

Asynchronous Forensics League Proposal

This is a draft proposal initially created by me, Erick Roebuck of SEARK College. I was the DOF at Biola University from 1997-2009 and served for six years of that time as AFA-NIET District One chair. Since then, I have coached at John Brown University and the University of Oklahoma. I am looking to finish my coaching career by starting a team at SEARK College. I am compelled to get like-minded coaches together to start asynchronous competition as I have no budget to start a program and due to the fact that there is not much local competition for speech events in my state. I really saw some great potential for asynchronous competition when I volunteered to judge the [2020 ProtoCommunications Asynchronous Tournament](#).

How do I envision asynchronous tournaments benefiting the collegiate forensics community in general? I see asynchronous competition as a complement and not a replacement for typical tournaments. I view asynchronous tournaments as a means to bring forensics to underserved students who could not go to a traditional tournament due to work demands, lack of a school budget, etc. I believe that asynchronous tournaments can be a gateway to increase the number of teams competing at traditional tournaments. For the purposes of my own college and nascent forensics program, I see asynchronous competition as a springboard to competing at relevant regional and national tournaments in the future.

What follows in the proposal are just some ideas formatted into bullet form. I hope whoever joins me in this quest to build an asynchronous forensics league will help to make these ideas even better by amplifying the good ones and getting rid of the dumb ones. Some of these ideas may not come to fruition until after the pandemic. I am eager to see what the forensics community comes up with to adapt to the current situation at the NDE-IE Conference. It seems that we at SEARK may be able to catch the wave of online tournaments at this moment to get our start, but I would also like to have something available for the future if future seasons return to “normal”.

Purpose of an Asynchronous Forensics League

- In non-emergency times, asynchronous competition would provide colleges and universities with limited or no budget the opportunity to participate in intercollegiate forensics.
- In non-emergency times, asynchronous competition would provide students the opportunity to participate in speech and debate competitions who are not able to attend in-person or connect synchronously online.
- In emergency times, asynchronous competition would provide opportunities to all students during pandemic or other exigencies that limit travel and gathering of large groups.
- Another worthwhile purpose would be to allow students to get additional feedback from coaches outside of their region and to gain exposure with judges and competitors from across the country (perhaps even around the world!).

Season Format

- There would be a Fall Season and a Spring Season. Students could keep the same speeches during the academic year.
- Two regular season tournaments would lead into a championship tournament. Tournaments judging could take place over the course of a few weeks. Ideally, one tournament a month.
- For regular season tournaments, the format could be the same one used by the Annual ProtoCommunications Asynchronous Speech Tournament. No final rounds, but at least 5 ballots from 5 judges.

- If entry was large enough, students could be divided into separate divisions (i.e. Novice, Community College, University, Open). Students could keep their classification for the entire semester. Novice would be for students in their first semester of competition either in HS or college. CC and University would essentially be a junior division, but allow students to participate up to 3 semesters (in addition to the one semester of novice). Any student could enter open division, but it would be considered the highest level of competition.
- For a championship tournament at the end of a season, the top performers over the course of the season could advance directly to semifinals and/or final rounds in each of the divisions. Points would be earned for each ballot earned (1st place-5, 2nd place-4, 3rd place-3, 4th Place-2, 5th Place-1). Basically, the season would be a long tournament with semis and finals happening at the end of the semester.
- If a student did not qualify for the championship tournament in an event, they could compete in a regular competition for the championship tournament (without the competitors who advanced to the semifinal or final round). This would keep students engaged and give them an opportunity to win an award without the top speakers present.

Possible 2020-2021 Competition Year

Wed Sept 30 thru Wed Oct 14	Fall Tournament #1
Wed Oct 28 thru Wed Nov 10	Fall Tournament #2
Wed Dec 2 thru Wed Dec 16	Fall Championships
Wed Jan 13 thru Wed Jan 27	Spring Tournament #1
Wed Feb 10 thru Wed Feb 24	Spring Tournament #2
Wed Mar 10 thru Wed Mar 24	Spring Championships
Wed Apr 7 thru Wed Apr 21	National Showcase/Rookie Tournament

To help with web hosting costs, tournaments could have sponsors. The sponsors could have short commercials during the awards broadcast.

Tournament Administration

- As curation of videos is a time intensive process, each program should be responsible for the upload of their videos to YouTube. This way the programs and students have control over their intellectual property and recorded performances. Programs would need to set their videos to unlisted for the duration of the tournament and perhaps a short time afterward to deal with any protests.
- Tournament entry should be free (with covered judging) until the championship tournament. Competitors who directly advance to the semifinal or final rounds at the championship tournament would have the option of purchasing a personalized award with their name from the tournament administrators (who would place an order with a trophy company shortly after the tournament).
- As far as tournament administration software, a custom web app might make the most sense. Instead of having to open up a ballot and a YouTube playlist, both could be integrated through embedding the YouTube videos into the actual ballot. I have the experience to be able to code something like this. We basically would build something simple that would serve our purposes. A custom web app would also

allow an easier opportunity for folks to come and “watch” the tournament.

Benefits of Asynchronous Performance

- Having students adapt to performing on camera will be essential now that webcams have become an important part of our communication repertoires. Students need to learn lighting, framing shots, how to speak to the camera, etc.
- Since programs are in control of their videos, students would be able to share their speeches and other advocacy on their own social media accounts, thus increasing the impact of their speeches.
- Teams could develop more professional recording skills to help publicize and promote their hard work to their institutions.

Why build infrastructure for asynchronous competition?

- Bottom line, asynchronous performance helps promote our activity more whether the team is able to compete in person or can only join online. It will complement traditional tournaments while expanding the reach of tournaments beyond the traditional brick and mortar setting.
- An Asynchronous Forensics League would allow programs to compete with a \$0 budget if they had the time and volunteer coaching/judging. I am in the process of trying to start a team at my community college. There will not be funds next year for travel at my school due to state budget cuts. This provides my students the opportunity to compete in this venue (which everyone might be doing anyway because of COVID-19).
- Building the infrastructure now helps asynchronous forensics competition be viable in the future. Moreover, the pandemic is a good opportunity to legitimize this type of competition in the broader forensics community.