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Impact by Intention: An Argument for Forensics as a High-Impact Practice

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This essay locates forensics within national discourse about high-impact practices (HIPs) in higher education, as outlined by scholar George D. Kuh. Forensics shares all the characteristics associated with the ten promising practices Kuh (2008) outlined initially. Though Kuh's original overview and expanded list of practices (Kuh, 2016) serve as reference points for addressing HIPs, forensics has not been recognized as a HIP. The essay argues that framing forensics as a HIP could enrich advocacy efforts to start and/or sustain current forensics programs. The article connects the fiscal climate with the assessment paradigm, examines the ways forensics adheres to Kuh's definition, and identifies three ways reframing forensics could enrich advocacy efforts and the visibility of forensics.

If I describe intercollegiate forensics as an enriching educational experience that changes the lives of students, most directors, coaches, and students who constitute the forensics community, including alumni, would probably agree. Further, if I outline the time and effort it requires from students; describe the ways it facilitates learning beyond the classroom; note the range of meaningful interactions it fosters among coaches, students, and teammates; articulate how it encourages collaborations with diverse people; and observe that it offers a forum for students to receive frequent and substantive feedback, this would probably generate minimal controversy.

As obvious as the impact of forensics might seem to members of the forensics community, recognition of its role as a substantive co-curricular endeavor is noticeably absent from the scholarship regarding High-Impact Educational Practices or, more commonly, High-Impact Practices (HIPs), that has circulated in higher education discourse since around 2008. To return to my opening proposition, the National Survey of Student Engagement's (NSSE) "Engagement Indicators & High Impact Practices" (2015) summary describes HIPs in terms familiar to forensics affiliates. It characterizes them as practices that:

> . . . represent enriching educational practices that can be life-changing. They typically demand considerable time and effort, facilitate learning outside of the classroom, require meaningful interactions with faculty and other students, encourage collaboration with diverse others, and provide frequent and substantive feedback. (NSSE, 2015)

The ten practices most commonly identified as HIPs that "educational research suggests increase rates of student retention and student engagement" (Kuh, 2008, p. 9) include first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity/global learning, service learning/community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects (Kuh, 2008). In 2016, Kuh expanded the list to also include electronic or e-portfolios where students document their cumulative co-curricular experiences.

The educative core of forensics does not appear in literature on HIPs. McBath (1975) argues that forensics is "an educational activity primarily concerned with using an argumentative perspective in examining problems and communicating with people," and asserts that "forensics activities, including debate and individual events, are laboratories for helping students to understand and communicate various forms of argument more effectively in a variety of contexts with a variety of audiences" (p. 11). However, despite the literature forensics educators, alumni, and current students have shared about the educational impact of forensics on the enrichment of knowledge and skills, it is missing from the conversation.

This essay aspires to correct this omission for multiple reasons. Exploring the ways forensics can be understood within the HIP framework is an important way for the forensics community to speak a type of language many administrators and scholars are speaking in higher education. The pressure for co-curricular programs to demonstrate their value and impact on students is inseparable from contemporary discourse about competing demands for institutional funding and support. As Cunningham (2005) notes, "[s]adly, our community has seen many programs eliminated when a new dean or department chair-person with a lack of knowledge about forensics wants to cut budgets" (p. 15). The survival of forensics may eventually depend on clear and effective articulations regarding its impact and efficacy. Placing it in the HIP context could aid efforts to converse with institutional, divisional, and/or departmental goals.

Understanding forensics as a HIP is also a potential tool for enriching the forensics community's self-awareness and enhancing its own administrative practices. Deeper reflexivity could provide a means for translating the learning outcomes of forensics to faculty, staff, and administrators. As several authors have noted previously, the forensics community must continually challenge perceptions that it is "extracurricular" rather than co-curricular, a club rather than an enduring educational activity, or just a "competition" focused on winning rather than student development (Burnett, Brand, & Meister, 2003, p. 12).

The most pointed articulation so far of forensics as competition comes from Burnett, Brand and Meister (2003), who argue:

> Current practices in forensics focus on competition and not on an often-referenced education model. The problem is that when the competition model of forensics attempts to justify the activity by advocating a 'balance' of education through the realities of competition, it masks the competition model under an educational guise. (p. 12)

Their argument prompted Hinck (2003) to challenge their overall perspective and articulate the educative value of forensics' competitive structure. Hinck notes:

> In a well-founded forensics program, students learn how to communicate complex ideas to many different types of audiences from peers, to coaches, to teachers, to judges, to teammates, to members of other departmental classes, to community members, and possibly even administrators. Through forensics competition students begin to understand how competing ideas shape political and organizational outcomes. (p. 64)

The process of preparing oneself to engage with audiences is part of a larger process warranting further inquiry. Hinck (2003) cites discipline, the ability to prioritize, and goal-setting as skills students experience through competition that enrich their lives beyond college. Hinck offers an important critical opportunity to challenge perceptions, and more importantly, to expand our lens to view competition as a vehicle for transformative educational and personal development well beyond tournaments themselves.

I begin my argument for framing forensics as a HIP by first addressing the relationship between the funding anxieties in higher education and the emergence of the HIPs paradigm as a language for measuring learning in a curricular, co-curricular, and pedagogical context. Next, I discuss the specific correlations between forensics and the HIPs framework based on the six criteria Kuh (2008) outlines. Finally, I explore the utility of this approach and potential advocacy strategies for program directors and coaches.

I ground this discussion in the robust literature on forensics' educational impact written by scholars who have expanded the discourse regarding forensics' educational scope. Because the relationship between coaches and students is a central engine of the educational orientation of forensics, coaches as teachers, mentors, and advisers have an especially prominent role in this process. Communicating about the ways forensics exemplifies the HIP definition is a potential strategy for aligning forensics practitioners with their campus colleagues and placing their work more strategically in the national discourse about the role of co-curricular learning in a liberal education.

Placing HIPs in Context

Communication studies scholars routinely allude to concerns regarding resource allocations as a looming anxiety affecting forensics programs. For example, Schnoor (2015) begins an essay on forensics program budgeting by noting:

> We only have to look at how the events of the past few years have provided us with the evidence that our administrators are under the gun to tighten financial expenditures and in doing so, have begun to look closely at departments and programs they may feel are of less value or have failed to defend their existence for whatever reasons. (p. 76)

Copeland and James (2016) note similar concerns by recognizing that "[f]orensics educators find themselves continuously justifying the activity to administrators, colleagues, and other stakeholders," a concern that should compel forensics educators to "champion the applied educational benefits of the activity" (p. 20). Billings' (2011) study regarding the learning experiences of former forensics competitors beyond their undergraduate education is also situated in the concern that a lack of scholarly information may impact struggles to "maintain forensics programs at a time of declining financial support for higher education" (p. 111).

These financial concerns reflect a broader conversation in higher education that partially informs the drive toward assessment. Pike, Smart, Kuh and Hayek (2006) discuss various factors informing expenditures on multiple types of college campuses. They frame their analysis as a necessary intervention responding to a "paucity of research on expenditures and outcomes," especially "given the declining state of funding for higher

education and growing demands that colleges and universities be more transparent and accountable for student learning outcomes" (pp. 847-848). One of Pike's co-authors, George D. Kuh, is a leading voice in the translation of engagement data from the NSSE, which "collects information at hundreds of four-year colleges and universities about first-year and senior students' participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development" ("NSSE," 2015), into a framework for organizing select student practices that has become known as HIPs. Published in 2008, *High-Impact Educational Practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter* (Kuh, 2008) is a publication based on a collaboration between the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) Initiative and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC & U). In the publication, LEAP's then-President Carol Geary Schneider links the ability of students "to both thrive and contribute in a fast-changing economy and in turbulent, highly demanding global, societal, and often personal contexts" to the "emerging discussion about 'student learning outcomes'" (Kuh, 2008, p. 2). Questions regarding the ways students use their time, their engagement with different types of educational practices, and the ways these practices help them learn are central to the discourse regarding outcomes, as are concerns from employers about students' preparedness in key skill areas (Kuh, 2008).

From this largely socioeconomic context, Kuh outlines six primary characteristics that define the 10 categories of HIPs. Kuh does not frame HIPs as infallible solutions. He recognizes certain limitations and frames them carefully as "promising practices" (Kuh, 2008, p. 17). A critical concern about this admirably nuanced approach is that, by emphasizing the 10 categories, the HIPs approach codifies them to the exclusion of other impactful practices. This is a key area where forensics educators have an opportunity to examine and articulate the impact of their practices on student learning and development.

Defining Forensics Practices as HIPs

I examine the six characteristics Kuh (2008) uses to define HIPs and consider them in relation to practices within the forensics community. Affirming the ways forensics exemplifies HIPs criteria does not exempt either forensics or the HIPs framework from further critique or scrutiny. My focus, however, operates from the critical perspective that both have demonstrated their validity in numerous ways and thus placing them in conversation could benefit both mutually.

Student Time and Effort

First, Kuh (2008) notes that "these [HIPs] practices typically demand that students devote considerable time and effort to purposeful tasks; most require daily decisions that deepen students' investment in the activity as well as their commitment to their academic program and the college" (p. 14). Students who compete within the guidelines of two of the most prominent individual events forensics organizations, the American Forensics Association (AFA) and the National Forensics Association (NFA), typically compete in multiple individual events including limited prep, oral interpretation, and public address (American Forensics Association, 2018; National Forensics Association, 2018). The "pentathlon" and "individual sweepstakes" awards categories, often featured at local, state, regional, and national tournaments, reflect the common practice of students choosing to

compete in multiple events annually. In public address events, for example, time—to select topics, research and craft speeches, collaborate with staff coaches and peer coaches, memorize speeches, practice delivery, travel to tournaments, compete in rounds, review ballots, and revise—is central to the art of forensics. The first two elements of topic selection and speech writing are approached differently in working on interpretive events, but selecting texts, cutting them, and blocking the pieces are parallel time-consuming activities, as are more general practices such as working with coach(es) and traveling to tournaments.

The abilities of students to work with multiple coaches and for teams to travel widely vary by the size and funding of teams, among other factors. As such, one cannot sufficiently quantify the "average" time competitors spend preparing for individual events. However, a core structure of forensics that reflects Kuh's (2008) definition is the demand for coaching and practice time. Moore's (2005) essay on coaching addresses the varieties of coaching structures prevalent in forensics. These include *standardized individual coaching* sessions, which are typically half-hour or hour-long weekly meetings, and *variable weekly coaching*, the "most common coaching approach," where "you allow students to sign-up for individual coaching sessions weekly. The availability and quantity of the coaching slots varies week-to-week. In general, students schedule these appointments at the teams' weekly meetings" (pp. 66-67). Coaching times also include *standardized team practice*, which could occur multiple days per week at the same time, *come when you want* sessions where students work with coaches during their extended office times, and *peer coaching*, which often comes in the form of varsity students serving as "event captains" and supplementing feedback from professional coaching staff members (p. 68).

However scheduled coaching and practice sessions represent only one aspect of the time required to compete in forensics. This is a substantial activity that requires hours of performing, active listening, reflection, and post-coaching revision from students. This correlates to the purposeful task, student investment, and academic elements Kuh (2008) notes as a defining aspect of HIPs (p. 14). Further, the NFA's Academic Learning Compact (ALC) learning outcomes (Kelly, Paine, Richardson, & White, 2014) outline specific learning outcomes representing "the best practices in forensics pedagogy" that students experience in working with coaches (p. 39). For example, for Public Address events they outline nine areas of development, including audience analysis, analysis of the occasion, topic selection, research, organization, language (style), vocal delivery, physical delivery, and memorization. Each section includes a rationale and at least one student learning outcome. They codify similar elements for oral interpretation and limited preparation events. Kelly and Richardson (2010) framed these outcomes as the Pedagogical Prerogative Perspective, "a theory-based set of learning expectations and outcomes" (p. 80).

Critical awareness of the need to articulate the educational aspirations and achievements of forensics participants has inspired multiple studies relevant to our understanding of how students use their time in forensics and what they learn. A qualitative study Copeland and James (2016) conducted with then-current competitors identifies "improving skills in public speaking, listening, organization and structure, networking, time management, group work, and increasing knowledge and broadening worldview" as major benefits of competing in forensics (p. 20). Billings's (2011) qualitative study of

forensics competitors at least 10 years past their competitive careers identified six areas where the alums felt the activity was most beneficial, including argument formulation, confidence, friendships, research skills, world/cultural literacy, and time management/organization. Clearly, the desired outcomes of forensics, the ways competitors experience forensics historically and in the present, and the time and investment required to reap these benefits relate strongly. While more research on students' self-perceptions on the benefits of forensics is needed, as well as more discussion about the ways students structure their time, these examples epitomize Kuh's (2008) time and effort criteria for HIPs.

Meaningful Interaction with Faculty and Peers

The second criterion Kuh (2008) identifies as a characteristic of HIPs is the way such an activity "puts students in circumstances that essentially demand they interact with faculty and peers about substantive matters, typically over extended periods of time" (p. 14). Critical discussions about the role of coaches as mentors (White, 2005) and advisors (Tyma, 2008) for students in forensics reflect the high potential for intense collaborative relationships between coaches and students which Moore (2005) identifies. In 1990's National Developmental Conference on Individual Events (NDC-IE) proceedings, Carver and Ialson-Casselton's (1990) discussion of mentoring for coaches notes, "most of the experienced coaches definitely felt they fulfilled the mentor role for their students." The nature of the mentoring interaction is commonly understood within the forensics community as intrinsic to the coach-student relationship but may be less evident externally. White (2005) notes, "[m]entoring is an important aspect of a forensic coach's job. Although it is not what we are 'officially' hired to do, it is fundamental to the success of our programs" (pp. 92-93). Drawing on a range of mentoring literature, White identifies the nurturing, friendship, and apprenticeship models of mentoring as valuable models for coaches at different points in their careers.

Understanding the nature of different types of mentoring relationships in the context of forensics deepens my argument that forensics fosters meaningful interactions between faculty and students. *Nurturing mentoring* is rooted in "empathetic guidance," whereby "[t]he mentor shows a genuine concern for the mentee, but still maintains a stance as the more knowledgeable in the partnership. The mentor's role is not to control the mentee, but rather to guide the mentee toward making wise life choices" (White, 2005, p. 90). *Friendship mentoring* is "a complementary and reciprocal relationship," given that "mentoring views mentor and mentee as peers who are equals. There is no hierarchical distance between the involved parties" (p. 91). *Apprenticeship mentoring* is "characterized by a short-term relationship where the mentor assists in the mentee's learning process" and social and personal aspects are minimal (p. 91). White thoroughly addresses the benefits and limits of these models in the context of forensics. For example, she recognizes the potential for a "friendship" mentoring relationship to undermine the professional role of coaches if students perceive all decision-making as open for "mutual negotiation" (p. 91). Nonetheless, each type of mentoring embodies a high level of intentionality rooted in communication, listening, support, and feedback in various forms.

The coach-as-advisor perspective Tyma (2008) describes has parallels to the mentoring approach but incorporates a more overt developmental piece. Notably, "[t]he coach knows various ways of achieving a winning performance, but the competitor must

find his or her own path." Such an approach "affords the competitor an opportunity to learn, make decisions, make mistakes, continue to learn, and become finally successful by her or his own measure" (p. 105).

The correlation between effective mentoring and the development of skills extends beyond tournaments to broader areas of a student's development. Hinck (2003) captures the unique potential outcome of this relational intensity by noting:

> Competitive forensics can provide opportunities for mentoring students who might otherwise have chosen to forego further coursework, might be going through difficult personal circumstances, or simply trying to stay interested in school. The close interaction between teacher and student in the course of preparing for tournament competition can often create the relationship that makes mentoring and its positive outcomes possible. (p. 65)

I explore the way competitors articulate classroom impacts of forensics later in this essay, but Hinck offers an important link, noting how positive coaching-mentoring relationships enrich students' enthusiasm for their academic work and even inform retention and persistence toward graduation.

Peer coaching is a significant element in forensics that Moore (2005) has addressed previously. This practice also mirrors Kuh's (2008) discussion of substantive peer-to-peer interactions. Tyma (2008) recognizes peer coaching as a longstanding tradition in forensics and discusses the ways it "allows for all members of the team to have *voice* and *agency*" through structured opportunities for teammates working with multiple events to perform for each other, listen, and share questions and constructive feedback (p. 106). The greatest potential benefit of students learning from each other is the opportunity to "uncover new options or directions, and assist in developing a course of action to follow for the competitor[s]" (p. 107). Additionally, the connections students make with competitors from other teams, especially competitors who compete over multiple years, can be understood as a substantive form of peer engagement. While this is challenging to document, Billings (2011) discusses the relationships and friendships forensics alumni report they developed as a result of their experiences, and Copeland and James (2016) discuss the networking opportunities current competitors report. This speaks to a rich social dimension of peer connections happening within the forensics student community.

Though White (2005) and Tyma (2008) focus on describing types of coach-student relationships, there is a strong praxis element. For example, White elaborates on her mentoring experiences by noting interactions beyond the more apprentice-oriented model focused on skill-building:

> I usually try to hold goal-setting appointments at the start of each semester. If I am most comfortable taking the apprenticeship approach toward mentoring a student, I keep these meetings focused on competitive goals and skill improvement. If I am drawn toward the nurturing style of mentoring with a particular student, I use these special meetings to ask the student more specific questions about his/her academics, family and future plans. (p. 92)

A variety of structures and practices exist within forensics that entail strong faculty-student and student-student interactions.

Experiences with Diverse Cultures

The third criterion Kuh (2008) identifies notes how "participating in one or more of these activities increases the likelihood that students will experience diversity through contact with people who are different from themselves" (p. 15). Because students from community colleges, public universities, private universities, and private liberal arts colleges participate in the forensics community, no central metric could quantify the cultural diversity of the community sufficiently. This lack of quantitative data has neither prevented attention to issues of inclusion and diversity nor impeded qualitative analyses of diversity, which is the topic I now turn my attention to.

Though one could intuit that competing at local, regional, national, and international tournaments offers students multiple opportunities to experience cultural differences, both Billings (2011) study of forensics alumni and Copeland and James (2016) qualitative study of current competitors provide firsthand evidence of forensics students' perceptions of diversity. Among the core benefits Billings isolates in his survey of 107 respondents, diversity emerges as one of the six key themes he identifies. Billings notes that the range of comments provided by respondents:

> . . . made a joint argument for forensics being a facilitator of a global citizenship that includes not only learning about different social, cultural, economic, and political ideas through the construction of speeches but also the exposure to people who were of different demographic and cultural origins than their own. (p. 117)

Some of the comments refer to the benefits of leaving one's own home state, travelling outside of the United States, and meeting an open member of the LGBTQ community.

Related to this finding is Copeland and James's (2016) note that 14 of the 19 then-current competitors they interviewed "described the forensics experience as increasing their knowledge, and therefore broadening one's worldview" (p. 28). The way students think about the world, the openness to different perspectives, the development of empathy, the use of forensics as a form of social advocacy, and the personal expression of underrepresented identities are some of the thematic elements the authors quote from respondents. Clearly, the process of crafting content within individual events, the opportunity to engage with other competitors' arguments and interpretations, and opportunities to interact with different kinds of people affect the ability of forensics students to develop inclusive attitudes and broaden their social perspectives. While there are many opportunities for scholars to explore this area further, the existing evidence indicates a positive correlation between participating in forensics and experiencing diversity.

Ongoing Feedback

Kuh's (2008) fourth criterion for HIPs is that "students typically get frequent feedback about their performance" (p. 17). Some of the examples he cites include

collaborating with faculty on research, working with a peer-writing tutor, and receiving feedback from an internship supervisor. All of these are "opportunities for immediate formal and informal feedback" (p. 17). Coaching relationships and the ways students respond to ballots from judges are the obvious examples of feedback received by forensics students. As Moore (2005) outlines, coaching relationships and feedback are a constant in the life of forensics competitors. Moore also references overt academic overlaps, noting that "[s]ome schools allow students to receive practicum hours for their participation on a team and some even require communication majors to compete at least one semester during their collegiate experience" (p. 67).

Alongside the feedback professional coaches and peer coaches can offer students is the important educational role of judges. One of the four domains of the National Forensics Association's Academic Learning Compact is communication, which includes four sub-goals: a clear and memorable style, the ability to "[d]eliver effective presentations," the ability to "[e]stablish credibility with [the] audience," and the ability to "use information technology effectively to conduct research" (Kelly, Paine, Richardson, & White, 2014, pp. 39-40). Judges, many of whom are coaches, previous competitors, and lay judges, constitute the audience for most competitors. Critical evaluations of performances, as recorded on ballots which also include comments, rankings, and speaker points, are largely rooted in competitors establishing credibility with their audiences. Considering that most individual events competitors compete in multiple events, forensics students receive a substantial amount of criticism at a typical tournament. Of course, the amount does not ensure the criticism is insightful or that it leads competitors to alter their approaches. But the same could also be true of a student intern with multiple supervisors. The likelihood of students competing in multiple events means students are receiving multiple ballots, which ensures the opportunity to consider multiple voices and responses to their performances.

Qualifying to compete at the AFA-NIET and/or the NFA National Championship Tournament is a common goal for forensics students. The process of preparing to compete at nationals means competing at multiple local, state, and/or regional tournaments (depending on a team's resources). Students' opportunities to employ ballots as educational tools, and to then refine and revise their performances, guarantee that forensics students experience a steady stream of feedback regarding their performances. By the time they compete at national tournaments (for those who qualify), students have read and potentially responded to a substantial number of ballots from different types of judges, as well as benefited from coaching feedback. National tournaments are the ultimate space for feedback. Great humility and openness are required for students to listen, trust, and think beyond their own perspective on their performances.

For example, at NFA's national tournament students compete in three preliminary rounds and are scored by two judges in each, thus they receive a minimum of six ballots. Students who advance to elimination rounds (octofinals, quarterfinals, semifinals, and/or finals) receive an additional five ballots from each round. Thus, a finalist in a limited prep, public address, or interpretive individual event would receive 26 ballots from 26 separate voices. Though most students do not necessarily emerge as finalists at national tournaments, the culmination of each person's experience is not just recognition but feedback for improvement.

Observing Impact

The fifth HIPs criterion Kuh (2008) identifies is that "participation in these activities provides opportunities for students to see how what they are learning works in different settings, on and off campus" (p. 17). The relationship between the craft involved in preparing for forensics tournaments, the experience of competing, and the way these experiences impact students' undergraduate education and broader sense of self has inspired multiple studies involving competitors in both debate and individual events. Rogers (2002), whose work assesses behavioral differences between debate and non-debate students, speaks to the layered nature of forensics in a way that resonates for both debate and individual events. Notably, there are "contextual skills" such as critical thinking, research skills, and evidence evaluation that forensics community members presume are benefits. Alongside these skills is a perception of "an impressive array of non-linear benefits" (p. 1). These findings were later expanded on by Rogers and his additional associates (Rogers, Freeman, & Rennels, 2017). Exploring the ways obvious and less apparent "skills" surface in the lives of forensics students also informs my argument that forensics fulfills Kuh's criteria. Based on the existing research, forensics provides students a panoply of opportunities that empower them to excel in the classroom, pursue their educational and professional aspirations vigorously, and develop a robust set of personal competencies. Copeland and James (2016) frame this apparent richness as "an experiential-learning environment where students find personal and academic growth" (p. 33).

In 1991, McMillian and Todd-Mancillas identified self-esteem, education, and skills as three main areas where competitors perceived specific advantages from competing in individual events based on the responses of 164 forensics participants. These categories provide specific frameworks for understanding the different kinds of learning derived from the forensics experience. In terms of self-esteem, students strongly agreed or agreed (93% and 95% respectively) that "personal accomplishment and enhanced self-confidence" (p. 6) were advantages gained from forensics competition. Copeland and James (2016) found that eight of the 19 actively-competing participants in their study noted "that the speaking experience in forensics fostered confidence, or building the belief in the reliability of speaking well in front of others" (p. 26). While this may not be surprising, multiple students discussed developing confidence "outside of forensics" in a personal sense, as well as gaining an applied sense of managing anxiety in stressful situations and feeling better equipped to improvise in challenging situations. Confidence is also identified as a positive benefit by the past competitors Billings (2011) surveyed, with those respondents holding that "the immersive nature of forensics provided enough overall experience to give them the confidence they needed in their jobs" (p. 116). In terms of esteem, competitors' perceptions of the enhanced confidence forensics provided for them has personal and practical resonance in multiple contexts, a result which reflects Kuh's (2008) mandate.

McMillian and Todd-Mancillas (1991) also cite education as another area where students identified themselves as feeling advantaged. Specific impacts garnering the strongest responses include "gaining knowledge and skills which can be implemented in the 'real world,' receiving individual instruction, learning about people and subjects, learning to think quickly, and developing ethics" (p. 8). In the context of Kuh's criteria, focusing on the notion that forensics can translate into the "real world" beyond forensics itself is particularly germane. The current competitors and alumni competitors who participated in studies by Copeland and James (2016) and Billings (2011) both cite

enhanced research skills, including knowing proper research methods and learning how to identify credible sources, as forensics-related skills that improved their ability to execute coursework (Copeland & James, 2016; Billings, 2011). Both studies' respondents also identify time management, including the ability to balance competing demands (Copeland & James, 2016) and the ability to meet deadlines and prioritize (Billings, 2011), as real-world educational impacts of participating in forensics.

The skills the participants in McMillian and Todd-Mancillas's (1991) study identify as areas where they improved through forensics include "oral communication, critical thinking, organization, research, and writing skills" (p. 8). Several previously cited examples illustrate these elements, but the Copeland and James (2016) study features more explicit applications of these advantages and benefits in terms of "educational courses, the workforce and professional etiquette" (p. 30). They note that 10 of their 19 participants cited forensics as enriching their coursework through advancing skills related to argumentation, reasoning, and improvisation. Fourteen participants noted direct correlations between their skills in argumentation and communication and the achievement of their professional goals. Finally, 11 participants connected forensics to enriching their sense of professionalism, including their choice of attire, professional communication expectations, and social skills. Beyond teaching skills needed to compete successfully, forensics consistently promotes skills related to self-esteem, confidence, and various other competencies competitors can employ quite broadly in their lives.

Beyond the Classroom

The sixth and final criterion Kuh (2008, p. 17) associates with HIPs concerns the ways "it can be life changing to study abroad, participate in service learning, conduct research with a faculty member, or complete an internship." Having this type of "undergraduate experience deepens learning and brings one's values and beliefs into awareness; it helps students develop the ability to take the measure of events and actions and put them in perspective."

Framing forensics as a HIP with a wide range of positive outcomes related to education, skill development, and self-esteem does not rob it of its complexities and challenges. For example, McMillian and Todd-Mancillas (1991) incorporate students' critiques of the activity, including being expected to learn overly programmed delivery styles, feeling the time commitment can sometimes interfere with coursework, and noting areas where competitions could improve (including the quality of judging and "tournament structure alterations" [p. 12]). Billings's respondents also address the heavy time demands, the high levels of stress, poor personal choices (e.g. smoking, physical impacts), myopia, costs of competing, and internal politics as negative aspects of their experience. Arguably, *any* high impact practice will offer students a range of challenges and benefits, as well as offer different levels of engagement. Kuh (2008) recognizes, for example, that among the 10 most prominent (initially) promising practices, "some groups of historically underserved students are less likely to participate in high impact activities—those first in their family to attend college and African American students in particular" (p. 17).

Despite the existence of documented challenges, the forensics community has a strong record of reflexivity, indicated by the movement toward greater educational accountability, and the overall benefits seem to outweigh the challenges. Multiple students in Copeland and James (2016) study cite forensics as a key to accessing a "[w]ell-rounded

education" (p. 30), with comments such as, "[m]y college education has come from my participation in the forensic team. I've learned more in forensics than I did in my philosophy class," and "[t]o be quite frank, I feel like I have learned more in my speech and debate career than I have learned in any classroom" (pp. 30-31). Billings (2011) finds similar results, citing such open-ended responses as, "I think that competing in college forensics was the single most valuable aspect of my college education," and "[i]t was a life-changing experience and I cherish every memory" (p. 120). Members of the forensics community continually articulate the impact of the practice on their lives beyond the context of tournaments themselves, and sometimes view it as more educational than formal classroom instruction. For example, the forensics journal *Speaker & Gavel* inaugurated the "Alumni Corner: What Forensics Did for Me" feature in their June 2016 issue (Jablonski, 2016; Keatley, 2016). It provides an opportunity for forensics alumni to write about the impact of forensics on their lives in multiple contexts. The viability of this reflective opportunity speaks to the enduring impact of forensics for many of its competitors.

Next Steps: Translating Knowledge into Advocacy

The concept of High-Impact Educational Practices has circulated in higher education discourse since around 2008 and has persisted as a powerful way for institutions of higher education to frame the educational impact of their curriculum and co-curriculum. Institutions mobilize HIPs by sharing examples of how their students participate in HIPs with NSSE. NSSE shares these via "NSSE Data Use Stories." In a 2017 brief, for example, NSSE highlights successful HIPs at the University of Georgia, University of Texas at Tyler, Ramapo College of New Jersey, and Tulane University ("Increasing opportunities to engage"). Bucknell University's Office of Institutional Research and Planning includes data related to NSSE-derived data on HIPs on their website under the heading "Student Outcomes." In both examples, HIPs function as a kind of currency exemplifying a promising practice for peer institutions and as a potential asset for consumers seeking to connect the undergraduate education an institution offers with its practical value. Employing the language of HIPs to articulate the impact of forensics on undergraduate students is a promising strategy for directors to advocate when seeking ongoing, or even increased, institutional support for existing forensics programs, or when asserting a rationale for institutions to initiate programs. The vast scope of advantages, benefits, and impacts associated with forensics, as documented by various qualitative and quantitative studies, align forensics with the promising practices more commonly associated with HIPs.

I recommend three potential ways to mobilize the critical alignment of forensics with the HIPs framework I have outlined above. They include general administrative advocacy, data-informed campus partnerships, and forensics and HIP fusions. It is not an exhaustive list. Many programs may already engage in some of these practices. Future research might encourage programs already engaging in such advocacy practices to share the outcomes of their existing efforts. Programs could also implement some of the newer ideas and share them with other forensics community members. As such, a "best practices" list of advocacy strategies could emerge as a resource for other forensics programs.

General Administrative Advocacy

- Collaborating with campus offices of institutional research (if such resources are available on a respective campus) to design and administer annual learning assessments for forensics competitors, and developing effective ways to release the results publicly.
- Creating faculty and staff reading groups/colloquia for faculty and student life professionals to discuss key studies related to forensics impacts. This would exemplify what Manning, Kinzie, and Schuh (2006) title the academic-student affairs collaboration model, which features "significant interactions between student and academic affairs staff around the common purpose of enhanced student learning" (p. 124). One area of interest could include emergent literature on contemporary topics such as overlaps between forensics and civic education.
- Developing opportunities for faculty to experience forensics directly. Just as athletics programs have "faculty coaches" who attend practices and games, programs could invite faculty to attend a select number of practices and coaching sessions and serve as judges at competitions.
- Hosting annual showcases that include performances and opportunities for students to reflect on the educational impact of their competitive experiences.
- Collaborating with faculty in fields that address student development, including psychology and education, to develop assessments.

Data-informed Campus Partnerships

A data-informed approach to translating some of the high impact educational outcomes forensics achieves involves the study of building relationships with campus offices and services, as well as with faculty. Developing a rapport with campus resources is a visible way for diverse colleagues to experience the range of skills students obtain in forensics. Alongside sharing data, establishing and sustaining these kinds of meaningful relationships could aid with securing institutional buy-in for the viability and impact of forensics programs. A few examples of this "forensics ambassador" role include the following:

- Since forensics students cite the ability to do research as a key area of competency and skill, those who actively employ campus libraries for their research could share this ability with library personnel to create research guides. This outreach could also generate publicity for campus libraries as a student resource for classroom *and* out-of-classroom endeavors. Similar outreach to offices of undergraduate research could also achieve these results.
- Because many students consider forensics a key source of professionalization, ranging from attire choices to communication styles, forensics students could volunteer to lead workshops for campus career centers. A sampling of potential topics could include workshops on delivering presentations effectively in relation to such issues as addressing the needs of different kinds of audiences, organizing content succinctly, and incorporating improvisation and humor.
- An improved capacity for interacting with people from a broad range of cultural backgrounds and perspectives is another consistent outcome of forensics. This fact could motivate forensics programs to collaborate with campus cultural centers (e.g. ones focused on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, ability, and faith traditions) as

allies for diversity, equity, and inclusion work happening on their respective campuses.

Forensics and HIP Fusions

Though Kuh's (2008) research and NSSE surveys tend to emphasize ten types of promising practices, as well as e-portfolios, they are often presented as discrete entities. Notably, the ways a first-year seminar and a service-learning project overlap are rarely discussed. Comparatively, since I argue that forensic practices are HIPs, there are opportunities to reimagine forensics in these contexts. I preface these recommendations by acknowledging the wide variance in how different institutions define and coordinate HIPs—perhaps or perhaps not including such programs as study abroad and internships. Some examples that might "double" the impact associated with these activities could include the following:

- A forensics-themed learning community, a promising practice in which "[s]tudents take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors" (Kuh, 2008, p. 11). A thematic community co-sponsored by communication studies faculty that incorporated varsity forensics students as peer leaders would connect forensics to the academic core, showcase the leadership skills of forensics students, and recruit new students to experience the educational potential of forensics. Many colleges have residential learning communities or living learning programs "where students often live together for several years, take numerous classes together, and have structured activities in their living space that focus on academics" (Jessup-Anger, Warwrzynski, & Yao, 2011, p. 58). Student affairs literature often cites these programs as "exemplary initiatives in academic-student affairs collaboration" (p. 58).
- Creating opportunities to connect forensics with service learning, defined as "field based 'experiential learning' with community partners" (Kuh, 2008, 11). Related to service learning is the opportunity to mobilize forensics to contribute to students' engagement with civic education and experience "the acquisition of knowledge and skills to enable understanding of and participation in public life" (Hogan, Kurr, Bermaier, & Johnson, 2017, p. xi-xii). Service learning and civic education are great sources of educational fusion among HIPs. As Hinck (2003) notes:

> Service-learning activities, debate watches during major campaigns, civic engagement projects, speaker bureaus, exhibition speeches and debates, communication workshops for high schools and community citizen groups, public forums on major social issues, and integrating interpretive performances and debates during campus conferences" are opportunities that connect forensics to public life. (p. 74)

Some useful resources for exploring programmatic possibilities include reviewing Volume 16 of the *National Forensics Journal*, which features essays by Hatfield (1998), Warriner (1998), and Hinck and Hinck (1998), that focus on forensics and service-learning opportunities. The edited collection *Speech and Debate as Civic Education* (Hogan, et al, 2017) offers a historical perspective on the relationships

between debate, argumentation, and civic life, as well as contemporary examples of how forensics can connect students with public engagement opportunities.

There is a longstanding conversation in the forensics community about the urgent need to articulate its educational outcomes given its status as a co-curricular experience that requires dedicated staffing, considerable investments of time from students, and ongoing institutional resources. McMillian and Todd-Mancillas's (1991) observation that "knowledge of the perceived benefits (or disadvantages) of individual events could be used in making programmatic improvements and gaining additional financial and institutional support for individual events programs" (p. 1) remains a relevant insight. In a related vein, though Rogers (2002) focuses on competitive debate, his argument that studies have the potential to offer "empirical data to persuade administrators, colleagues and parents" that forensics benefits the "socio-psychological and academic success arenas" (p. 23) also relates to individual events. The emergence of academic studies on the experiences of current and past competitors, and the development and usage of assessment tools such as the NFA's Academic Learning Compact (Kelly, Paine, Richardson, & White, 2014), are conscious efforts to demonstrate the impact of forensics in terms of not only programmatic survival but overall educational enrichment.

The HIP framework has great potential to synthesize these efforts in a fashion that resonates with faculty, staff, and administrators. Optimally, employing the tools of persuasion, argumentation, and communication that are the cornerstones of forensics could clarify the ways the community theorizes its impacts and identifies specific benefits that have made forensics competitors successful students, professionals, and citizens. The thinly veiled HIP definition I began with should feel familiar to most forensics alumni and competitors because its criteria have been deeply embedded in the community's practices for years. This richness is not a coincidence or a recent development. Rather, it is the outcome of decades of sustained attention to forensics as an educational practice. The language of HIPs has persisted for over a decade as a fresh educational paradigm. The concept's maturation and institutionalization make this an opportune time for coaches and program directors to translate what many of "us" (I competed in forensics in high school and college) know into a larger framework accessible to the broader academic and administrative community.

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