Special Section – Critical Thought in the Age of Forensics

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Bruce Wickelgren, Editor of the National Forensic Journal

Like any organization, the National Forensic Association recognizes that change is vital to the growth of any institution. My view of NFA includes one that suggests that the members are open to new ideas from the community, yet, as we can see through ongoing debates about how to improve the pedagogical goals of this organization, change is never easy.

At the 2012 NFA national tournament, the body of the organization decided to run an experimental event called Forensic Criticism. One of the goals of the experimental event was to create a stage for analysis of the activity directly to the students. As the editor of the journal I was excited to see a scholarly approach to the understanding of our discipline, one that allowed healthy discussion of what it is we do. Normally, I saw these conversations taking place in public spaces like our semi-annual meetings and developmental conferences, and private spaces when participants in the activity sat around sharing coffee and stories. The introduction of Forensic Criticism as an event elevated discussion of the activity to another public forum and created dialogue about what it is we do.

As a critical scholar, I was excited to see the organization take these steps. The chance to extend these discussions led to the decision to open the journal to texts of speeches that students had written that offer a critical perspective of the activity. This style of writing makes the transition from an oral form to a written form daunting; therefore, the pieces in this issue are published in their original manuscript format, containing oral citations rather than in-text citations, so as to preserve their original format. I include these ideas to explain the text that you see here are as a representation of an oral text. This means that they have orally referenced their
sources. I decided that to turn these into APA manuscripts would take us even further away from the intent of the original activity.

The manuscripts were submitted and reviewed by the journal’s Review Board. Two performances were done in competition at the National Forensic Association tournament in 2011 and we have manuscripts submitted by Katie Donovan of Rice University (please note that Ms. Donovan’s speech includes an appendix with visual representations of visual aids she used in competition) and Jaime Bingham and Kylia Goodner of Berry College. Another speech used in Rhetorical Criticism at the 2010 NFA nationals comes to us from Illinois State University competitor Stephanie Orme (Donjon).