Abstract: An important link has been made in current research between coach burnout and improper training of directors of forensics. Although the structure for such training is in place via the graduate programs of universities offering forensics, this arena has been underutilized. A competency-based model of training is presented utilizing both curricular and non-curricular methods. Six competency areas are established, with a call for national standards toward the development of future coaches by those programs with graduate assistantships in forensics.

SOLVING FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE: CREATING NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR TRAINING FUTURE DIRECTORS OF FORENSICS

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Most coaches of collegiate oratory teach their students that all problems have a cause, and that once the cause is fully determined, a set of solutions can be created and set into action that should eventually solve the problem. Though labeling the current trends in the careers of our nation's forensics directors as problematic may be an overstatement, a number of articles, papers and presentations have called our attention to the growing concern of career burnout, program reduction and/or elimination, and the declining health of the activity for coaches and directors (Burnett and Danielson, 1992; Bartanen, 1996; Jensen, 1996). Bartanen's 1996 report of a national survey sponsored by the Guild of American Forensic Educators notes that well over half of the respondents did not expect their careers to continue beyond five years, with nearly two-thirds of respondents stating that they would be leaving the activity by the end of the century (p. 17).

Many causes for this problem have been explored, yet substantial evidence exists correlating the decline of long-term careers in forensics education to improper or non-existent training of those pursuing such a career (Bartanen, 1996; Burnett and Danielson, 1992; Gill, 1990; Hassencahl, 1993; Jensen, 1993). Jensen (1996) goes as far as to state, "With evidence pointing toward limited careers in forensic coaching and poor training for those entering the forensics profession, we can see the tenuous foundation for forensic education. Our activity is only as strong as the training of the professionals that teach it" (p. 2). One notion is that, as untrained or poorly trained coaches begin their positions, they are not fully equipped to handle the sheer magnitude of tasks that require a wide array of skills--from bookkeeping to public relations. Their training and experience in public speaking, oral interpretation, debate and even competition is undermined by the day-to-day operations of a program. Moreover, they may be approaching these tasks in ineffective and non-efficient ways, creating more stress and hence a higher probability of burnout. Training cannot remove the stresses that surround a director's work, but it can better prepare the coach for those stresses and enskill the coach to work more productively and efficiently.

With such a clear-cut cause, one solution to the growing problem of coach and program burn-out seems to be better education for the future forensics educator. Yet very little has been written on the subject, with only a handful of models presented (Bartanen, 1996; Hassencahl, 1993; Larson-Casselton, 1991). We as a community are just beginning to realize our need for formal training in forensics administration and education; it's no surprise that we've not yet begun to build the road.

Luckily, the basic structure for such training currently exists in the graduate programs and assistantships offered at universities across the country. Historically, a student wishing to pursue a career in forensics education begins such work as a graduate assistant with a speech team while enrolled in a masters program in Communication Studies. Yet,. sadly, Bartanen (1996) reports that less than half of all universities with graduate programs have a course in forensics direction and administration, and Hassencahl (1993) paints an even bleaker picture for doctoral students, despite consistent findings that such a course can prove to be a key foundation to formal instruction in forensics education (Jensen, 1996; Leland, 1996; Workman, 1996). Without curriculum, training is received through experience, which, though meritorious (Leland, 1996), leaves training as widely disparate and unstructured (Jensen, 1996). Clearly, the

graduate program, and the Ph.D. program in particular, serves as the perfect place for such professional training, as it can provide both curricular and experiential training for the future coach, similar to an apprenticeship for any established profession. Hassencahl (1993) remarks that only six Ph.D. programs offer coursework in forensics (p.2), yet perhaps it is not the number of programs offering on-the-job training as the quality of training these programs provide, and more importantly, the utilization of these programs by those wishing to pursue a career in forensics education. Without a clear sense of what such training entails, or national standards for such training, the road to careers in forensics education remains no more than a dirt path, and one that few even realize they must travel.

Clearly, it's time to begin building the road. This paper is an attempt to create a foundation for both curricular and non-curricular training for graduate students wishing to become directors of forensics. I first review the literature concerning skills and tasks of the director/coach. Next, I present six competency areas that I believe need to serve as the core of all graduate training in forensics education if we are to create better developed, stronger, and longer-lasting directors of forensics. I then present several curricular and non-curricular approaches to achieving competency in the six areas, establishing that both arenas are necessary for the development of future forensics educators. Finally, I argue for national standards for developing future coaches and administrators in forensics, so that, despite the individual differences of any particular program, a future coach from any university can receive consistent instruction and development.

The Skills of a Director/Coach: Current Research

Several approaches have been taken to better understand the skills and tasks of the coach/director of forensics. Bartanen (1996), in one of the few textbooks currently serving those training in forensics administration, writes that "Individuals who teach and coach forensics must be dedicated, 'jack-of-all-trade' teachers" (p. xiii). In reality, however, they need to be jack of more trades than simply teaching. Danielson and Hollwitz (1993) created a job-analysis approach for the evaluation of coaches, and in doing so, produced a comprehensive list of job-specific skills that serve our purpose here. Through a survey of current directors, they determined dimensions, tasks and worker characteristics associated with performing the functions of the director. These dimensions go far beyond the standard areas of public speaking, debate or oral interpretation instruction, and include accounting and bookkeeping, administering the speech/debate program, arranging student participation in off-campus tournaments, coaching speech/debate participants, and recruiting students for the speech/debate program. Lesser tasks include public relations, coordinating college/university and community service, and tournament hosting (pg. 17). It is interesting to note that only two of these dimensions--coaching speech/debate students and program administration--were commonly listed in the survey of forensic position advertisements conducted by Shelton in 1996.

Another area of skill lies in guidance and counseling. Colvert (1993) found that coaches across the country were involved in at least some degree of personal counseling with undergraduate students for everything from relationship issues and career decisions to substance abuse and eating disorders. Though clear lines must be drawn around the boundaries of ethical and appropriate personal counseling, the evidence suggests that the relationship between a coach and the students will involve this level of interpersonal interaction.

Along the same lines, however, are the skills needed to work with the gifted and talented, many of whom find a home in our forensics programs. Little is mentioned about this type of student in the majority of the literature, yet it is imperative that a new coach recognize the needs, issues, and approaches to the exceptionally bright or talented student. Beyond developing coaching styles for a student who may out-read, out-perform, and out-do the director in accomplishments, new coaches must be able to work with what are often highly sensitive and often difficult temperaments that can, without proper training, exasperate the best coach or director. Leadership skills are critical here, as a director must be able to take a variety of personalities and personal issues and create a collective team effort, not simply for the sake of team trophies but for the educational goal of helping talented people work with others.

Anecdotally, the list of tasks and skills could be endless. From handling medical emergencies on the road to helping a new competitor overcome stagefright, the specific skills and duties of a forensics director are as

unique as the many programs existing across the country. Yet, the goal of this paper is to focus on those key skill areas that can and should be included in a training program, allowing a graduate student to develop mastery before entering the field as a full-fledged director.

Six Competency Areas for Forensics Directors

Therefore, in order to establish national standards for training, a specific set of competencies must be created to serve as goals for the trainer. From the literature mentioned earlier and the many anecdotes of coaches across the country, six key areas of competency emerge. Each area heading is followed by a set of skills that would demonstrate competency in the area.

1. *Instructional Competency:* The ability to teach undergraduate students in an interpersonal or small group structure.

    a. Demonstrates a general knowledge of speech communication theories and practices.
    b. Demonstrates a general knowledge of coaching styles and methods.
    c. Demonstrates specific expertise in an area of speech performance or competition.
    d. Demonstrates a knowledge of educational styles, needs and issues.
    e. Demonstrates the ability to assess student ability and needs.
    f. Demonstrates the ability to adapt teaching/coaching style and method to the learning style and needs of the student.
    g. Demonstrates the ability to evaluate student progress and adjust goals and methods when necessary.

2. *Financial Management Competency:* The ability to manage financial records and operations.

    a. Demonstrates the ability to create a budget.
    b. Demonstrates the ability to manage funds used for operations.
    c. Demonstrates the ability to comprehend financial statements.
    d. Demonstrates the ability to solve financial problems.
    e. Demonstrates the ability to communicate financial issues to others.
    f. Demonstrates the ability to raise funds.

3. *Leadership & Responsibility Competency:* The ability to motivate, guide, and take charge of others.

    a. Demonstrates the ability to problem-solve.
    b. Demonstrates the ability to motivate others.
    c. Demonstrates the ability to work within departmental policy limitations.
    d. Demonstrates the ability to maintain professionalism.
    e. Demonstrates the ability to handle crisis.
    f. Demonstrates the ability to establish leadership over a group.
    g. Demonstrates the ability to maintain safety for the group.

4. *Administrative Competency:* The ability to administrate tasks and projects.

    a. Demonstrates the ability to organize tasks and projects.
    b. Demonstrates the ability to manage multiple and simultaneous projects.
    c. Demonstrates the ability to interact with and influence others.
    d. Demonstrates the ability to establish priorities.
    e. Demonstrates the ability to manage paperwork.
    f. Demonstrates the ability to work within deadlines.
    g. Demonstrates a general understanding of administrative procedures.
    h. Demonstrates the ability to work with administrative technology.

5. *Interpersonal Competency:* The ability to communicate effectively in interpersonal settings.

    a. Demonstrates the ability to adapt styles of listening to the needs of others.
    b. Demonstrates the ability to provide empathy.
    c. Demonstrates a general knowledge of resources for student issues and problems.
    d. Demonstrates the ability to express themselves clearly in interpersonal settings.
    e. Demonstrates the ability to create functional relationships.
    f. Demonstrates the ability to create professional relationships.
    g. Demonstrates the ability to use referrals effectively.

6. *Professional Competency:* The ability to establish and maintain professionalism in the field.

   a. Demonstrates a formulated philosophy of speech performance and program administration.
   b. Demonstrates a general knowledge of competitive rules, approaches, and practices in a variety of competitive arenas.
   c. Demonstrates an ability to evaluate performances in competition.
   d. Demonstrates an ability to write educational critiques.
   e. Demonstrates an interest in scholarly activities of the field.
   f. Demonstrates an interest in continued development.

Training Methods and Approaches

In an attempt to address the many needs of training future coaches, the National Developmental Conference on Forensics set forth recommendations for a degree program in forensics, involving coursework in speech communication and supervised experience with directing a forensics program (McBath, 1975). Proponents exist for both curricular instruction and supervised experience. Jensen (1996) writes, "The ideal directing forensics course, aside from integrating the knowledge gained in other coursework, (1) provides activities that reflect the integral dimensions of directing a forensic program, (2) allows for interaction regarding concerns of the students in the course, as well as the choices that face them as forensics educators, and (3) culminates in the student understanding the importance of having a philosophy of forensics and being able to communicate that vision" (p. 7). Leland (1996) states, "Instruction can be as simple as following basic directions on how to complete paperwork, to discussing deeper issues of balancing competition and educational missions of the program" (p. 9). He adds, later, "It is essential that graduate students get a chance to learn by being involved in the actual day-to-day and weekend to weekend activities of the team and the leadership" (p. 11).

Obviously, in order for competencies to be reached, both coursework and guided experience will be essential components of a training program. An endless number of models exist under the structure of the graduate assistantship which serve perfectly for training, whether reporting occurs individually or within a small group, as teams of GTAs or alongside the Director. Both formal and informal approaches should be developed, where a graduate student has both course requirements for the accomplishment of competencies as well as gains competency from individual mentorship. Carver & Larson-Casselton (1990) found that such mentoring relationships do exist within the community and, despite differences in the interpretation of the term, produced an important contribution to the education of new coaches.

Serving as the trainer would most likely be the Director of Forensics, who is the person most likely to teach the Directing Forensics course and to whom the graduate assistants in forensics most often report. This is often the person who provides an evaluation of the graduate assistant for decisions regarding future funding, and the one who will most likely provide the letter of recommendation for future employment in the activity. Obviously, such a person must be able to demonstrate competencies in all six areas, but moreover, must be able to commit significant time and resources to the training of future coaches as a part of their departmental and professional duties. It is absurd to believe that a Director of Forensics can pay as much attention to the competitive needs of the program as they can to the training of future coaches without the provision of resources by the department, whether that includes an assistant director to administer the daily tasks of maintaining a competitive standing or whether it simply involves defining a position that allows time for and places a value on the training of graduate students as part of their educational mission. It is my guess that few university departments have made this level of commitment, yet in order for coaches to be well trained, we must begin building the training facilities--many of whom already exist and are ready to produce competent coaches with several minor adjustments in curriculum, line redressment, and promotion.

A Call for National Standards

We all know that, when detailing elaborate solutions, talk is cheap and actions speak louder than words. Producing better coaches through better training will require support from national forensic organizations, university department administrators, and individual coaches who serve as the important recruiting officers for the new army of undergraduate competitors who will consider a career in coaching. By adopting these or similar competencies into national standards for training, national

forensics associations can serve a vital role in paving the road to better coaches without becoming involved in prescribing or demanding curriculum from university programs. A statement of national standards for director/coach training would, in fact, legitimize the activities of many university programs striving to provide excellent training to their graduate students, and provide consistency in the scope of training offered across the nation.

There is certainly more to study, to discuss, and to explore in this area. Competencies must be thoroughly tested to be proven valid indications of success, and training methods must be explored and communicated to those who are attempting to raise the next crop of coaches. Yet, our discussions must not override initial action, or the laying of a foundation to get the work started. As Jensen (1996) so aptly warns us,

> ". . . we can ill-afford to place our programs in the hands of poorly trained educators. To do so is not fair to our institutions, to the educators faced with making choices they are not prepared to make, nor to the students who are directly impacted by the abilities of their teachers. Most importantly, it is not fair, nor is it healthy for our activity" (p. 12).

The first step is to declare a standard that serves as a map for those traveling. The construction of this road may take time, but the results are well worth the effort.

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