are brief and broad and don't suggest what students should have learned from the experience and, as a result, are of little help in the formation of specific criteria for assessment.

Directors of forensics should have both direct and indirect measures of success embedded in the program. Clearly articulating the learning outcomes, and then creating measures to evaluate those learning outcomes, is critical to ensure external accountability. Indirect measures of learning may also be considered as a part of assessment, and may include alumni surveys of what they see as being of value upon reflecting on their forensics career, specific and on-target ballot comments, and assessments from community members. If a student takes a particular ballot comment related to a learning outcome, makes adjustments based upon recommendations on the ballot, and improves the event such that the learning objectives are met and an outcome can be measured, then the director of forensics has just identified a direct measure of assessment. In addition, data on retention rates among students who were on the team compared to the institutional whole, GPA's of students on the team compared to non-competitors, and other indirect measures certainly may be used in the justification of a program.

I recommend that directors of forensics discuss appropriate assessment strategies and tools with their academic assessment coordinator or institutional researcher, or both, to learn how best to craft effective assessments that the institution can use as evidence that students really are learning what we say they have learned. That's the ultimate question that assessment seeks to answer – how do we know that students learned something as a result of the instruction provided? What in the feedback loop from students, guest judges, and others constitutes an understanding that faculty and coaches have learned something they didn't before?

3b. The organization values and supports effective teaching.

I have twice in this paper argued against reporting results related to competitive norms when it comes to assessment. The primary reason for this is that judges often don't use recognized and content-specific criteria in their assessment of who "wins" or "loses." Curriculum models should be adopted that are well tested and capable of adding valuable information to the study of forensics or the improvement of student learning. Directors of forensics cannot meet goals of improving pedagogy if student horizons are not being expanded through learning outcomes. Students and coaches are invited to participate in professional conferences and meetings. In order to engage in practices that are innovative, norms must be reconsidered and tested, and in order to do that, one needs to understand the underlying theory that grounds the practices of communication, in general, and the various forensic events, in particular.

One substantial argument that directors of forensics can make under this criterion is that forensics features varied learning environments. One-to-one teaching and tutoring, enhancing learning through competitive activity, reflection and emotional maturity through interp, and engaging in the heavy research typically required of speeches serve as a truly unique opportunity to exercise skills desired by faculty and future employers alike. In addition, students who truly attempt to break norms will advance innovative practices, which means that forensics will be less likely to grow stagnant as students exercise a range of perspectives.

3c. The organization creates effective learning environments.

The direct and indirect assessment results mentioned above are key to this third component of Criterion 3. Results from assessments provide a feedback loop to the coaches and demonstrate an open environment for examining the curriculum, coaching methods, instructional resources, and student services. All learners are supported in the various ways that they practice, develop, and adopt skills. If a practice is not working, it can be recorded, assessed, and ultimately even dismissed. This cannot happen absent a process of assessment. In addition, this cannot happen if the director of forensics avoids taking the assessment process seriously. In speaking with colleagues who may not be inclined toward common assessment practices and procedures, the director might assume that this process does not carry value, or is only a process of "jumping through hoops." When used well, this process is not external to the running of a foren-

sics program; in fact, it becomes integral to developing a solid, logical and ethical program.

3d. The organization's learning resources support student learning and effective teaching.

Resources under this heading may include the purchase of electronic databases for research, performance spaces, and practice sites that support quality teaching and learning. Technology, specifically, is mentioned in this component as a means to meet the goals of the criterion. Thus, staffing of learning resources, support for students, faculty, and staff in the use of technology, and the effectiveness of learning resources all play a vital role. The evidence and arguments that you use can be helpful to information technology staff, the library, and faculty/staff development coordinators, among others. By sharing information on resource usage, directors of forensics can support other departments on campus while seeking approval from others for their own program. For example, if the forensics team is heavily using a particular database or part of the physical campus for performances or practices, note the need for such spaces, document their heavy use, and prepare to make recommendations as a result.

Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge

The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

4a. The organization demonstrates, through the actions of its board, administrators, students, faculty, and staff, that it values a life of learning.

This criterion statement provides extensive potential for directors of forensics to argue the benefits of their activity. As establishing a life of learning is forward-focused and difficult to measure, the director must articulate the goals of forensics that point toward the likelihood of a lifetime of engaged learning. One of the examples of evidence is that the institution publicly acknowledges achievements of students and faculty in the area of knowledge creation, application, and presentation. Forensics emphasizes research, analysis, and application of a body of knowledge through its public address events. In addition, extensive consideration of literature promotes creativity and character analysis in the interpretive events. Limited preparation events promote acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge in every single round of competition. Due to the need to promote these successes publicly by the institution, the forensics team should furiously promote their accomplishments by using the language of the criterion. In press releases, directors of forensics should note that students pursue acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge. The directors then need to provide examples for support. The range of topics that students address in forensics, if announced in press releases, provide further evidence in support of the criterion and in our support of students' critical inquiry, creativity, and practice. Cyberterrorism, false promises in

the promotion of organic foods, and a narrative which details the traumatic events that take place within a terrorist cell, demonstrate this criterion more effectively than the facts, on their own, that one student finished third in persuasion, another ranked fourth in CA, and yet another won prose. This is not to disparage the rank of students at a tournament; quite the contrary, it is the director of forensics' avenue to promote the team's success. Noting some of the final round topics in extemporaneous speaking, for example, reinforces the criterion and the emphasis on the promotion of life-long learning, while promoting a student's final round placement in the event.

This criterion also provides a unique opportunity to promote research in forensics. The National Developmental Conference is but one occasion for coaches and students to gather and share through the exploration of applied research. There are two specifically relevant pieces of evidence here: First, that faculty and students produce scholarship and create knowledge. Second, that research should be used to improve organizations and education. Directors of forensics should promote their own research and presentations in addition to highlighting student participation in these types of conferences. Coaches and students alike can help shape forensics and ultimately meet some of the most worthwhile goals of criterion 4 – to improve the activity for the future and foster a lifetime love for learning through competition.

4b. The organization demonstrates that acquisition of a breadth of knowledge and skills and the exercise of intellectual inquiry are integral to its educational programs.

This activity provides incredible evidence in support of breadth of knowledge and skills and the engagement of intellectual inquiry with an educational program. Although this component, in large part, addresses the curriculum related to general education requirements of the institution, forensics certainly provides a clear connection between the curricular and co-curricular components of a college or university education. Forensics supports critical inquiry, practice, creativity, and social responsibility. In addition, if we have done our jobs effectively by creating learning outcomes for each category of events, we then can demonstrate achievement of a breadth of knowledge and skills. These learning outcomes, combined with alumni feedback and support, can turn promotion of this activity into a catalyst for continued learning well into the future.

4c. The organization assesses the usefulness of its curricula to students who will live and work in a global, diverse, and technological society.

Once again formal curriculum is the focus for this core component. Those who host either formal programs of study, or even forensics as a single course, will be able to detail the specific curricular connection here. Outside of the formal curricular context, directors of forensics will likely discuss limited preparation specifically in regard to this core component. One of the examples of evidence – skills and professional competence essential to a diverse workforce – substantially relates to the preparation and skills we provide

through impromptu and extemporaneous speaking. In addition, having the skills and knowledge needed to function in a national and global society is represented in every round of extemp. Directors of forensics need to articulate these skill sets and share information with alumni, employers of former students, and other external constituents with documentation on how forensics has played a substantial role in their lives.

There is a caveat which is important to highlight at this time. As this core component addresses the usefulness of the curriculum, and holds as an example of evidence student/faculty research, I recommend that coaches have frank discussion with students on the effect of competitive dimensions on public address research, in particular with regard to CA. Research for many public address events focuses attention on magazines, newspapers, and the occasional journal, and may or may not add substantive new research to the field of study (often students summarize, or analyze, others' works instead of creating their own research). In CA, although students are producing very creative and original ideas, in particular in the implications section found in most CAs, students and directors should take care not to confuse extensive academic research practices with those of CA. Directors should discuss with students how research is conducted in the academy, the role of the research question in published articles, and how these elements differ from some of the research that is done for CA. We would not publish a ten-minute CA script in an academic journal. This is not a criticism of the event – it is the reality when we consider that the scope and burdens of CA research are often very different from formal scholarship, even though there are many talented students who find ways to link their academic scholarship in creative and interesting ways to their specific events.

4d. The organization provides support to ensure that faculty, students, and staff acquire, discover, and apply knowledge responsibly.
This entire core component regards responsible use of knowledge, ethical conduct with regard to use of information, and respecting intellectual property rights. It is incumbent upon the director of forensics to discuss responsible use of information with students. We must ensure that students are writing their own speeches, that they review each source citation so that it accurately and appropriately reflects the information consulted, and consider the role of learning objectives/outcomes in the practice of event development.

Source conduct is a very important component of limited preparation because of the spontaneous nature of both events. It is very easy for a student to "botch" a source in impromptu or extemp, either by simply forgetting or mixing up dates/periodicals or theories/reference points. Although anyone can, in the tension of a competitive round, forget or misstate a source, we must take steps to ensure that this is the exception and not the rule. Thus, I urge the entire forensics community to consider the role of notes and to address perceptions on how notes are considered in the context of the round. It is interesting that absence of notes in a limited preparation event, with content that students likely have not consulted or used in a particular way in advance of the round, is determined more credible than possession of notes. I would argue that, when referenced on occasion, notes should actually *convey* credibility instead of harming it. However, imagine the reaction if, when judging national tournaments, I were to write, "good speech, but because it's memorized I'm worried that it's not fully credible." Yet, we have all seen ballots that suggest the opposite ("you'd be more competitive if you dropped the notecard"). While this is not to suggest that everyone who uses a notecard is automatically more responsible with their sourcing, our standards for information usage should reflect appropriate use and consideration, and efforts to promote practices that encourage this appropriate use should be adopted.

Criterion Five: Engagement and Service
As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

5a. The organization learns from the constituencies it serves and analyzes its capacity to serve their needs and expectations.
This criterion and core components should be the most enjoyable to fulfill of all – outreach of our activity into the community. Forensics possesses ample opportunity to enhance our students' skills and improve the lives of others in ways both large and small. Our students can share their presentation skills and perspectives with local schools, civic groups, or prison inmates. Performances showcase the talents of the students, spark valuable discussion, and forge strong connections/networks outside of the forensics community. Students may form or join a speakers' bureau, for example, which emphasizes "real-world" speaking in non-competitive contexts.

Whatever directors of forensics use to reach out to and support the community, they should ensure that it is documented. For example, if students perform at a local Rotary group, pass out surveys afterward requesting feedback. Specifically, Rotarians might be asked to provide their perspectives on a persuasive speech that is delivered to a non-forensics audience. Were they persuaded? What dimensions of the topic were not considered in the speech that should have been included? What did you like best about the presentation? Part of assessment is "closing the feedback loop," which means that we take the feedback and actually use it to inform practice. These are the types of questions that can lead us to an examination of practices and procedures within the community.

5b. The organization has the capacity and the commitment to engage with its identified constituencies and communities.
The focus of this core component is the direct linkage of the institution's structures and programs to the community. Specifically, educational and co-curricular programs need to

provide evidence of engaging and connecting students with external communities. This is an opportunity for the program to put its best foot forward and bring performance and persuasion to those outside of our organization.

Directors of forensics can get very creative and discuss outreach with their team members, creating ownership and pride among the team members. Putting on a showcase of events prior to nationals can bring campus and community together without a cost to attend. Asking students to perform for various civic groups broadens the reach of the activity and also engages external audiences in a discussion of important issues. Audience adaptation is an important skill that can be lost in our activity. Thus, performing for older audiences (such as nursing homes or assisted-living facilities) and younger audiences (Dr. Seuss Week performances of children's literature) alike is a value that can be reached through community. There are literally dozens of ways to link our activity to the community. The key to success is to select quality events that are audience-appropriate. For example, after dinner speaking is an event that, due to styles of humor and audience, may not work well with external audiences. In addition, competitive behaviors, such as walking in triangles, puns in preview statements, and assumptions of audience attitudes and beliefs need to be carefully considered and adapted based upon the context.

As the community enjoys the student performances and engages in the discussion of important issues, teams benefit as well, through exposure of the activity, avenues for future team fund-raising, and testing clarity and quality of events to a non-specialized audience. Publicizing these connections also provides valued evidence of engagement by the institution. In short, under this component, everyone involved benefits.

5c. The organization demonstrates its responsiveness to those constituencies that depend on it for service.
While the forensics team does not typically have a constituency that relies upon it for service, partnerships can be formed with local groups and organizations. A capable group of students can help research important issues and deliver speeches to targeted groups, such as nonprofit boards, city councils, and chambers of commerce. In addition, senior-level and well-rounded team members may be able to serve as no-cost public speaking coaches for community members or organizations. Overall, however, the strongest partnerships under this core component will likely take place in the schools. Team members can assist local schools by coaching and/or judging for their teams, putting on summer or seasonal training camps, and serving as role models for community youth.

5d. Internal and external constituencies value the services the organization provides.
What impact do services of the institution have on the community? This final core component attempts to measure impact and ensures that it's positive, sought after, and open to the public. Directors of forensics should seek out testi-

monials from alumni, local employers who have hired forensics students, satisfaction surveys from civic groups and other community organizations, and letters of program support from neighboring school districts who have benefitted from college student coaching.

In addition, institutions must demonstrate that external constituents participate in the activities and co-curricular programs open to the public. Inviting community members to serve as judges at locally-hosted tournaments, for example, can provide invaluable exposure and evidence of engagement. Directors of forensics should invite public officials to serve as judges. After a contest hosted last year, a Wisconsin state representative asked two students for copies of their speeches and their research base as those topics related to issues being debated or proposed in the state legislature.

Conclusion
The goal of this paper has been for directors of forensics, in particular, and coaches/students/friends of forensics, in general, to appreciate how our programs can support an institution's efforts toward accreditation while also benefitting the team's focus, philosophy, learning outcomes, and promotion. I encourage directors to adopt some of the recommendations above, in particular by adopting learning objectives/outcomes so that students understand what they are learning and why they learning them. If you need help and support, please contact me and I will do everything I can to help you with your team's progression in these vital areas.

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