
CREATIVE EVENTS: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE ON INDIVIDUAL EVENTS

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The individual events aspect of forensic programs are catching and retaining a high degree of student interest by some very imaginative approaches, but debate, which still remains the focal point of most forensic programs seems shockingly unresponsive to innovation¹. A close examination of individual events in 1988 may bring one to the conclusion that what Jack Howe complained about debate, may be happening to individual events. Prior to his statement in 1974, and for some years thereafter, individual events enjoyed growth in both the numbers of participants, and the diversity of events offered. While the numbers of participants seems to continue to grow, the diversity of events at national competitions has seemed to stagnate. A study of events offered at five national tournaments² shows some experimentation with new events from 1974 until 1979, but very little in the last eight years³.

If one can assume that forensics as an organization must continue to change in order to remain alive, it is important to study the events that are used as well as how they became used on the national level. Before an event is

adopted by a national organization, it is necessary to give the event a test-spin before adoption. For this reason, it is important for the forensic community to study the use of creative events.

For purposes of this paper, a creative event is one that is not currently offered at the national tournament. In other words, dramatic interpretation would be creative in regards to NFA, but not to AFA. While this may seem a bit confusing, it is important to realize that many students prepare events that they can use for nationals, and those extraneous to this end, for the student, are "creative." It is also important to note here that one could look to creative use of the current events, however time and space considerations prohibit its use.

Prior to the 1970's, most contest individual events tournaments were held in conjunction with debate tournaments, and then only a very limited number of events were offered (usually oratory, extemp and interpretation.) The growth of individual events in the 1970's shows an introduction of many new events. An edition of Speaker and Gavel, the journal of Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha, was dedicated to the state of forensics, and over half of the writers discussed the growth of individual events.

In 1974, the first national individual events tournament was held at Plattsburgh State University in Plattsburgh, New York. The events offered were prose, poetry, dramatic duo, persuasive, expository, impromptu, extemp, and after dinner. Phi Rho Pi offered "persuasive, interpretation, impromptu, informative, speech to entertain, and speech analysis. Pi Kappa Delta had discussion, extemp, oratory, interpretation, informative, and speech to entertain. Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha conducted interpretation, extemp and oratory. In 1975, the National Forensic Association ran the second national individual events tournament and introduced rhetorical criticism as a new event. The PRP tournament held reader's theater, and 1976, they also added duet acting. 1977 brought an addition of interper's theater and the deletion of reader's theater.⁴ The American Forensic Association began its national tournament in this year. They offered prose, poetry, dramatic interpretation, dramatic duo, impromptu, extemp, communication analysis, after dinner, informative, and persuasive. Phi Rho Pi substituted reader's theater for interper's theater in 1978, and reversed itself once again in '79. Also in 1979, PKD separated interpretation into prose and poetry, and DSR-TKA expanded from three events, to the ten AFA events. Somewhere between 1980 and 1984⁵ Phi Rho Pi separated oral interpretation into prose, poetry and dramatic, and PKD added dramatic duo and dropped discussion. The 1987 and '88 AFA national tournaments saw sales as the experimental event, and will see mixed interpretation in '89 and '90.

If this data were put on a time line, one could see the great amount of experimentation taking place prior to 1980. Very little of this testing seems to have taken place after this time period. There has been no change in events in

NFA since 1975, DSR-TKA since 1979, and AFA has kept the original ten events since its first tournament in 1977, although they have introduced an experimental event.

Now that the established events have been outlined, it is necessary to look at some ways that these events became established. For the purpose of comparison, the years 1969, 1971, 1974, 1977, and 1987 will be used. 1969 and '71 will be used to illustrate pre-national individual events tournaments, 1974 as the year of the first national tournament, 1977 for the beginning of the AFA tournament and 1987 to look at the present.

Persuasive speaking was the event that tops nearly every list that Jack Howe compiled listing the availability of the event at tournaments. This fact can be explained by two hypotheses; 1, forensic educators subscribe to the notion that all speaking is inherently persuasive, and/or 2., the oldest competitive speech activity, Interstate Oratory, has played a big influence on the activity's growth. The next event that Howe lists as the most offered was oral interpretation. The developments in this area are quite substantial. In the 1968-69 issue, Howe states that there were 106 chances to do competitive interpretation in the country. He provided no breakdown by genre. In the 1970-71 compilation, he cited 122 instances, with poetry at 15 tournaments, and prose with 13 (drama will be dealt with later.) From this data, one can surmise that the rules allowed one to select one genre, or that a combination of literature was needed. At least one of the national tournaments did require at least two of the three types of literature.⁶ This fact suggests that the AFA experimental event, mixed interpretation, is not new to national competition. In 1974, the beginning of the national individual events tournament, interpretation (again no delineation) was offered 106 times, and the opportunities in poetry and prose were 43 and 37 respectively. By 1977, poetry was held 101 times to interpretation at 100. Prose was held 94 times. By 1987 when all of the national tournaments had separated the oral interpretation events, prose was offered 198 times, poetry 197, and mixed interpretation had dropped drastically to 21.

Dramatic interpretation did not make a showing on Howe's list until 1971. During that year, it was used 8 times. In 1974, it was offered 9 times. The year before AFA began using it as an individual event, it was held 15 times. In 1977, it was held 15 times and just one year later jumped to 40. Finally, with four of the five tournaments now offering the event, drama was held at 144 tournaments in 1987.

All five organizations host dramatic literature for two people. Only Phi Rho Pi has duet acting. The other groups use dramatic duo. This is one event that has very new roots, roots which began in the East according to Howe. In 1969 there were no contests reported using the event. In 1971, three tournaments had dramatic pairs, and one had duet acting. By 1974, it was held at 30

tournaments, 74 in 1977, and 196 in 1987.

Extemporaneous speaking enjoyed growth during the 1970's but slackened off in the 1980's. In 1969, there were 100 tournaments, 110 in 1971 195 in 1977, and 105 in 1987. During the '70s extemp was consistently the third most offered event behind persuasive and interpretation. By 1987, it had fallen to the eighth most popular event. Expository/informative is another event that has enjoyed a surge in popularity. In '69, the event was held 15 times. In 1971, it occurred 18 times. 1974 saw 66 tourneys with the event, and there were 176 times in 1977. In 1971, the event was the sixth most held event, in '77 it was fourth, and by 1987, it jumped to the second most held event with 205 occurrences.

Impromptu and after dinner speaking have similar development. Impromptu started slow with 38 in 1969, 52 in 1971, 87 in 1974, 122 in 1977, and 204 in 1987. It jumped from the eighth most held event in 1977 to the third most popular in 1987. After dinner was held 30 times in '69, 45 in '71, 71 in '74, 118 in '77, and 200 in 1987.

Rhetorical criticism was not introduced at NFA until 1975. In 1969, it was offered on 10 occasions, 8 in '71, 38 in '74, 52 in '75 85 in '77 (19 of which were specified as communication analysis - the AFA name), and 163 in '87.

Some events enjoyed popularity in the late '60's and 70's but have not fared so well in the '80's. The most obvious was radio and television. It was held 12 times in 1971, 17 in 1974, 16 in 1977, and only 5 radio competitions and one television entry in 1987.

Other events have slowly grown in popularity. The AFA experimental event for 1987 and 1988 is a prime example. Sales started very slowly in 1971 with 2 tournament appearances. By 1974, it was offered in 7 competitions. There were 17 offerings in 1977 and 81 in 1987.

Reader's theater, according to Howe, began in California and has had a rocky history. Phi Rho Pi is the only organization to hold this event annually. There were no reports of the event in 1969 and 1971. 1974 saw 17 inclusions, 1977 had 32, and there were 28 in 1987.

The forensic community needs to keep an eye on its creative events to identify those that may prove worthy of national attention. Howe predicted in the late '70s that organizational communication would be the next hot event, an event which would answer the great influx of organizational communication in the speech communication field. The event made only one more appearance in the form of business communication and has not been heard from since. Two other events seem to be on the rise in the East; epideictic and legal speaking. With continued tournament support, either these events could easily become the next experimental event, or even add its name with the nine of ten "regular" events.

In the 1973-74 tournament results book, Jack Howe states, "Can anyone say when, where and who first originated these (events)? It seems a clear pattern that events tend to take hold in a single state and then in a region before becoming national in nature." It is time that the forensic community salutes those tournaments that dare to try new ground. It is important that everyone looks at these events with at the very least, an open mind. To be sure, many of the "creative" events are merely for the fun of the activity and it should be viewed in that matter. Those that attempt to break new educational barriers are the ones that deserve attention.

In the early 1970's, Jack Howe warned the debate community about an unresponsiveness to innovation. Surely individual events has not discovered those nine or ten events which are the perfect educational tools. An open mind to the creative events is a sure way to keep individual events as responsive in the 1990's as it was in the 1970's.

ENDNOTES

- ¹Howe, Jack H., editor, Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results vol. X:II 1973-74 p. 1.
- ²Tournaments of the American Forensic Association, Association, Delta Sigma Rho-Tau Kappa Alpha, Pi Kappa Delta, and Phi Rho Pi.
- ³One major exception is the introduction of an experimental event at the AFA tournament in 1987.
- ⁴Howe, Jack H., editor, Intercollegiate Speech Tournament Results volXVII 1977-78.
- ⁵The tournament result book was not published for the four years between 1980 and 1984.
- ⁶Harris, Edward J. and Hawkins, Seth C., editors, Intercollegiate Forensic Tournament Results Book July 1987