

HEY, CHAIRPERSONS, DIRECTORS, AND COACHES!

Don't Fret If Your Debate and Forensics Budgets Are Cut! COMMUNITIZE YOUR DISCIPLINES!

by
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The Gloom on Some High School, College, and University Campuses:

Today, financial pressure is scourging many high school, college, and university campuses. School boards, trustees, administrators, and faculty representatives are spending countless hours in fact-finding and priority-listing committee meetings. Among their discussions has grown the question: "How can we provide our students a rich foundation for intellectual, cultural, social, and spiritual or moral growth, and still pay our bills?" Departments responsible for debate and forensics are not immune to this question.

Some departments of English and Speech, for example, already have experienced significant budget cuts, and many more departments must face similar cuts in the immediate or near future. Department chairs often must share in recommending cut-back procedures. For illustration, recent recommendations of high priority are eliminating certain faculty and staff positions, increasing preparation and teaching loads, changing positions from full-time to half-time, freezing faculty and staff salaries, and cutting extracurricular budgets.

Of course, debate and forensics budgets vary greatly among institutions, but the budgets generally compose a significant percentage of their respective departments' operating allotments. Recommendations in this article should reflect considerable savings, yet the latter need not prostitute institutional and departmental goals nor generate permanent cessation of debate and forensics activities.

Institutional and Departmental Goals:

Although high school, college, and university catalogs vary extensively in their precise descriptions of institutional goals, the latter generally focus upon transmitting values, ideals, and aspirations, as well as upon preparing young people for productive personal and professional lives. In short, academic institutions strive to advance human knowledge and to educate new generations of productive citizens.

Departments of English and Speech play leading roles in fulfilling institutional goals. Generally, the departments foster individual development by promoting qualities such as flexibility, creativity, openness to experience, and responsibility. Specifi-

cally the departments help students to acquire and utilize effectively general skills such as the ability to analyze and synthesize, to identify relationships and infer meanings, and to express one's intended thoughts accurately, clearly, and impressively. Such skills are essential to a variety of life roles and work roles.

Contributions of Debate and Forensics:

Debate and forensics also contribute to sound education. For instance, debate and forensics offer the kind of learning that frees students from provincial and parochial attitudes, bias or limitations of

origin, vocational narrowness, and cultural particularity.

Debate and forensics help students to transmit knowledge and understanding in human terms rather than as abstractions. In other words, students learn not only to explain clearly their personal and social values, but also to defend them effectively through confrontation with the value judgments of others.

In brief, debate and forensics generate *living teaching* in which students and coaches engage in projects which require

participants to discover things for themselves, to develop their own interpretation of issues and information, and to solve problems or gain better understanding of them.

Thesis:

Of great importance is the fact that off-campus debate and forensic tournaments are not necessary for reaping the above advantages.

The Teaching-Learning Situation:

Perhaps one of the best descriptions of the teaching-learning situation appears in the ANTIDOSIS. Isocrates wisely remarked:

I say to them [his pupils] that if they are to excel in oratory or in managing affairs or in any line of work, they must, first of all, have a natural aptitude for that which they have elected to do; secondly, they must submit to training and master the knowledge of their particular subject, whatever it may be in each case; and, finally, they must become versed and practised in the use and application of their art; for only on these conditions can they become fully competent and preeminent in any line of endeavor. In this process, master and pupil each has his place; no one but the pupil can furnish the necessary capacity; no one but the master has the ability to impart knowledge; while both have a part in the exercises of practical application; for the master must painstakingly direct his pupil, and the latter must rigidly follow the master's instructions. (II, 291-93)

In other words, Isocrates taught speech through a trinity of theory, practice, and criticism. The cycle is widely accepted today as evidenced by numerous textbooks on public speaking and persuasion and by literature specifically treating debate and forensics.

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The Need for Theoretical Understanding:

After a student has expressed interest in debate or forensics, the next step is for a competent teacher to equip the student with a theoretical understanding of the subject. This can be accomplished by both curricular and extracurricular activities. For illustration, under supervision in class, students could read and discuss select Classi-

cal, Medieval, Renaissance, and contemporary rhetorical treatises treating public speaking, argumentation, and debate; and they could read and discuss the plethora of articles dealing with research and criticism in the many fields of Rhetoric and Public Address, Argumentation and Debate, Discussion, and multiple forms of Forensics. Coaches and students attending meetings and workshops of national and local debate and forensic fraternities and clubs could disseminate their information to respective institutions. The latter could also offer their students sufficient theory and maintain cost-effectiveness by using technology like distance learning classes.

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Putting Theory into Practice:

Once students are equipped with sufficient theory, the next step is to enable them to apply their theory in practical situations. Possibilities are numerous. For instance, students could debate, discuss, orate, or present other forms of public address on local, state, national, or international affairs through distance learning classes, before various groups on campus, or before groups in the surrounding community, including, for instance, Friends of the Library, church socials, and business organizations (e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary, and the Chamber of Commerce). In forums following such presentations, students could defend further their positions.

Students interested in radio and television broadcasting could "shadow" local professional announcers and eventually present some segments of the news under the title "Student Newscaster of the Week [or Day]."

Students could interpret literature of all varieties before social groups, and they could perform in solo acting or reader's theatre at hospitals, at homes for the elderly, and in classes or at school convocations comprised of hearers ranging from elementary school children to college and university students.

Students intramurally could compete for scholarships and for positions in groups attending state or national conventions treating debate, forensics, and other speech activities. By utilizing only a small portion of their present debate or forensic budgets,

some institutions could provide handsome financial awards - of course, along with the usual trophies, plaques, medals, and ribbons. In light of the soaring costs of education, it is difficult indeed not to think that debate and forensic scholarships would motivate many students to work hard to perform well in local contests.

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Competent Criticism:

To complete the educational trinity, students must receive competent criticism for their presentations. Opportunities again abound. For instance, teachers or appointed representatives could accompany the students in various activities in the community and offer criticism immediately after the students' presentations. Also, students could receive competent criticism from outside their respective departments, but still within their home institution. For instance, students could present their speeches before faculty members and select students in such disciplines as Political Science, Economics, Sociology, History, Philosophy, Comparative Religions, or any other discipline most appropriate to the students' particular messages.

Then, too, students could send their messages and present their skills through distance learning classes, videotapes, tape-recordings, and pamphlets--media not foreign to contemporary life--and this technology and literature could be viewed, discussed, and evaluated by faculty and qualified students in other institutions. Then the evaluations could be returned to the respective students for retort or appropriate adaptation to future communication.

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Other Advantages:

Besides saving significant institutional funds and adhering closely to the educational trinity of rich theory, sound practice, and competent criticism, other advantages could be gained by not going to off-campus debate and forensic tournaments (Mannebach to page 39)

ments. Of course, some of the following advantages apply only to debate and discussion which maintain a single topic for a given year. Also, not all students travel great distances to tournaments. However, many do and therefore the following advantages could accrue.

For illustration, teachers and students no longer would have to devote the entire academic year treating subject matter they voted against during the selection of the national debate and discussion topics; no longer would have to spend hundreds of hours each year fighting traffic, inclement weather, and tournament schedules while cramped in automobiles filled with snoring, unpleasant music, and the smell of greasy junk food; no longer would have to travel thousands of miles to judge or compete against individuals and teams they recently met at local tournaments; no longer would have to meet teams who at the middle or end of the academic year still employ debate cases from handbooks issued at the beginning of the season; no longer would have to meet individuals or teams ill-prepared in theory and practice, but compelled to compete so that their respective coaches

have all events covered in hope of winning a sweepstakes trophy to help justify their spending of hundreds of dollars on tournament expenses, e.g., entry fees, hired judges, lodging, meals, and transportation; and no longer would have to be subjected to judges who are incompetent because of bias, inadequate training, or other unacceptable reasons. One does not need to spend much time to find literature written by coaches and students complaining about poor judging at off-campus tournaments.

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Conclusion:

In conclusion, the authors are not recommending universal withdrawal from off-campus debate and forensic tournaments, nor are they urging their colleagues and students to crusade voluntarily for the abolishment of such competition.

What the authors do advocate is twofold. First, if English, Speech, and other de-

partments are confronted with having to cut back in expenditures, then they should consider seriously withdrawing from off-campus debate and forensic tournaments **BEFORE** cutting faculty, freezing salaries, or instituting similar behavior.

Secondly, if debate and forensic budgets become the targets of financial cutbacks, then chairpersons, directors, and coaches should neither fret nor become paranoid. After all, off-campus debate and forensic tournaments are a luxury; they are not necessary for meeting institutional and departmental objectives. Academic institutions indeed can be cost effective and practice the educational trinity of sound theory, sound practice, and competent criticism. The answer is *right at home*; the answer is more *communitizing* of debate and forensics.

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