



Competitive and collaborative options for forensic programs

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"As education budgets continue to tighten, we need allies and advocates more than ever." Ned Lauver, former forensic coach, assistant principal at Westlake High School in Ohio (Jan, 2020)

"As budget cuts slice ever-closer to the bone, as students are tempted to invest their available time in newly diverse options, and as the value of a college education itself comes under increasing attack, it's crucial that we understand what our activity has to offer" Editors Richard E Paine and Dr. Emily M Crowder (editors note in National Forensic Journal Issue 35 Fall 2017)

Forensics Identity and Branding/Rebranding

Many in the general public often misperceive what forensics teams are all about, envisioning groups of coroners. Those in academia often acknowledge the educational value of speech and debate teams. For many, though, the competitive nature of the activity may be relatively unknown. The public at large and the university, both town and the gown, are drawn to competitions. Viewer ratings for Espn Ocho Day last March (when most professional athletic leagues were suspended) featured taped footage of stone skipping, marble races, and Krystal hamburger eating [contests](#). The event gained viral attention and reports centered on fan openness to previously unseen content.

Forensic activities have the ability to compete virtually/ remotely while many other collegiate activities do not. If before or during the coming fall semester collegiate athletics are suspended, the university could be searching for good news. Speech and debate teams could become an outlet for publicity, attention, and competitive pride through virtual tournaments or arranged competitions. Some initial steps that could be taken to position yourself competitively with athletics include referring to your organization as a team, creating team phrases/ sayings, fostering team bonding, starting and maintaining team traditions, and acquiring team clothing.

Publicity

Emphasize the team internally and externally through on campus services, social media, with and around campus offices. We used to joke that the slogan for our team was “the best kept secret on campus” As the governor of Kentucky Andy Beshear is known for saying- “Ya’ll can’t be doin’ that” We have to promote our achievements and not be shy about accomplishments. Budget work time for publicity and religiously follow up after events even if you are exhausted and playing catch up with classes. Athletic departments provide press releases after games and often regularly during competitions. Forensics could do the same (some do).

To enhance forensic publicity, consider arranging meetings before the academic year begins or soon after with the following:

on campus communications (internal and external)- discuss collegiate signage for media opportunities/ on campus presence (requirements/ procedures/ font and style formats)

campus/ local paper, radio and television stations

internal campus publications about academic news and notes

external campus publications (student and alumni magazines, email newsletters)

various departmental and university social media editors

Additionally, the team can ask/ elect a member to be social media director

Finally, consistently write and send out info about all that your team does- competitions, travel, mentoring, forums, service projects. You can even plan some stories to break during dead times for other campus sports/events or when you aren’t competing for awhile.

Strategic language choices for press releases can be implemented.

Ned Lauver discusses speaking the language of athletics for speech events. He writes, “Instead of simply reporting a fourth place finish at a nameless local tournament, emphasize how many teams were competing (e.g., 4th among 21 teams competing), the location of the tournament, and individual tournament champions. When providing interviews for members of the local media, find ways to equate speech and debate to track or swim meets (or other

recognizable athletic competitions) and discuss forensics in visceral terms. Speech and debate tournaments (especially at the upper echelons of competition) are just as physically and mentally exhausting as their athletic counterparts—use language that illustrates the point.”

From Forensics is a Contact Sport: Speaking the Language of Athletics Can Help Your Speech and Debate Program Thrive By Ned W. Lauver January 27, 2020 NFSSA.

Administrators and students are often surprised to find out that speech and debate competitions aren't based on divisions or school size. Everyone competes against everyone at tournaments. Highlighting some of the other universities your team competed against or defeated is often noticed by others on campus. Look for noticeable/ recognizable university landmarks to utilize appropriately for press reports.

Keep a record of all news stories, interviews, team accomplishments, service projects, pictures and images in a central location that can be accessed anytime and compiled at the end of the year. The team can use a shared social media app (line, band, other) to collect team member photos in a central location.

Create program justification using research/ testimonials.

There are many articles that discuss the benefits of forensics training and competition. A few of these research projects and articles include:

forensics team participation and [critical thinking](#), [improved emotional competence](#)
 debate participation and [improved academic outcomes across the college campus](#) and [cultural tolerance and understanding, improved life and career choices, long term benefits to society](#) and civic engagement (**see Navigating Opportunity, Policy Debate in the 21st Century : Wake Forest National Debate Conference**)
 individual events participation and [affective learning, self confidence and life direction](#)

Collect [anecdotal accounts](#) regarding forensics activity and [participation lists](#) from notable politicians, business leaders, news personalities, actors, and [others](#). Request testimonials from alumni and current members on value/benefits from their experience.

On campus involvement with institution (F2F or virtual)

1. Integrate or assist with campus Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) or campus programs that work across curriculum (writing, debating, etc.)
2. Offer workshops or assistance with Career or Workforce Development Dept
3. Recruit cohosts for events with other campus organizations, campus activities, departments, or honoraries (some may depend on topic of event)
 - *Battle of the Brains event at UC
4. Election events leading up to and after November
5. Become a part of existing on campus events (orientation, homecoming)
6. Increase involvement with student government (campus activity funds)
7. Nominate students for end of year university awards on a regular basis

Off campus involvement (F2F/ virtual)

1. High school forensics team development/ training virtually
2. Showcases open to participating institutions- open to all partner with on campus departments
3. Competitions open to participating institutions- open to all can be open or narrow in focus by event, or topic
4. Home and home events with other colleges (debate, interp, platform)
-similar to debate travel in years past. Can incorporate viewing parties, virtual formats. Consider competing with athletic rival to your school
5. Host an event or forum with an outside partner. [Kettering Foundation](#), [Common Ground for Action](#)/ [National Issues Forums](#), or through [net impact/ up to us](#) which offers microgrants to hold events on campus or online. Also consider collaboration with campus center for deliberative action (typically through political science departments)