

It is only fitting that we gather for this historic inaugural Conference on Individual Events as we stand on the doorstep of the 1990's. If intercollegiate Individual Events is to prosper in the decade ahead, it must entrench itself in the changing structure of University decision making. Forensics must exist in the context of an academic institution and so must make itself a valued aspect of that institution. In the 1990's that means survival in an atmosphere of budget cutting, concern for accountability and pleas for a return to basics. As a forensic coach, a teacher and a Department Chair, I believe Individual Events can prosper in the difficult environment of higher education in the 1990's; indeed Individual events may be in an ideal position to do so. What follows are a series of broad propositions for this Conference to consider and a more detailed set of strategies for Individual Events coaches to implement. They are by no means an exhaustive list, nor do they attempt to address issues at the high school or junior college level.

PROPOSITION ONE: UNIVERSITY SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUAL EVENTS ACTIVITIES IS BEST DIRECTED THROUGH A DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATIONS AS PART OF NORMAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING.

Although Departments of Communication have occasionally been less than sympathetic hosts to individual events programs, they remain the natural home for forensic activities. Indeed Communications provides an individual events program with an academic identity and a natural transfer point for the skills developed in forensic competition. Communications Departments tend to be eclectic, often housing specialists in a variety of sub-disciplines and overseeing activities as disparate as theater, television and intercollegiate debate. However, Communications Departments are also academic units suffering from budgetary constrictions, heavy administrative workloads and demands for increased enrollments, greater accountability, higher retention and improvement in basic skills. If individual events wishes to survive in the academic environment then it must learn to make itself responsive to the concerns of that environment. Fortunately, forensics in general and individual events in particular have the capacity to be attractive to an academic unit, especially Departments of Communications..

STRATEGIES FOR OBTAINING DEPARTMENT SUPPORT
1. Develop a Course for Individual Events Contestants.

The course can either be a one credit practicum or a formal class in Forensics with either a letter grade or a pass/fail option. This course can enhance enrollments and help legitimize forensics as an academic endeavor. It can formalize Individual Events instruction and serve as a mechanism for release time or compensation for forensic instructors. The key is that it permits a Department to build its enrollment because of Individual Events rather than

**STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE UNIVERSITY SUPPORT FOR
INDIVIDUAL EVENTS PROGRAMS**

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forensics being a non-credit drain on the Department.

2. Offer the Services of Forensic Contestants for Classroom Demonstrations.

Faculty are often looking for ways to show classes examples of effective speaking or organization or delivery. Individual events students can provide these model speeches or interpretation cuttings and reduce faculty time spent on preparation for introductory courses. The students receive the chance to perform before a live audience and usually obtain positive feedback from friends and classmates. More importantly this can build relationships with faculty in a positive academic framework.

3. Write Annual Reports and Periodic Updates of Team Activities.

Internal publicity of team activities to Department Chairs, Deans and other Administrators fosters a positive image of Individual Events. In an environment where administrators are called upon for frequent reports on programs and their effectiveness, having reports on Individual Events readily available can make the program more valuable to a Chair.

4. Engage in Recruiting of Students at Local High Schools.

Often forensic directors have high school contacts that are unavailable to other recruitment officials. High schools are often eager to have college students perform readings or speeches in an assembly or class environment. If the recruiting is done in conjunction with the Department or the University Admissions Office, then the value of forensics increases.

PROPOSITION TWO: FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR INDIVIDUAL EVENTS ACTIVITIES IS BEST DIRECTED THROUGH NORMAL ACADEMIC PROGRAMMING PROCESSES.

Perhaps no single factor influences the success of an individual events program as much as a stable competitive budget. Although budgetary pressures will escalate in the foreseeable future, forensics programs can enhance their budget position by increasing their overall value to the University, as discussed in connection with Proposition One and Three. More specifically, individual events programs can develop an aggressive strategy to justify their budget applications.

STRATEGIES FOR OBTAINING FINANCIAL SUPPORT

1. Seek to Obtain Administrative Rather than Student Financing.

If individual events seeks to establish a university identity then it should also seek direct financial support from a formal university source. Given the vagueness of student budgetary decisions and the concomitant loss of control of the program when students control the purse strings, it seems wise to seek a more neutral and consistent funding source. Surely we have all heard horror stories of students asserting control over an individual events program based on their financial power. Although we have also heard horror stories of administration neglect of programs, it seems, that if a program succeeds in a student funded atmosphere, it attracts greater hostility, whereas a successful

program in an academic funding environment has a greater chance of increased support.

2. Seek to Diversify the Rationale for Budgetary Support.

As in any political-financial negotiation the factors that lead to success are dependent upon the needs, expectations and desires of the parties involved. We who study communications should be especially adept at determining those needs, expectations and desires in our administrative audiences. Some institutions reward programs that improve retention or increase admissions or generate positive publicity or produce exceptional students. As forensic directors we need to become sensitive to these concerns and collect data about our programs to use as budget justifications. Forensics students generally do have higher retention rates and above average academic performance and we can gear our programs to have a positive impact on admissions and publicity. We must also seek to provide quantifiable data to demonstrate the academic success of our programs. Everyone, in a request for budgetary resources will claim to have sound educational objectives and important educational outcomes but forensics and individual events has a built in advantage in that we conduct continuous ongoing objective assessment of our students. Assessment has become a national buzzword for academic administrators and we can easily produce both internal and external assessment data from our training sessions and from the ballots we receive at every competition. This kind of quantifiable data can be impressive to an administrator and result in improved financial support for your program.

3. Employ an Athletic Analogy in Budget Justifications.

Forensics has long claimed that it can produce positive educational outcomes and that should be the goal of every individual events program. But as a community we have often ignored the other side of our existence; we are a competitive intercollegiate activity. Instead of being ashamed of that competitive identity, we should make it an integral part of our programs justification. Sports build positive attitudes and teach teamwork, discipline and other virtues. At least these are the arguments put forth by athletic programs to justify their existence. We in individual events can also lay claim to these positive aspects of competition and in so doing produce feelings of a positive nature toward our programs. Everyone admires a winner and everyone respects those who compete in adversity. We can use these positive feelings to portray our programs as forensics underdogs or consistent champions.

PROPOSITION THREE, INDIVIDUAL EVENTS PROGRAMS SHOULD SEEK UNIVERSITY SUPPORT BASED ON BOTH THE COMPETITIVE AND ACADEMIC ASPECTS OF THE ACTIVITY.

The essence of securing and improving overall University support for individual events is to establish your forensic program as being responsive to a variety of University needs and concerns. Although many of the strategies that

would enhance the identity of the program have been discussed allow me to restate a few strategies for increasing support.

STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING UNIVERSITY SUPPORT

1. Identify issues of concern to your administration (e.g. retention, enrollment, assessment, etc.) and market forensics in term of these concerns.
2. Forward annual reports and periodic updates of program activities to key administrators.
3. Offer services to administrative programs like admissions and orientation.
4. Engage in activities that promote visibility of your program on campus like hosting tournaments, sponsoring an intra-mural speech contest or hosting a reception for new students.

PROPOSITION FOUR: FORENSIC ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD DEVELOP MECHANISMS FOR SUPPORT OF INDIVIDUAL EVENTS PROGRAMS AS AN INTERFACE BETWEEN UNIVERSITY OFFICIALS AND PROGRAM DIRECTORS.

Individual events must achieve a recognizable identity with University administrators to secure positive support and financing. Our colleagues in debate have a somewhat easier task in establishing that identity because almost everyone thinks they know what a debate is and why debate is important. Consequently, the forensic organizations that sponsor and control individual events must assume a greater role as advocate for individual events programs. Specifically, the national organizations should develop a detailed rationale for individual events programs as distinct from debate or current generalized forensics rationals. Guidelines for staffing; competition, ethics, funding and other important aspects of individual events should be addressed. In short, the national organizations should develop a blueprint for establishing an individual events program and the arguments for its acceptance or expansion. The organizations must begin to act as advocates for this activity if they wish to see the activity prosper. In this vein I applaud the efforts of NFA in contacting University administrators when programs achieve qualification for the national championships. An expansion of this type of advocacy can help programs secure a prominence in University decision making and promote the activities we all value.
