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# The Impact of Competition in Forensics on Future Careers

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THE IMPACT OF COMPETITION IN COLLEGE FORENSICS ON FUTURE  
CAREERS

A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Educational Leadership Doctoral Program  
Western Kentucky University  
Bowling Green, KY

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

By  
Jace Thomas Lux

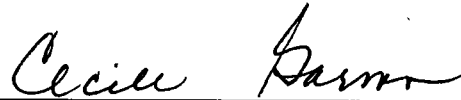
December 2012

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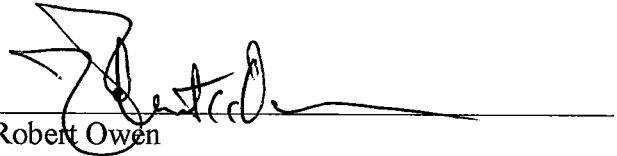
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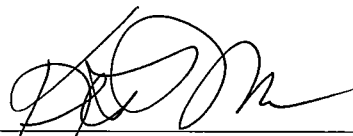
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I dedicate this dissertation to a tremendous support group including family, friends, students, and colleagues. Without their encouragement, this final dissertation, and quite possibly my doctoral studies as a whole, may have never been completed. The students and staff of Western Kentucky University's Forensics Team have journeyed through this educational endeavor with me for the last four years, and have never failed in cheering me on each step of the way. My family, and in particular, my parents, have always stressed the value of a complete and rounded education, and throughout my life have equipped me with all of the necessary tools to accomplish all my academic undertakings. My son, Colton, wasn't with us when Daddy first started the doctoral program, but you came into our lives halfway through, and forever altered my outlook on everything. You remind me every day of the value of an education, of loving what you do, and never putting anything before your family. Thank you for your patience when Daddy had to do schoolwork when it meant sacrificing our playtime together. Your laughter is the best sound in the world. And finally to my wife, my partner and my world, Brandy. We journey through life together, and are never out of step. The Lord has blessed my life by adding you to it, and there's nothing I wouldn't do to make you smile.

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# THE IMPACT OF COMPETITION IN COLLEGE FORENSICS ON FUTURE CAREERS

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Directed by: Randall Capps, Cecile Garmon, and Robert Owen

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Western Kentucky University

Each year, thousands of college students participate in forensics (competitive speech and debate). Despite previous studies that identify numerous benefits to forensics participation, the activity is often eliminated from college campuses due to financial constraints. Although previous literature identifies the benefits of forensics participation to competitors, these studies do not address the lasting impact of college forensics participation on the careers of former competitors.

This exploratory study sought to identify the forensics outcomes that former competitors felt are used most frequently in their current careers, as well as the amount of emphasis forensics programs are placing on teaching these particular skills to students. The study also sought to determine the level of agreement between former participants and coaches/directors of forensics about which skills students will use most frequently once the competitive experience ends.

One hundred twenty-one former competitors provided responses, as did 33 coaches/directors of forensics. The data analysis revealed that coaches/directors of forensics and former competitors agreed on the importance of most survey items. Additionally, the analysis revealed that most forensics programs seem to be teaching students the majority of the skills they will need in their future careers. However, the

analysis also revealed that forensics programs are directing some emphasis at outcomes that are not very useful to students once they enter the workforce.

Additional findings revealed differences between the value placed on certain outcomes by former debaters versus the value to former individual-events-only competitors. Also, the length of time since a former participant last competed in forensics resulted in a variation of responses for some of the outcomes.

## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Public speaking and debate have long remained mainstays in the American educational system. For over four and a half millennia, teachers and students have engaged in analysis of, improvement upon, and tactical approaches to creating arguments and crafting rhetorically sound messages for audiences. Lucas (2004) notes that the earliest known handbook on effective public speaking was written in Egypt 4,500 years ago. Nearly 2,500 years ago, the Greek philosopher Protagoras began what is considered the first true instruction on effective debate techniques (Bartanen, 1994).

The practice of exploring persuasive speaking and debate techniques increased dramatically with the publication of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. In this treatise, Aristotle (trans. 2010) discusses the art of persuasion, introducing the concepts of logos (focusing on the argument); ethos (the credibility of the speaker); and pathos (the speaker's ability to appeal to the emotions of the audience). These three persuasive components continue to form discussions in public speaking classrooms worldwide as essential tenants of effective persuasive messages.

The rise of the Roman Empire brought the idea that historical records would dramatically improve if particular attention were given to eloquence and language (Nichols, 1963). This concept formed the foundation for full curricula covering the importance of language and style in both written and oral histories. Subsequently, classes in public speaking grew in popularity in the Roman Empire, and public speaking and debating became recognized as unique forms of entertainment. Forensics competitions grew from these initial beginnings of public speaking and debate as entertainment.

Students during this era began to debate various political and philosophical issues, and these classroom debates often drew the attention of large numbers of spectators.

Soon, the study of debate and rhetoric spread beyond the Roman Empire and found its way into the curricula of European schools. Alcuin began the first instruction in English rhetoric in the late eighth century (Howell, 1954). The study of rhetoric and debate persisted in England, aided heavily by the 1480 publication of Traversagni's *Nova Rhetorica*, the first work of rhetoric printed in England.

Naturally, the study of rhetoric and debate found its way into the early curriculum of higher education in America. As Howell (1954) notes, Harvard College held its first commencement in 1642, and those first graduates spent many hours studying the principles of rhetoric rooted in the Roman Empire. This emphasis on rhetoric and debate in American higher education persists from those humble beginnings in New England. Numerous scholars have documented the important role of forensics in American formal education. Similar to the curricula of ancient Roman educational institutions, American schools began to adopt speech and debate skills as fundamental aspects of curricula at all educational levels. As Potter (1963) explains "during the decades following the Civil War, especially in the East and South, there were individuals who still believed that reasoned discourse deserved a place in the curriculum of the nation's schools and colleges" (p. 22). Borchers and Wagner (1954) echo this idea. The authors discuss what early American educators termed a "well-rounded" education, and note that this desire to produce citizens with essential skills in a number of fields led to the revision of curricula nationwide. The authors state "educators began to popularize the needs of man as an articulate person in his practical world; and they saw man as a citizen speaking as well as



reading” (p. 285). Speech and debate, as well as related activities, continue to play an important role in formal American education curricula.

While teaching public speaking and debate is a long-held practice, formal, organized competition in such events began only recently in America. Reid (2000) notes that formalized competition between students from different organizations took place through various literary societies in the 1800s, where students engaged in extemporaneous debates and speeches. While it is difficult to pinpoint the exact origins of competitive speech and debate in American colleges and high schools, many well-known institutions of higher education established competitive teams during the early 1800s. Schools engaged in declamation and other speaking and debate activities early in that century, and formal competitive speech and debate activities eventually evolved from such practices (Bartanen, 1994).

Scholars have long struggled to determine when the first official intercollegiate debate occurred. Many claim that the first official intercollegiate debate took place on January 14, 1892 between Harvard University and Yale University (Cowperthwaite & Baird, 1954). However, other researchers have uncovered records of intercollegiate debate more than a decade prior to the Harvard versus Yale debate. Reid (2000) notes “We cannot be sure when the first intercollegiate debate was held, but we know that there was one as early as May 5, 1881, when the Phi Alpha Society of Illinois College played host to the Adelphi Society of Knox College” (p. 8). By the 1940s, multiple debate tournaments were offered all over the country every weekend, and debate teams could choose which tournaments they wanted to attend (Freeley & Steinberg, 2005). The first honorary forensics society, Delta Sigma Rho, was established in 1906. In 1925, the

National Forensic League was established as a high school speech and debate honor society (National Forensic League Website, 2012) and became the first nationwide organization developed for the sole purpose of organizing speech and debate activities at the high school level across the U.S.

From its humble beginnings in literary societies, competitive speech and debate has grown to unforeseen levels of popularity over the last century. High school and college competition teams exist in all 50 states, and, according to the official website of the National Forensic League, there are currently over 112,000 active high school student members who participate in speech and debate competitions annually. Over a decade and a half ago, Bartanen (1994) stated that “During this school year, thousands of high school and college students will participate in some form of organized speech competition” (p. 1).

### **Statement of the Problem**

With such high levels of participation, students and educators alike theorize that many benefits accrue from participation in competitive speech and debate activities. Hinck (2005) states that at the university level “speech and debate programs are vital components of departments of speech communication and colleges of communication, fine arts, and liberal arts” (p. 116). While many colleges or universities and high schools in America currently have a forensics team or have had one at some point, administrators constantly struggle with the issue of whether to continue funding for such programs (American Forensic Association Website, 2012). The cost of funding a program is a major consideration. Teams travel to tournaments nationwide during a season that spans from September to April. Additionally, 60% of active collegiate teams provide some

means of financial support to team members, which can be a significant cost to the university as well (Ziegelmueller, 1997). Added to the already growing list of expenses, the salary and benefits for a team's coaching staff and the costs associated with starting and maintaining a team may appear to some administrators as unfeasible.

This issue of whether or not to fund a forensics team has long plagued higher education administrators. Thompson (1930) argued nearly a century ago that "principals have reduced budgets for debating, have ignored debate coaches, and have reduced academic credits for debates" (p. 555). Speaking of college programs specifically, VerLinden (1985) claims, "Administrators who would not think of eliminating a science laboratory perceive forensics as an activity that is acceptable but quite expendable" (p. 79). As Cunningham (2005) notes, "The goals of the institution and the goals of administrators have a definite impact on forensics" (p. 15).

Perhaps the most palpable explanation for the lack of support for forensics programs derives from a condition this study seeks to alleviate. As Billings (2011) explains, a lack of research may prove deleterious to the existence of many programs. In his study exploring the impacts of participation in forensics individual events, the author asserts, "It is possible that a dearth of scholarly investigation in the area hinders arguments to maintain forensic programs at a time of declining financial support for higher education" (p. 111).

Many former participants have attested to the fact that they would not have otherwise acquired a number of the skills they attained through forensics competition, but little academic research supports this notion. Several works have examined the benefits of forensics participation, and a few have surveyed participants to determine the

perceived benefits students have derived from forensics participation (Billings, 2011; Billman, 2008; Kuyper, 2011; Littlefield, 2001; Quenette, Larson-Casselton, & Littlefield, 2007; Rogers, 2002; Williams, McGee, & Worth, 2001). However, most of these studies have sought to determine the impacts on current competitors, and not the effect on those individuals who competed at one time, but no longer participate in forensics competition. Also, no in-depth work currently exists to detail the long-term impacts, either positive or negative, that forensics participation may have on students.

Additionally, no exploration has occurred which seeks to determine the forensics skills that former competitors find most valuable in their day-to-day lives, and the extent to which the teaching of those skills pervades collegiate forensics programs. Also, no previous study has sought to identify the degree of consensus that exists between coaches/directors of forensics and former competitors about which skills should be emphasized through forensics competition. Essentially, no current work seeks to determine if coaches and/or directors of forensics are actually emphasizing the skills in their forensics programs that former competitors claim they use most often in their current jobs.

This study will have value for several reasons. Without a study regarding the lasting impacts that forensics participation can have on competitors, schools may continue to struggle for an answer to the question of whether or not to fund a team. As Bartanen (2006) explains:

The duality of accountability and cost-containment will continue to influence the well being of both individual forensic programs and the activity in general.

Forensic programs will be required to explain and justify the benefits of their

existence using clear and compelling evidence to both maintain their continued presence and increase the likelihood of funding at a level sufficient for achieving the program's competitive and non-competitive goals. (p. 33)

This study seeks to provide that much-needed evidence. Providing high school and college administrators with a summary of the impacts of forensics participation can help them to determine whether a forensics program fits their institution, or, if a team already exists on campus, whether that team should continue to receive financial and faculty support. Additionally, this study will seek to identify the emphasis that particular programs place on the recognized benefits of forensics. Current coaches and directors of forensics can use this information as a guide to identify areas of improvement within their own programs.

State colleges and universities are experiencing unprecedented budget reductions (Willner & Gronblom, 2009), which has caused many university leaders to make difficult choices regarding which departments and initiatives to fund. Budget cuts limit access to higher education and increase the debt burden of individuals (Curran, 2009). Budget cuts such as those currently experienced in higher education often result in massive layoffs and reductions in services (Doyle & Delaney, 2009). Recent budget reductions have created harsh fiscal conditions in many universities, resulting in cuts to many research projects (Blair, 2010). The character of universities has changed due to budget cuts, which has negatively impacted the cost of going to college and gaining employment security, and has caused high rates of unemployment (Apple, 2006). As Phifer (1963) posits:

Forensics activities provide valuable laboratory, co-curricular, or extracurricular experiences in all forms of original speaking. If student participants gain increased ability in reflective thinking and advocacy, if they acquire complex skills of speech composition and delivery, if they learn to organize and analyze and outline a case, frame and define propositions, do research in the library and elsewhere, then the forensic program serves defensible educational aims and deserves a place in an educational institution. (p. 305)

In a time of limited resources, educational institutions have difficult decisions to make, and a study such as this one may provide a valuable tool in determining the worth of a forensics program. Kuyper (2011) claims that, “Programs are increasingly having to justify their existence in higher education” (p. 22). This study could help coaches and directors of forensics to better defend their program’s continued existence.

Additionally, if the results of this study indicate significant benefits for forensics participation, the study can help current and future coaches and directors of forensics demonstrate the value of their own teams to potential students, parents, peers, donors, and administrators. On the other hand, should the results of this study demonstrate little or no benefit from forensics participation, that, too, could be valuable information for coaches and directors. Clearly, if respondents indicate that the activity failed to provide the expected benefits, coaches and directors of forensics need to consider a major overhaul of the activity on a large scale. As a popular and historical academic activity on many campuses, one would expect multiple lasting benefits to result from participation in the activity. Since this study will not only seek to determine the level of beneficial skills gained in forensics competition, but will also attempt to determine the emphasis current

programs place on integrating these skills into forensics pedagogy, the research can serve as a valuable tool to help current educational leaders, coaches, and directors of forensics decide which skills need more or less emphasis for long range usefulness once the competitive experience ends for each student.

This study will seek to fill the existing void in previous forensics research of this nature. Little research examines the impacts of forensics participation from the perspective of former competitors. By surveying former forensics competitors now engaged in a wide array of careers, the study seeks to present evidence of the impact forensics participation can have on student success once their competitive eligibility ends. Ideally, this project will serve as a tool to aid in decision-making about whether to support a forensics program on a high school or college campus.

By seeking the perspectives of former forensics participants using a survey listing previously identified benefits of forensics participation, this study can begin to fill a void in existing forensics research. The benefits included in the surveys used in this study derive from cross applying the results of three recent and widely-circulated studies on the benefits of forensics participation to current participants (Littlefield, 2001; Quenette et al., 2007; and Williams et al., 2001). Additionally, the researcher reviewed the stated purposes of the National Forensic Association and the American Forensic Association to ensure that all stated benefits of those organizations were included in the survey.

### **Significance of Study**

Existing publications identify the impacts forensics participation can have on competitors. Cowperthwaite and Baird (1954) state:

The educational values of the forensic program for the functions and purposes of a democratic society were recognized as playing an indispensable role in the struggle for survival. If free speech, basic to the American system, is to serve democracy properly, discussion and debate will continue as essential educational disciplines. (p. 275)

Participation in forensics results in both physical and mental stamina (Angelo, 1995). Kelly (2010) notes, “Intercollegiate forensics is, at its core, a form of teaching” (p. 130). Among the benefits to students who participate in forensics are enhanced reasoning, research analysis, speaking, and organizing skills (Alexander & Strickland, 1980). Proof exists to support a strong correlation between participation in debate and the development of critical thinking skills (Colbert, 1995).

In a survey conducted by Paine and Stanley (2003), respondents noted both the value of people and relationships and the value of an education as benefits of membership on a forensics team. Participants in their study noted that forensics gave them an opportunity to meet new people and to develop positive relationships with others. Additionally, respondents noted that they appreciated the value of forensics as an educational tool. Additional positive outcomes of forensics team membership illuminated by this study included traveling to tournaments. Compton (2006) states that “forensics has a rich tradition of celebrating its past” (p. 27). Hughes, Gring, and Williams (2006) claim, “The forensics family has long been an issue of great importance for intercollegiate competitors. For many, the forensics family is a reference to the closeness experienced between competitors and the coaching staff, teammates and students from other schools” (p. 7).



Jensen and Jensen (2006) also recognize the impact that forensics participation can have on relationships. They note that forensics team members can build relationships with other activity participants and that “abilities to communicate competently within those relationships are essential to the quality of the forensic experience” (p. 17).

Forensics can also have an impact on its home educational institution. At the university level, forensics teams can fulfill academic, extra-curricular, and university recruitment roles (Cunningham, 2005). Hinck and Hinck (1998) claim, “Forensic programs can provide community service in the way of exhibition debates, speakers bureaus and showcases” (p. 10). Quenette et al. (2007) and Foster (2004) all advocate the benefits of participation in forensics among current competitors.

While multiple studies explore the impacts that forensics can have on current competitors, few, if any, look at the benefits that past participation in the activity has had on the current careers of former competitors. Also, while many researchers discuss the benefits of forensics, no study asks former competitors directly about the impact forensics participation has had on their lives, whether positive or negative. Finally, this study is unique in its attempt to provide current coaches and directors of forensics with a blueprint of the forensics skills that students consider valuable once they begin their careers.

As Reid (2000) explains, the activity has enjoyed periods of significant popularity at times, as well as periods of decreasing interest. Cowperthwaite and Baird (1954) also note that the activity has undergone significant periods of both expansion and decline. Bartanen (1994) states, “Resource scarcity has led to the cutback or cancellation of many programs.” (p. 7). Forensics participation has proved to be inconsistent at times. If this

study demonstrates significant benefits from forensics participation, leaders within the forensics community may wish to convene to determine how to stabilize participation numbers.

The significance of this study derives from the sheer volume of forensics competitors each year. With so many competitors participating in forensics at the high school and collegiate level annually, the results of this study could be of great benefit to coaches, directors of forensics, competitors, and administrators alike. Stakeholders at all levels need to recognize the benefits of forensics participation, or in the absence of any recognizable benefits, they need to commence conversations about how to revise the activity to attain positive impacts on participants.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: To what extent do former forensics program participants use key forensics speech, debate, and public speaking outcomes as part of their current jobs?

Research Question 2: To what extent do former forensics program participants believe key forensics outcomes were emphasized in their college forensics program?

Research Question 3: Do directors of forensics/coaches agree that there are important forensics outcomes that should be taught?

Research Question 4: If so, which outcomes are rated high most consistently?

### **Definition of Terms**

Several operational definitions, unique to this study, require clarification.

Following is a list of these definitions:

Forensics: A form of rhetorical scholarship which takes various forms, including debate, public address, and the interpretation of literature. Forensics serves as a curricular and co-curricular laboratory for improving students' abilities in research, analysis, and oral communication. Typically, forensic activities are conducted in a competitive environment so as to motivate students and accelerate the learning process. Forensics remains an ongoing, scholarly experience, uniting students and teachers in its basic educational purpose (Freeley & Steinberg, 2005).

Participant or Former Competitor: For the purpose of this study, these two terms may be used interchangeably. When used in this study, the terms will both refer to someone who has competed in forensics at the collegiate level, and who has not been a competitor in the activity for at least two years.

Director of Forensics or Coach: For the purpose of this study, these two terms are interchangeable. When used in this study, both will refer to someone who serves as either the head coach, assistant coach, graduate assistant coach, or director of a collegiate forensics team. Undergraduate student coaches will not be considered in this study.

Key Forensics Outcomes: Recognized benefits and/or outcomes resulting from one's participation in forensics.

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Many academic institutions find themselves faced with the issue of trying to enrich students' educational experiences with fewer and fewer resources available, and leaders do not know how to differentiate between successful and unsuccessful extracurricular programs. Many colleges and high schools must make significant decisions about which new initiatives to undertake, or which existing initiatives to continue each year. Often, forensics programs find themselves on the chopping block (Kuyper, 2011), as administrators have no research or data with which to determine whether or not speech and debate activities benefit students or whether the impact is minimal or non-existent. Without a tool by which to gauge the impact of forensics participation on former competitors, administrators may make ill-informed decisions about the fate of such programs. Additionally, without a study to determine the value of the activity or which forensics skills are most important beyond the competitive experience, coaches and directors of forensics do not know what, if any, improvements must be made to the activity and individual forensics programs.

Some literature exists which examines the benefits of forensics participation, but these studies do not seek the input of current forensics coaches/directors of forensics. Additionally, these studies tend to focus on the experience of current participants, without examining how past participation in the activity has benefitted individuals in their current careers. Also, no such study seeks to determine which skills are most important to former competitors after their competition days are over, or the degree of awareness among forensics directors/coaches about which skills should be emphasized in order to prepare students for life after competition.

This chapter provides an overview of previous research regarding the most prevalent impacts of forensics participation. It discusses the value of competition; communication skills; communication education best practices; critical thinking skills; critical thinking skills in forensics; and leadership skills.

### **The Value of Competition**

Multiple works have examined the benefits to current forensics participants. Hinck (2003) notes that the activity can teach students the value of competition, and the author states that competition can enhance the educational experience for participants. Jensen and Jensen (2006) echo this sentiment, noting “although the value placed on awards and honors varies with individuals and programs, there is no escaping that the competitive context is the source for feedback which contributes to skill development and the laboratory in which performance, argumentation, and advocacy is practiced and perfected” (p. 24). Hobbs, Hobbs, and Paine (2007) state, “Competitive forensics influences the self-esteem and lives of those who participate in it” (p. 1). Quenette et al. (2007) note that among participants surveyed, respondents listed enhanced competitive success among the benefits derived from forensics participation. They state that “these items addressed the acquisition of skills that enable students to compete more successfully in a competitive environment” (p. 13). Clearly, researchers who have previously examined the impacts of forensics participation on students have noted that forensics is a competitive activity. As Warriner (1998) notes, “Beyond skill attainment, the competitive nature of forensics stimulates desire, commitment, and high motivation in students” (p. 29). White (2010) states, “Healthy team cultures include team members who willingly embrace the joy of competition. Forensics is at its core a competitive activity.

In my experience, when a team loses sight of the gratification competition can provide, the health of the team culture starts to falter” (p. 160).

Since forensics is widely recognized as a competitive endeavor, it is important when examining the impact of the activity on former participants to also examine previous research detailing the value of competition. Numerous scholars in multiple disciplines have noted that competition provides tremendous educational value to students. As Burnett, Brand, and Meister (2001) point out, “The incentive of competition pushes everyone to ‘be the best they can be’—students learn, and new knowledge results” (p. 107). Gardner (2011), writing about adult literacy education, claims that competition can serve as a strong motivator toward excellence in educational endeavors.

Shields and Bredemeier (2010) state that various researchers have considered competition in education as a harmful notion that can decrease students’ self-image and lower their confidence. However, responding to such criticism of competition, the authors state, “Rather than corrupting our young, competition can cultivate their character” (p. 63). They continue, “In true competition, each party is pushed to its limits by the challenge coming from the best effort of opponents. The mutual challenge is a stimulus to maximum effort that, when rooted in the values of true competition, leads to an exhilarating upward spiral toward excellence” (p. 64). While critical of some of the various employments of competition in educational settings, Wang and Yang (2003) concede, “To introduce sharp competition among students as a ‘high-powered incentive scheme’ can indeed motivate students on effort” (p. 125).

Hinsz (2005) claims that “if challenging and specific goals are established for individuals who have the necessary ability and are committed to the goals, task

performance increases as a function of the difficulty of the goals” (p. 259). Essentially, this author asserts that as goals become more difficult, individuals are more likely to put forth greater effort toward the achievement of these goals. The author notes that competition will result in individuals setting higher goals for themselves.

Bartrom (2008) discusses the value of student competitions in the context of student media events. As the author states, “There is a toughness, a strength that emerges from this (entering media competitions) that is developmentally necessary and psychologically valuable” (p. 18). Clearly, this author believes that competition generates fortitude in participants.

Bergin and Cooks (2000) analyzed the effects of academic competition on students of color. In general, the authors note that students felt as though competition was beneficial, and that it caused them to focus more on the task at hand as well as to pay attention to what other students were doing academically. In this case, respondents agree that competition leads to positive effects among participants.

Ozturk and Debelak (2008) state that, among schoolchildren recognized as “gifted,” academic competitions play an important role in student enhancement. The authors state, “Academic competitions have long been an aspect of programming for the gifted. These competitions can facilitate a learning environment that presents gifted students the academic challenge that often is difficult to create in a single classroom or school” (p. 49). Among the many benefits outlined by the authors, these competitions can produce a learning environment that presents participants with academic challenges not found in a traditional classroom setting. The authors also state that such competitions can promote productive work habits, and can nurture emotional and psychological

growth. Finally, the authors state that competition can increase motivation, help students cope with subjectivity, and foster participant interaction with supportive role models.

Studies of the positive relationship between competition and motivation are not limited to Western academicians. Examining students in India, Tripathi's (1992) study indicates that competition produces a greater intrinsic motivation to engage in a task. In addition, direct competition also typically leads to a higher level of task performance. Explaining this phenomenon, the author claims, "In direct competition, the subjects experienced more pressure to perform at a higher level, felt more of a threat to their self-esteem, and experienced greater conformity. These constraints might have led to greater arousal, leading to a higher level of performance" (p. 715).

Continuing to herald the benefits of engaging in competition, Udvari (2000) states:

Students gain in a multitude of dimensions by participating in contests and competitions. Their knowledge bases are expanded in the specific areas of the contest, along with the concepts and skills needed for participation. Gains are made in process skills, personal and interpersonal development, and product production. The process skills of creative problem finding and solving, critical and creative thinking, leadership, group dynamics, goal setting, and communication skills are used. Self-directed learning and a sense of autonomy are also enhanced. When teams are involved, cooperative learning can be strengthened. (p. 213)

The author advocates competition as a tool for gaining valuable and essential skills.



One cannot deny that the debate as to whether competition is beneficial or detrimental to the participant is alive and well and will likely persist indefinitely. However, as the preceding research points out, numerous studies have demonstrated multiple positive benefits relating to the act of engaging in competitive endeavors. Forensics, by its very design, provides participants with the opportunity to compete against peers. Regarding the different genres of forensics competition, Bartanen (1994) notes, "They provide a unique opportunity for students to learn valuable life skills in an enjoyable, competitive environment" (p. 1). As the author contends, a forensics environment is a competitive environment, and a study on the activity of forensics cannot commence without also examining the impacts of competition on students.

### **Communication Skills**

The activity of competitive forensics and the field of communication will always be intertwined. Many forensics programs are housed within a higher education institution's department of communication studies. At the high school level, forensics classes are often offered as part of a communication or language curriculum. As Phifer (1963) explains, "Forensic experiences provide invaluable training in oral communication." (p. 305).

Freeley and Steinberg (2005) offer perhaps the most inclusive list to date of the benefits of participation in academic debate. Among the positives associated with the activity, the authors note training in argumentation (p. 23); the ability to make prompt, analytical responses (p. 26); the development of critical listening skills (p. 27); the development of proficiency in writing (p. 27); the encouragement of effective speech composition and delivery (p. 28); and the empowerment of personal expression (p. 29).

All of these benefits are found within the field of communication studies; in essence, participation in forensics helps enhance communication skills. For the authors, “Debate is an educational activity that provides students with the opportunity to develop proficiency in writing, thinking, reading, speaking, and listening” (p. 29).

Williams et al. (2001) note that the most frequently cited benefits of participation in debate for current students are enhanced speaking and communication skills.

Likewise, Littlefield (2001) reports that enhanced speaking and communication skills were among the top three self-reported benefits of forensics participation.

Shaw (1995) also notes the benefits of forensics participation and the correlation between participation and the development of communication skills. As a language arts teacher, the author offers a unique perspective on forensics, stating that forensics participation can

increase self-esteem, promote leadership skills, increase communication skills, teach research methods, and provide an outlet for creative expression. Most coaches and students can enumerate these benefits, but I think forensics goes beyond this: it teaches students lessons about language and communication that cannot be taught in the confines of the language arts classroom. (p. 51)

Scholars agree that participation in forensics can enhance students’ general communication skills. Therefore, when examining literature that highlights the impacts of forensics participation, one cannot ignore the importance of strengthening one’s communication skills. The importance of communication skills has been addressed across numerous disciplines, including psychology, sociology, family studies, politics, and education. Therefore, an exhaustive discussion of the importance of communication

skills is not possible within this study, but the researcher will make an attempt to cover various perspectives on communication skills' value.

Egeci and Gencoz (2006) note that communication is essential for healthy relationships of all types. The authors state, "Communication skills seem to be a crucial factor in association with relationship satisfaction" (p. 385). Without effective communication, relationships can disintegrate while conflict escalates, leading to mutual dissatisfaction on the part of everyone involved.

Reed and Spicer (2003) echo this sentiment, claiming "interpersonal communication is a fundamental way in which relationships...are formed and maintained" (p. 343). The authors also posit that communication skills can actually impact the quality of the education students receive. They note that research has demonstrated that students with perceived higher communication proficiencies tend to enjoy higher quality interactions with teachers in high school, and that these interactions can often influence educators' perceptions of their students. A poor perception of a student could result from perceived poor communication skills and could negatively impact the interactions that teachers have with these poorly-perceived students. While communication skills are often thought of as being important beyond the classroom, these authors make the case that the skills are important within school as well.

Writing about deficiencies experienced among soon-to-be or recent college graduates with degrees in marketing, Hyman and Hu (2005) claim, "Company recruiters report that soon-to-graduate students often lack adequate communication skills, planning and organizational skills, and decision-making skills" (p. 105). In the discussion of their findings, the researchers conclude that multiple studies "indicate that communication and

cognitive skills are consistently viewed as most important” (p. 109). Job recruiters recognize that future employees must have communication skills in order to contribute to an organization, and the authors encourage marketing educators to incorporate the teaching of these skills into their courses.

Similarly, in a preceding study, DiSalvo and Larsen (1987) note that respondents identify a number of essential communication skills in the workplace, regardless of profession. In the study, the researchers interviewed respondents in a variety of occupations, ranging from those in the financial sector to the legal profession. The five skills that appeared most frequently in responses despite occupation were building relationships, listening, giving feedback, exchanging routine information, and soliciting feedback. Other common communication skills deemed essential for success included advising, persuading, and interviewing.

Finset, Ekeberg, Eide, and Aspergren (2003) discuss the importance of communication skills within the medical field. To conduct their study, the researchers interviewed physicians who had taken an intensive training course in communication skills to determine their level of satisfaction with what they had learned. The authors note that satisfaction with the course among those who completed it was extremely high. As the researchers conclude, “It seems obvious that course participants had gained insight that the core skills of communication are very important in clinical work with patients” (p. 692).

In his 2009 publication, Self raises two important considerations surrounding the value of communication skills. First, the author notes the importance of improving one’s understanding of intercultural communication. The author notes that communication

between those from different cultures can be difficult, stating, “The study of intercultural communication helps people understand how challenging communication can be when national, regional, religious, socioeconomic, age, and other cultural variables are dissimilar” (p. 232). Clearly, differences in communication norms between cultures are significant, and it is important for one to understand and respect these differences, because, as Self explains “today’s communication technologies allow cross-cultural communications to occur with more ease and at lower costs than at any other time. Additionally, the economic systems of nations are intertwined to such an extent that widespread commerce and effective intercultural communication are necessary” (p. 232). As the author explains, a firm understanding of intercultural communication differences and similarities is essential for today’s business professionals.

However, Self (2009) does not limit his focus on the importance of communication skills to intercultural communication. He also places great importance on the value of learning nonverbal communication skills. Combining the concept of intercultural communication skills and nonverbal communication skills, Self claims, “Nonverbal communication skills can be useful when considering the value and potential risks involved in doing business with international parties” (p. 235).

A common misconception occurs when an individual believes that communication skills are only essential within certain fields of employment, and that they are unnecessary in others. Seeking to counter this claim, Flink (2007) discusses the importance of developing strong communication skills within one’s own line of work. Speaking specifically about those in the field of engineering, the author claims, “Ineffective communications occur when we use technical jargon to explain a concept to

a non-technical individual such as a customer or co-worker. For people who do not have an engineer's training, this can lead to confusion" (p. 45). The author advocates the practice of developing and integrating more universal communication skills into one's career. Emphasizing this point even further within the discipline of engineering, Ford and Teare (2006) state, "As engineering students move into the workplace, their success is as dependent on their ability to communicate as it is on their technical skills" (p. 5).

Fischer (1999) echoes the importance of communication skills regardless of one's career. The author notes that neurosurgeons must often learn the intricate skills necessary to perform difficult medical procedures, but often, the most basic skills, chief among them communication skills, are overlooked in a neurosurgeon's training. Fischer posits, "There are several elements of good communication skills, including those related to comprehension and those additional elements that are essential for production. Time spent acquiring these skills can significantly enhance one's career opportunities" (p. 103).

Condra and Hudson (1996) explain that communication has recently become a greater focus among those attending law school, particularly among programs preparing individuals to practice trial law. As the researchers claim, "From opening statements to closing arguments, the trial process is dependent upon effective communication strategies" (p. 156). To determine the value that attorneys place on communication skills within the legal profession, the researchers conducted a survey asking attorneys to rate the importance of communication skills. The authors note that "all attorneys (100%) responded that communication was very important in the courtroom. When responding to the follow-up question concerning how communication was important, roughly a third (33%) said that communication was the single most important element in the courtroom"

(p. 162). Clearly, those in the legal profession advocate becoming as proficient as possible in communication skills.

Stevens and Stevens (1994) focus on the importance of communication skills among internal auditors. Speaking specifically about writing skills, the authors explain that it is essential for companies hiring auditors to require a writing sample from candidates. The authors list among the benefits of this practice “the ability to identify students with good communication skills should reduce the need for costly in-house training” (p. 38).

Undoubtedly, communication skills play an important role across a variety of employment fields. To undervalue the importance of communication skills runs counter to multiple studies and general testimonies of individuals across disciplines. While some employers may value the importance of some general job skills more than others, communication skills are essential regardless of one’s field.

### **Communication Education Best Practices**

As the above literature demonstrates, communication skills are valuable across all career fields. While this might be a universally-shared sentiment, it does not address the question of how best to teach communication skills. While there certainly is no single best way for students to learn the communication skills valued by potential employers, a number of helpful guides exist that correspond to speech and debate activities.

Materese, Bach, and Engleberg (2003) explore several learning outcomes deemed integral to an effective background in communication by various organizations. The authors note that, according to the Maryland Communication Association, effective instruction in communication should include (1) a demonstration of the understanding of

the communication process; (2) the selection, effective use, and adaptation to different forms of verbal and nonverbal communication; (3) the generation and organization of the content of appropriate messages; (4) the ability to analyze and adapt to a variety of audiences and communication contexts; (5) the competent and confident expression of messages; (6) the ability to interpret and appropriately respond to verbal and nonverbal messages; (7) the ability to analyze and evaluate the content and delivery of verbal and nonverbal messages; and (8) the ability to demonstrate ethical communication principles and accept responsibility for the consequences of communication.

First, the authors claim that effective communication education will provide students with the ability to demonstrate an understanding of the communication process. While forensics does not provide direct instruction focused on this specific learning outcome, through participation in forensics, students become engaged in the communication process. The activity requires students to craft a message, deliver it to an audience, and determine the effectiveness of the message based on the feedback received. Second, forensics activities also help participants select, effectively use, and adapt to different forms of verbal and nonverbal communication.

Third, the authors discuss the need to generate and organize the content of appropriate messages. Each of the events in forensics competition requires at least minimal original content from the competitor. Students participating in debate events must develop original debate arguments to use at tournaments. Those individuals participating in the public speaking or limited preparation speaking events must develop entirely original speeches for competition. These speeches must be well-organized and the student's original work. Even those competitors participating in the interpretation



events must write introductions to help the audience understand the purpose and context of the original work being performed. Because forensics helps participants to generate organized, appropriate messages, the activity meets the authors' third principle, and can therefore be considered an effective form of communication education.

The authors also state that effective communication education teaches students to analyze and adapt to a variety of audiences and communication contexts. Miller (2005) notes the difficulties associated with participating in forensics in varying regions. The author notes that different styles, norms, and judge expectations force different approaches as a participant competes and coaches coach in different regions. In essence, the forensics participant must adapt to a variety of different regional audiences and contexts. Neer (1994) also states that student debate participants must be flexible in the presentation of their arguments; they must be able to adapt to a variety of audiences and contexts.

Buy, Murphy, and Kendall (1974) reinforce this idea of adapting within forensics. In their how-to textbook on debate, the authors note that "the most important factor in your success as a debater will be your ability to analyze the debate as it has progressed to the point at which you begin to speak in rebuttal" (p. 84). The authors claim that an effective debater must be able to analyze previous arguments and then take that information into account when preparing responses. The authors also explain:

You should adapt your contribution to what has already been said in the discussion. Keep constantly aware of what is being talked about and what has been said. You need to take what has been said, extend it by adding further

information, clarify it by using an appropriate example or explore it further by asking a pertinent and useful question. (p. 33)

Here, the authors stress the importance of building arguments on what has already transpired in a round of debate, and constantly adapting to the context of the round throughout the entire debate.

Materese et al. (2003) state that effective communication instruction will teach students how to express messages confidently and competently. Freeley and Steinberg (2005) note that the benefits of participation in forensics include developing courage, empowering personal expression, and encouraging effective speech composition and delivery. Rogers (2002) states that students participating in debate activities tend to be less likely to experience feelings of being overwhelmed or lacking self-confidence. These authors offer support that participation in forensics activities strengthens the ability to express messages with confidence and competence.

Materese et al. (2003) also state that effective communication instruction will provide students with the ability to interpret and appropriately respond to verbal and nonverbal messages. Turning again to Freeley and Steinberg's (2005) list of benefits of forensics participation, they note that forensics participation provides training in argumentation, develops critical listening skills, and encourages effective speech composition and delivery. As a result of forensics participation, students are better able to listen to, interpret, and respond to messages, thus fulfilling Materese et al.'s (2003) sixth tenant.

Materese et al. (2003) further note that effective communication instruction provides students with the ability to analyze and evaluate the content and delivery of

verbal and nonverbal messages. Regarding verbal messages, Freeley and Steinberg (2005) note that forensics participants develop critical listening and critical thinking skills. These skills can prove to be essential in evaluating the content of verbal messages. As for nonverbal delivery of messages, the authors state, “The importance of nonverbal communication is stressed by modern students of communication theory” (p. 294). Speaking specifically about forensics tournaments, Littlefield (2006) claims, “Paralanguage, proxemics, gestures and body language, all affect how a student succeeds in a competition” (p. 11). Forensics tournaments help participants evaluate verbal and nonverbal messages.

Finally, Materese et al. (2003) claim that effective communication education provides students with the ability to demonstrate ethical communication principles and accept responsibility for the consequences of communication. The issue of ethics in forensics has received substantial treatment from previous researchers. Redding (1963) notes:

Once an audience suspects a debater of malpractice, in handling his arguments or in dealing with his opponents, the debate is over...the practicing debater may be helped if he will ask himself, ‘Am I more concerned with gaining a strategic advantage, or with communicating an honest argument?’ (p. 276)

Freeley and Steinberg (2005) state, “students participating in forensics are obligated to adhere to high ethical standards” (p. 33). Bartanen (1994) notes:

Forensics competitors ought to behave humanely toward other competitors...forensics competitors ought to be the primary creators and discoverers of evidence and analysis...forensics contests should meet the highest

standards of fair play...education, rather than competition, ought to be the primary focus of forensics. (p. 165)

If, according to the author, these ideas are applied to the activity, forensics participants are then able to demonstrate ethical communication principles.

Best practices in communication must introduce communication students to a multitude of different skills, including the ability to craft, present, interpret, and respond to verbal and nonverbal messages in an ethical manner. As previous literature about the impact of participation in forensics demonstrates, the activity provides an ample forum for developing such skills in participants.

### **Critical Thinking Skills**

Most researchers would agree that the development of critical thinking skills is essential for high school and college students. Chaffee (1994) states, “Successful thinking enables us to solve the problems we are continually confronted with, to make intelligent decisions, and to achieve the goals that give our lives purpose and fulfillment” (p. 2).

Before one can fully comprehend the importance of critical thinking skills, one must understand what exactly is meant by the term “critical thinking.” Finn (2011) explains that “critical thinking is applied rationality. It is a way of thinking that is based on principles of rationality. Critical thinking has been conceptualized as a set of skills that people can learn and apply in their everyday or professional lives” (p. 69).

Determining exactly which characteristics comprise critical thinking proves a challenge for researchers. As Cotter and Tally (2009) note, “Developing additional consistency on the definition of ‘critical thinking’ and how to measure it is ultimately necessary for

researchers, educators, and students to fully understand this skill and how to improve it” (p. 11).

Despite the seeming lack of consistency in the definition of critical thinking, one can gain a general overview of the concept by exploring previous literature. Simpson and Courtney (2008) explain, “Many authors...support the view that critical thinking is more than a set of skills. Critical thinkers can provide justifications for their actions—they have the ability to think through, project, and anticipate the consequences of those actions” (p. 450). Seeking to pinpoint some of the key traits of critical thinkers, Carey and McCardle (2011) state, “Practicing self-awareness, tolerating ambiguity when faced with ethical dilemmas, and applying knowledge gained from multiple sources are all key components of critical thinking” (p. 358). Yang and Chou (2008) claim critical thinking involves judging in a reflective way what to do or what to believe.

Fero, O’Donnell, Zullo, Dabbs, Kitutu, Samosky, and Hoffman (2010) note that scholars often have difficulty narrowing down the traits that define critical thinking. In their recent article, the authors analyzed various reputable definitions for the term critical thinking, and from these multiple definitions, extracted what they believe to be the key elements of critical thinking. The authors claim that, based on the numerous definitions that exist for it, “critical thinking appears to have several key elements including an individual’s ability to seek and comprehend relevant information and an association with knowledge, reasoning, cognitive skills, identification, and exploration of alternative frames of reference” (p. 2183). Kaddoura (2010) notes that previous research has determined that critical thinking “is a form of purposeful, outcome-directed thinking based on a body of scientific knowledge derived from research and other sources of

evidence” and that the basic skills of critical thinking include the ability to “clarify questions, gather relevant data, reason to logical or valid conclusions, identify key assumptions, trace significant implications, or enter without distortion into alternative points of view” (p. 425).

Bensley, Crowe, Bernhardt, Buckner, and Allman (2010) define critical thinking as:

reflective thinking involved in the evaluation of evidence relevant to a claim so that a sound conclusion can be drawn from the evidence. Critical thinking requires both skills in using rules and criteria for making reasoned judgments and the dispositions to use those skills. (p. 91)

Halpern (2003) says critical thinking “is used to describe thinking that is purposeful, reasoned and goal directed—the kind of thinking involved in solving problems, formulating inferences, calculating likelihoods, and making decisions” (p. 6).

Perhaps the most comprehensive definition of critical thinking (and the definition that will be used within the context of this dissertation) comes from Wade and Tarvis (2008). The researchers state:

Critical thinking is the ability and willingness to assess claims and make objective judgments on the basis of well-supported reasons and evidence rather than emotion or anecdote. Critical thinkers are able to look for flaws in arguments and to resist claims that have no support. They realize that criticizing an argument is not the same as criticizing the person making it, and they are willing to engage in vigorous debate about the validity of an idea. Critical thinking, however, is not merely negative thinking. It includes the ability to be creative and constructive—

the ability to come up with alternative explanations for events, think of implications of research findings, and apply new knowledge to social and personal problems. (p. 7)

As these authors demonstrate through their definition, critical thinking is a complex skill with many different components.

Clearly, a multitude of definitions of the phrase “critical thinking” exists, but its importance is rarely debated. Few scholars would deny the necessity of learning critical thinking skills. Yang and Chou (2008) state, “Teaching students how to think critically is an essential issue in education. This is because critical thinking is vitally important in workplace decision making, leadership, clinical judgment, professional success, and effective participation in a democratic society” (p. 666). Law and Kaufhold (2009) explain the importance that future employers place on critical thinking skills. As the authors note “According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the fastest growing job markets in the United States will require critical thinking skills of all employees” (p. 29).

Finn (2011) states that critical thinking is a set of skills that can be learned, and that learning these skills can be extremely beneficial for any individual. Particularly, the author notes that individuals are often susceptible to various common errors in thinking, and learning how to think critically can help people avoid such errors. Among the most common errors, according to the author, is that individuals often develop judgments that do not necessarily reflect the best choice, or they result in perceptions that are not objective. He also claims that errors in thinking typically happen quickly or without the individual’s awareness, making them difficult to avoid. Further, the author posits that without critical thinking skills, individuals are more prone to be persuaded by personal

experience rather than objective evidence and are more likely to prefer evidence that supports one's own beliefs while ignoring evidence contrary to these beliefs. Finally, Finn argues that without employing critical thinking, individuals feel as though their memories are faultless and they oversimplify thinking, failing to look beyond the obvious and question multiple options.

In their 2009 study, Rugutt and Chemosit sought to identify what, if any, relationship existed between the teaching of critical thinking skills and students' motivation to learn. The authors proposed that students would be more likely to be motivated to learn if classroom activities highlighted the development of critical thinking skills. After collecting data from a number of university students, the authors' initial assumptions were confirmed. As they explain, "The results of this study...clearly show that student-to-student interactions, critical thinking skills, and student-faculty interaction are important variables in predicting motivation" (p. 25). They conclude by suggesting that, since critical thinking skills have been proven to be an important predictor of students' motivation in the classroom, more institutions of higher education should strive to emphasize the teaching of critical thinking skills. Similarly, Jones (2007) notes that "critical thinking also involves exploring contradictions, ambiguities, and ambivalence" (p. 92). This view supports the idea that critical thinking is essential in the ability to discern the best of multiple options, which every individual will have to do numerous times in their personal lives and careers.

Extending beyond just the ability to determine the best of multiple options, the author notes that critical thinking is essential to understanding the political process. As she states:



The skill of critical thinking requires an awareness of a political dimension and comprises an understanding of the nature and structures of power, essential in order to examine what has become established, why certain perspectives are current while others are marginalized, and what might be a better way. (p. 92)

Williams and Stockdale (2003) sought to determine the role critical thinking skills play in college course achievement. These researchers note that a number of students possess basic critical thinking skills, but that critical thinking skills exist on a spectrum among students. Students can be considered low critical thinkers or high critical thinkers. The authors compared low critical thinking students to high critical thinking students in an effort to evaluate the importance critical thinking has on student success at the collegiate level. The authors conclude, “Most students with high critical thinking skills will likely perform well in college courses, irrespective of how courses are organized and the level of assistance provided by instructors” (p. 222). Essentially, these authors believe that high critical thinking skills will equate to high levels of college course performance in almost every instance. Additionally, the authors note an added benefit, claiming that performing well in college courses can improve critical thinking skills. In their words:

High critical thinking contributes to success in a course, and success in a course contributes to higher critical thinking. Within this framework, high critical thinkers are more likely than low critical thinkers to achieve good grades in a course, and students achieving high grades are more likely than students achieving low grades to improve their critical thinking skills. (p. 200)

They conclude by saying, “Thus, low critical thinkers are at a disadvantage in two ways: they are more likely than high critical thinkers to achieve poor grades and less likely to improve their critical thinking” (p. 200).

Echoing the importance that critical thinking skills play in classroom achievement, McCollister and Saylor (2010) state that “infusing good critical thinking activities in the classroom...helps those students on the normal trajectory as they interrelate ideas within and among the disciplines leading to increased academic rigor and greater depth of understanding” (p. 42). The authors continue, “After determining their students’ readiness levels, personal interests, and styles of learning, teachers must create and deliver rigorous content, instruction, assessment, and product development through purposeful infusion of critical thinking” (p. 47). These researchers advocate the idea that incorporating classroom activities designed to increase critical thinking skills is of tremendous benefit to students.

Similarly, Angelo (1995) supports the notion that critical thinking skills are of significant value to students at all educational levels. Additionally the author contends, along with many others who have commented on the subject, that while difficult, teaching critical thinking skills to students is not impossible. He states that teachers simply need to bear in mind effective approaches to teaching critical thinking skills. As the author states, “Three teaching approaches can improve students’ critical thinking: student discussion, explicit emphasis on problem solving, and verbalization of metacognitive strategies” (p. 6).

Turning from judging the value of critical thinking skills only within an educational context, Pascarella (1997) states that “critical thinking skills are the

fundamental and enduring ingredients for good management” (p. 38). The author continues, stating that the critical thinking skills of finding critical issues in complex situations, finding the cause for what has gone wrong, making the best choice in the appropriate time frame, and identifying and responding to potential threats and opportunities “outlive the management fads; in fact, they are what makes any of them work” (p. 38). Regardless of the vocation, this author believes that any manager of any organization must possess a refined set of critical thinking skills.

Phillips and Burrell (2009) also contend that critical thinking skills are of immeasurable benefit to any individual. In their article discussing the necessity of training in critical thinking skills for law enforcement officers, the authors state:

This kind of in-depth questioning and analysis helps to ensure that the solution will actually solve the problem, not just be the best of mediocre options.

Engaging in this process also creates a mechanism of reassessment where, if the solution does meet a determined level of satisfaction, the decision-makers reopen the process and further research, or brainstorm, until the most effective outcome or decision is established. (p. 144)

These authors note the important role critical thinking plays in determining the best of multiple options.

Anton (2000) believes that critical thinking skills are essential in the development of productive, contributing members of society. The author posits that individuals must possess critical thinking skills in order to effectively have their voices heard and to enact change. As the author states, “In a democratic society, we all need these critical thinking skills to determine what kind of society we want to inhabit and who we want and need to

be within that society” (p. 283). Basically, if individuals want to determine the best course of action, the best person to lead, or the best decisions to make for the greatest good of all, then those individuals need to be able to employ critical thinking skills in the decision making process. Greengard (2009) shares this sentiment. His article claims, “Without critical thinking, we create trivia. We dismantle scientific models and replace them with trendy or wishful ones that are neither transferable nor testable” (p. 19).

Perhaps most interestingly, Jones (2007) offers a relatively unexplored concept of critical thinking which further highlights the importance of learning critical thinking skills. The author notes, “Critical thinking also involves an awareness of gaps and silences, the people who were not speaking, the things that were not said, and the evidence that is difficult to find” (p. 92). Obviously, this is not the traditional view of critical thinking, but it highlights important skills that critical thinking can help develop. According to Jones, critical thinking skills involve not only the ability to determine the worth of evidence that exists, but also to determine the importance of that which is not readily seen. Often, the absence of evidence, according to this author, can say a great deal, and critical thinking trains individuals to contemplate these absences.

### **Critical Thinking Skills in Forensics**

Previous forensics literature is replete with scholars who agree that forensics provides drastic acceleration in the development of critical thinking skills. In fact, as Freeley (2000) points out, the development of critical thinking skills was alluded to in the initial statement of principles of the American Forensic Association, one of the largest forensics organizations in existence. As the author notes, some of the principles state, “We believe that forensic activity should create opportunities for intensive investigation

of significant contemporary problems” and “We believe that forensic activity should promote the use of logical reasoning and the best available evidence in dealing with these problems” (p. 32). Both of these statements indicate the development of critical thinking skills among students participating in forensics through the AFA.

Williams et al. (2001) conducted a survey of collegiate debaters to ascertain participants’ perceptions of the benefits of being involved in college debate. Respondents overwhelmingly noted that the development of analytical and critical thinking skills was the second most important benefit of debate participation, just behind the development of communication skills. These findings led the authors to state, “The long-held claim that debate fosters the development of analytical skills and critical thinking is shared by today’s debaters” (p. 204). The researchers continue, noting that “the development of critical thinking skills presents a strong, agreed upon benefit that can be understood by current students, prospective students, and other publics” (p. 205). The authors conclude:

The development of critical thinking skills should be the primary benefit proposed in efforts to reach out to new students and publics. This has long been perceived as a benefit of participation by program directors, instructors, coaches, and students alike. (p. 204)

Similarly, Quenette et al. (2007) surveyed student participants in the activity of forensics to gauge participants’ perceived advantages to collegiate forensics individual events. Of the 273 students who responded to the study, 133 stated that participation in forensics enhances academic achievement. As the authors explain, academic achievement “was in the form of enhanced research skills, better critical and analytical

thinking, and a greater knowledge of the world and literature” (p. 15). These respondents clearly felt as though their forensics participation experience led to an increase in critical thinking skills. As Parson and Harris (2000) explain, “Historically, forensic events, like the classical rhetorical exercises, focused on developing skills in critical thinking, constructing and presenting effective arguments” (p. 62).

Diers (2005) also asserts that forensics can play an important role in developing many of the skills associated with effective critical thinking. Discussing Lincoln Douglas style debate, prominent in both high school and collegiate level competition, the author states, “The event uses a stock issues model for evaluating the substance of the arguments presented in the round in combination with a critical evaluation of the style with which the arguments are developed and delivered” (p. 53). This author poses the idea that an effective round of Lincoln Douglas debate is one which sees both participants employing effective critical thinking skills. Buys, Murphy, and Kendall (1974) also state that a debater must follow the steps of critical thinking in order to adequately prepare to debate an opponent.

Bartanen (1994), author of one of the few textbooks dedicated entirely to the activity of forensics, cites the development of critical thinking skills as one of the educational benefits for forensics participants. As the author notes, forensics training is an important method “for learning critical thinking skills and reasoning” (p. 4). Elsewhere in the book, the author notes that training in forensics individual events “ought to teach sound analysis and reasoning skills” (p. 76). He continues, saying, “Debate skills are necessary ingredients to improving critical thinking abilities. Proponents of this

view believe debate is a way of improving students' abilities at identifying and critiquing arguments" (p. 99).

Bartanen's textbook is hardly the only source of evidence linking forensics activities to the development of critical thinking skills. Freeley and Steinberg (2005) note:

Competency in critical thinking is a prerequisite to participating effectively in human affairs, pursuing higher education, and succeeding in the highly competitive world of business and the professions. Since classical times, debate has been one of the best methods of learning and applying the principles of critical thinking. (p. 2).

Elsewhere in the book, the authors put it more bluntly, stating quite simply that "debate develops proficiency in critical thinking" (p. 24). They go on to note, "Debaters learn to apply the principles of critical thinking not only to problems that emerge in the relative comfort of research or a briefing session but also to problems that arise in the heat of debate" (p. 24).

Researchers have devoted entire studies to determining the effect that forensics participation has on critical thinking skills. A decade and a half ago, Allen, Berkowitz, and Loudon (1995) sought to evaluate the impact of forensics participation on the development of participants' critical thinking skills. To achieve this goal, the researchers compared the development of critical thinking skills among forensics participants to the skills demonstrated by individuals in an introductory public speaking course. The authors found a strong correlation between forensics participation and a large gain in critical thinking skills, while the development of critical thinking skills among

individuals in basic communication courses with no forensics experience was not nearly as significant.

Littlefield (2001) compares the responses of both high school debaters as well as collegiate-level debaters to assess what participants believed were the benefits of participation in forensics. The author notes that high school students did not claim the development of critical thinking/analytical skills as a benefit nearly as often as the collegiate competitors, but both groups of students recognized the development of critical thinking skills as a product of forensics participation. Explaining the discrepancy in the importance assigned to these skills, the author states:

At the collegiate level, more advanced levels of argumentation result in debaters challenging the theoretical premises upon which the debate activity is based. The reliance on analytical arguments over fact-based claims also could contribute to the higher rank for critical/analytical thinking among collegiate debaters. (p. 92).

Regardless of why the rankings in importance are different between high school and collegiate debaters, both groups recognized that the development of critical thinking skills is an important product of forensics participation.

### **Leadership Skills**

Much has been written about the relationship between forensics participation and the development of leadership skills among participants. Scholars note that participation in speech and debate activities can foster skills in critical thinking and communication, which are skills deemed crucial among leaders in multiple fields (Lefton & Buzzotta, 2004). In fact, speaking about the National Forensic League, Radabaugh (1960) states,



“The purpose of the League is to assist students to prepare for leadership through the ability to command a following by the effective presentation of ideas,” (p. 47).

Dobkin (1958) also spoke of the positive relationship between forensics participation and the development of leadership skills. Speaking of the characteristics one develops through forensics, the author notes:

The thoughtful inquiry of good discussion, the research in depth to determine facts, the tests of evidence, the ability to detect fallacious reasoning, the skill in advocacy are all depended upon to produce the forensic director’s share of educated and learned citizens. (p. 204)

Essentially, the author makes the claim that participation in forensics can help the director of forensics prepare new generations of citizens to be leaders in their communities.

Bartanen (1998) notes that often the value of forensics programs in developing leaders is overlooked. The author claims that it is not uncommon for forensics programs to be considered expendable by educational administrators, but that they provide exceptional laboratories for students to learn crucial leadership skills. As the author states “as they foster leadership skills of reflection, connectedness, and advocacy, forensics programs are valuable models of learner-centered pedagogy, and underutilized resources for diversity education on the liberal arts campus” (p. 1).

Briscoe (2009) advocates leadership development through forensics participation as well. The author claims that the skills one employs in forensics competition can help students to become civic-minded leaders in their various communities. As the author states:

The course of study, alongside co-curricular competition, promotes civic education and enhances the standard curriculum by helping students explore myriad topics from multiple angles and find the truth in each, fostering civic participation, advocating civic engagement, promoting authentic discussions on issues of real importance, and emphasizing the principles that are essential to a liberal democracy. (p. 49)

Briscoe goes on to state, “Citizens in a democratic society are often called upon to persuade others of the best course of action, whether as political leaders, citizens engaged in discussions with peers in informal settings, or in a typical business setting” (p. 47).

Colbert and Biggers (1985) cite a 1960 study of political leaders including members of Congress, senators, and Supreme Court justices. Ninety percent of respondents called their high school or collegiate debate experiences “very helpful” or “invaluable” in developing their careers as leaders.

The promotion of leadership skills among participants is also a goal of the American Forensic Association, one of the primary forensics organizations at the collegiate level. The first line of the American Forensic Association’s credo states, “Our principle is the power of individuals to participate with others in shaping their world” (American Forensic Association Website, 2012).

As has been previously demonstrated, forensics serves as a catalyst for the development of critical thinking skills. Parcher (1998) claims:

Many authors note that leadership in a changing world requires students to learn to critically analyze and evaluate ideas. Besides being an obvious and important

goal of any educational institution, forensics directors have rated developing critical thinking ability as the highest educational goal of the activity. (p. 2)

As the author explains, today's leaders need strong skills in critical thinking, and forensics provides an avenue for the development of those skills.

Billman (2008) agrees with the notion that forensics develops leadership skills in participants. She states, "Compared to the general population, former forensic students are disproportionately likely to become leaders" (p. 98). The author elaborates, taking note of the skills typically found in leaders that can develop through forensics participation. As the author states:

Competitive speech and debate gives students the opportunity to develop skills that are especially helpful to leaders such as listening skills, tact, and clarity. Additionally, forensics tends to increase students' self-confidence, potentially rendering them more comfortable in a leadership role. These attributes give forensic students an advantage in assuming leadership roles. (p.98)

Finally, the author concludes the argument by noting high profile leadership positions that are currently occupied or have been previously occupied by former forensics competitors. She states, "Not surprisingly, numerous strong leaders have had forensic training including several members of Congress, Presidents, and even leaders in other fields such as entertainment or social activism" (p. 98).

### **Summary**

Previous literature illustrates the importance of competition; the development of communication skills; the development of critical thinking skills; and the development of leadership skills. Literature has also demonstrated that participation in forensics is a

viable avenue for attaining these various qualities. Previous literature demonstrates a correlation between participation in forensics and the development of communication skills, critical thinking skills, and leadership skills among current student participants in speech and debate activities.

## **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents a statement of the problem, as well as the research questions guiding this study. The chapter also includes a discussion of the methods employed in order to determine the reliability of the survey instrument and the methodology utilized in the data collection and analysis. The purpose of this study is to identify the areas of forensics participation that former competitors feel are most beneficial; the extent to which those outcomes were emphasized in their forensics experience; and whether any agreement exists between former competitors and coaches/directors of forensics about which forensics skills and outcomes are most important for student participants to learn. This task was accomplished by surveying two groups: (1) individuals who participated in forensics programs while in college, and (2) current coaches/directors of forensics programs. An analysis of the responses from research participants will form the basis of this study.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The literature reviewed for this study illustrates a gap in existing forensics research. Specifically, prior research has not examined which commonly acknowledged outcomes of forensics participation former competitors feel are most beneficial to them in their current jobs and the extent to which former competitors feel those outcomes were emphasized in their forensics program. Additionally, a review of previous literature did not reveal any attempt to evaluate the level of agreement, if any, between former competitors and their coaches/directors of forensics about which of these outcomes are most valuable and thus, most important for forensics participants to learn.

College and university administrators face a precarious economic reality, one that forces them to make difficult decisions about which programs to maintain on their campuses and which ones are expendable. An unfortunate reality is that forensics programs are often the recipients of these cuts (Kuyper, 2011). When university leaders have little information at their disposal to determine the validity of a forensics program, it becomes more and more difficult to justify its existence on campus (Billings, 2011). University policy makers have been charged with maintaining academic excellence while at the same time steering the college or university away from economic ruin. Insufficient data on any campus entity can lead to ill-informed decisions. Conversely, evidence demonstrating the utility of forensics outcomes in a former participant's career could help college and university officials make better-informed decisions about collegiate forensics programs on their own campuses.

Additionally, this study can fill a void that currently exists among previous forensics literature. No previous study has sought to determine if any agreement exists between a team's coaching staff and former forensics participants about which outcomes are most important in former participants' current jobs. Should this study illustrate inconsistency between those outcomes that coaches/directors of forensics feel are most important versus those that former participants say they actually use most frequently, it could help a coaching staff determine the areas that might need greater attention within their own programs.

### **Research Questions**

In order to determine the forensics outcomes that former competitors feel are most valuable in their current jobs; those they felt were highlighted most in their forensics

programs; and the degree of agreement between former competitors and their coaches/directors of forensics about the importance of those outcomes, the following research questions were posed:

Research Question 1: To what extent do former forensics program participants use key forensics speech, debate, and public speaking outcomes as part of their current job?

Research Question 2: To what extent do former forensics program participants believe key forensics outcomes were emphasized in their college forensics program?

Research Question 3: Do directors of forensics/coaches agree that there are important forensics outcomes that should be taught?

Research Question 4: If so, which outcomes are rated high most consistently?

### **Participants**

Because this study seeks information from former forensics competitors, the researcher identified former competitors who have been out of the activity of collegiate forensics for a minimum of two years. Coaches/directors of forensics at colleges and universities nationwide aided the researcher by distributing surveys to their alumni. Additionally, former participants who were present at the 2012 American Forensic Association and National Forensic Association national tournaments and who fit the desired criteria for participants were given the opportunity to complete the surveys. Because this study seeks to determine how regularly former competitors use skills and outcomes gained through forensics participation in their current careers, only the responses from individuals who have not competed in the activity for a minimum of two years were included in the data analysis. It was the intent of the researcher that by placing this stipulation on the respondents, the individuals participating in the study are

engaged in some form of full-time occupation. Demographic information requested on the survey assisted the researcher in identifying the current field in which respondents work, the length of time that has passed since they last competed in collegiate forensics, the categories in which they competed, and their level of experience. From this information, the researcher was able to draw relationships between the skills former debate competitors feel are most important versus former individual events competitors, as well as whether the length of time since an individual last competed makes a difference.

Additionally, since the researcher was interested in which skills or outcomes coaches/directors of forensics believe are most valuable for students to learn, the researcher sought the input of individuals serving as members of a forensics team's coaching staff at other colleges and universities. Thus, those individuals received a separate survey tailored to forensics coaches and directors of forensics programs.

## **Measures**

The researcher designed a survey to collect data from the former participants and a separate survey for the coaches/directors of forensics. The content for both survey instruments was developed by cross applying the results of three of the most recent and widely-circulated studies about the benefits of forensics participation (Littlefield, 2001; Quenette et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2001). These previous studies identified comprehensive lists of the most commonly-associated benefits of forensics participation. After examining the recognized benefits from these previous studies, the researcher added the most prevalent benefits to the survey instruments for this current study. The researcher also reviewed the stated purposes in documents published by the National



Forensic Association and the American Forensic Association. If, after reviewing these documents, additional intended outcomes of forensics participation emerged, they were added to the content of the survey. Ultimately, this process resulted in the creation of a 20-item list of outcomes stemming from participation in forensics.

The survey (Appendix A) distributed to former participants included two columns. Respondents were instructed to indicate the extent to which they use each of the outcomes in their current job or position in the left column. A Likert scale was utilized to determine how often every month each of the 20 outcomes are used. The scale ranged from zero to 30 times per month.

In the right column, respondents were asked to identify the extent to which each outcome was emphasized in their college forensics program. A Likert scale was developed for responses ranging from one to five. A response of one indicates that the outcome was not emphasized at any time in the respondent's forensics program; a response of five indicates that the outcome was integrated into all aspects of the program.

The second part of the survey sought demographic information from the respondents. First, respondents were asked to identify the job classification that best describes their current occupation. These classifications were derived from the most current version of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics Standard Occupational Classification System. Also, respondents were asked to indicate how many years had passed since they last competed in collegiate forensics, their year of graduation from college, their total number of semesters competing in collegiate forensics, whether they competed in high school, and if so, how long, and whether they competed in debate and/or individual events while in college.

Finally, the last section of the survey asked respondents to identify the five outcomes they believed to be the most important for students to experience in forensics. Not only were respondents asked to identify the five they felt are the most important, but they were asked to rank their order of importance.

The survey (Appendix B) distributed to coaches/directors of forensics was less complex. Coaches/directors of forensics were provided with a list of the same 20 outcomes identified on the former students' survey. Coaches/directors of forensics were asked to identify and rank the top five most important outcomes for students to experience while participating in forensics. Next, they were asked to indicate the size of their team, the number of years they had been coaching, whether or not their team participates in individual events and/or debate, and whether or not they participated in forensics as a college student themselves.

### **Pilot Study**

Since these survey instruments had not been previously used in any studies, the researcher sought to measure the reliability of the instrument via a test-retest protocol. To gauge the reliability of the instruments, the researcher conducted a pilot study with students from a large, midwestern forensics program and its coaching staff. These individuals were selected through convenience sampling. Student respondents were not the exact same demographic being sought for the actual study since they had not yet graduated college and were still competing in forensics. The most significant limitation of using this sample for the pilot survey is that the study seeks to gauge the utility of forensics skills in the current professions of former participants. Using individuals who were still students for the pilot study resulted in responses from individuals who did not

yet have full time jobs. To account for this fact, the researcher instructed respondents to complete the survey based on how often they use certain skills or outcomes in their current classes rather than a current job. Despite this difference in pilot study participants and actual survey respondents, their responses were able to help the researcher determine whether all of the survey items were easily understood by someone with forensics experience, and whether any of the survey items needed to be modified for clarity or reliability.

An additional limitation is found in the number of responses for both pilot surveys. For the former participants' pilot survey, the researcher collected responses from 29 individuals. Ten coaches responded to the coaches/director of forensics survey. Despite the small response size, the pilot study indicated whether or not significant flaws existed in the survey instruments.

For both the student version of the survey and the coaching staff version, the pilot study participants were given the survey to complete, and were asked by the researcher to write a number at the top of the survey that they would remember, but that could not be used by anyone to determine the respondents' identities. Seven days later, the researcher asked the same population to fill out the exact same survey and put the same identification number at the top of the second survey as well. The researcher then used these numbers to determine which surveys were completed by the same individuals. By comparing the first set of surveys with the second set completed a week later, the researcher was able to estimate the survey instrument's reliability, as well as whether or not the surveys were comprehensible.

To estimate the survey’s reliability, two measures were employed: (1) Pre-test exact response agreement (the degree to which respondents gave the exact same response agreement between the pre-test and retest), and (2) Cohens’ Kappa (Viera & Garrett, 2005). Table 1 illustrates the test-re-test statistics for the former participants’ survey. Here students indicated the forensics outcomes they use most frequently in their current positions. Of the 29 responses to the survey, only 28 were usable.

Table 1

*Former Participant Survey “Current Use of Forensics Outcomes” Test-retest Data*

Survey Forensics Topic	N	Pre-Post Test Exact Agreement Percentage	Kappa
(A) Enhanced Communication Skills	28	72%	.46
(B) Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills	28	62%	.45
(C) Increased Opportunities to Meet New People	27	48%	.42
(D) Enhanced Research Skills	28	66%	.54
(E) Increased Knowledge/Education	28	48%	.21
(F) Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence	28	65%	.52
(G) Enhanced Argumentation Skills	28	62%	.60
(H) Enhanced Worldview	28	59%	.47
(I) Enhanced Knowledge of Current Events	26	41%	.39
(J) Enhanced Organizational Skills	28	59%	.52
(K) Enhanced Ability to Think Fast	28	66%	.50
(L) Increased Exposure to Literature	28	59%	.60
(M) Increased Professional Networking Opportunities	27	55%	.43
(N) Enhanced Teamwork Skills	28	52%	.41
(O) Enhanced Leadership Skills	28	55%	.46
(P) Enhanced Listening Skills	28	62%	.48
(Q) Enhanced Textual Analysis Skills	28	69%	.65
(R) Increased Exposure to Competition	28	59%	.59
(S) Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct	28	62%	.28
(T) Enhanced Audience Analysis Skills	28	52%	.48
(U) Enhanced Understanding of Rhetorical Theory	28	62%	.52

The first column of Table 1 lists the skills appearing on the survey. The second column (N) indicates the number of respondents for each item. The third column demonstrates the percentage of respondents who placed the exact same degree of importance on each item on both the pre-test and the post-test. Finally, the fourth column illustrates the Kappa value of the pre-test and the post-test.

A Kappa value of .21 or higher represents at least a fair degree of agreement between a pre-test and post-test (Viera & Garrett, 2005). The lowest Kappa value for any of the survey items on the current use pre and post-test was .21. Therefore, one can conclude that the survey instrument is generally reliable and can be expected to yield consistent results over repeated administrations.

While all items displayed some degree of agreement, three items were at the lower end of the agreement spectrum. This result would indicate that these items are weaker in reliability than desired and thus might need better definition or to be eliminated entirely. However, as these items have been identified in previous studies as common outcomes of forensics participation, and because they did show some level of agreement between the pre-test and post-test, the researcher opted to keep them on the actual survey.

Similarly, students noted the emphasis their forensics program placed on each of the common outcomes. Table 2 displays those results.

Table 2

*Former Participant Survey “Emphasis in Your Program” Test-retest Data*

Forensics Topic	N	Pre-Post Test	
		Exact Agreement Percentage	Kappa
(A) Enhanced Communication Skills	29	82%	.34
(B) Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills	29	62%	.39
(C) Increased Opportunities to Meet New People	29	62%	.38
(D) Enhanced Research Skills	29	82%	.66
(E) Increased Knowledge/Education	29	68%	.51
(F) Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence	29	79%	.61
(G) Enhanced Argumentation Skills	29	65%	.48
(H) Enhanced Worldview	29	62%	.48
(I) Enhanced Knowledge of Current Events	29	68%	.55
(J) Enhanced Organizational Skills	29	51%	.39
(K) Enhanced Ability to Think Fast	29	68%	.60
(L) Increased Exposure to Literature	29	68%	.58
(M) Increased Professional Networking Opportunities	29	41%	.24
(N) Enhanced Teamwork Skills	29	65%	.53
(O) Enhanced Leadership Skills	29	68%	.60
(P) Enhanced Listening Skills	29	75%	.57
(Q) Enhanced Textual Analysis Skills	29	58%	.47
(R) Increased Exposure to Competition	29	89%	.28
(S) Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct	29	89%	.66
(T) Enhanced Audience Analysis Skills	29	79%	.62
(U) Enhanced Understanding of Rhetorical Theory	29	65%	.65

Similar to Table 1, the first column in Table 2 lists the common forensics outcomes appearing on the survey, the second column lists the number of students responding to that item, and the third column illustrates the percentage of students who indicated the same level of emphasis within their forensics program between the pre-test and the post-test. The last column displays the Kappa value between the pre-test and post-test. Again, all items displayed a Kappa value above the .21 threshold of agreement.

Therefore, one can conclude that the survey instrument is generally reliable in determining which forensics outcomes are most heavily emphasized in the programs of former participants.

Students participating in the pilot survey also ranked the top five outcomes they considered the most important for forensics students to experience. Table 3 displays the results of this area of the pilot study.

Table 3

*Test-retest Statistics for Student Survey “Ranking of Top Five Outcomes”*

Top Five Outcomes	N	Pre-Post Test Exact Agreement Percentage	Kappa
Rank 1	29	62%	.64
Rank 2	29	31%	.27
Rank 3	29	13%	-.05
Rank 4	29	17%	.10
Rank 5	29	24%	.06

The first column indicates the rank each student could give to the outcomes appearing on the survey. The second column displays the number of responses. The third column indicates the percentage of students who ranked each outcome exactly the same on the pre-test and the post-test. The last column indicates the Kappa value between the pre-test and post-test. Sixty-two percent of respondents had the same item in the top ranked spot on both the pre-test and post test. This item also displayed a strong Kappa value between the two tests. The Kappa values for the other four rankings were not as strong between the pre-test and the post-test. Specifically, ranks 3, 4, and 5 all produced Kappa values of either less than chance agreement or slight agreement. Thus, those ranks were not judged as reliable as the first and second ranks.

The pilot test administered to the coaches asked them to rank the forensics outcomes they feel are most important for students to experience. The results are displayed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Test-retest Statistics for Coaches Survey “Ranking of Top Five Outcomes”*

Top Five Outcomes	N	Pre-Post Test Exact Agreement Percentage	Kappa
Rank 1	10	90%	.76
Rank 2	10	90%	.83
Rank 3	10	70%	.67
Rank 4	10	50%	.51
Rank 5	10	80%	.70

The first column indicates the rank each coach could give to the outcomes appearing on the survey, the second column displays the number of respondents, and the third column indicates the percentage of coaches who ranked each outcome exactly the same on the pre-test and the post-test. The last column indicates the Kappa value of the pre-test and post-test. All five rankings had significant Kappa values between the pre-test and the post-test, indicating high reliability of this survey instrument.

The number of respondents for both surveys was small. However, given the limited number of responses and the strength of agreement in Kappa values, it can be concluded that the survey instruments for this study demonstrate a good degree of reliability. Additionally, given that these outcomes appear in several recent studies on forensics outcomes as well as the stated purposes of the largest collegiate forensics organizations, the items prove relevant to this study.



The researcher removed one response item from the pilot survey, which therefore did not appear in the actual survey the researcher used to gather data for this study. After much discussion with the dissertation committee, the researcher agreed that the original item (C), “Increased Opportunities to Meet New People” was similar to the original item (M), “Increased Professional Networking Opportunities.” Given the lack of distinction between the two, and the agreement between the committee and the researcher that the original item (C) did not yield significant scholarly output, the researcher eliminated it from the final surveys. This represented the only noteworthy change between the pilot surveys and the final surveys.

Overall, based on the results of the pilot study, the survey was judged as a reliable instrument to measure the forensics skills former competitors use in their current jobs, the emphasis in their programs, and the skills which coaches/directors of forensics deem important. While the Kappa value of a small number of items was lower than desired, these values still proved that agreement existed between the pre-test and post-test on the survey instruments.

### **Research Methodology**

Data collection involved the distribution of surveys to forensics alumni who had not been involved in the activity for at least two years. The researcher worked with current coaches and forensics directors to identify potential research participants. The survey contained a list of benefits derived by cross applying the results from three of the most recent and prevalent studies on the benefits of forensics participation and an examination of the stated purposes of the two major collegiate forensics organizations, the National Forensic Association and the American Forensic Association. Participants

receiving this survey were asked to identify the recognized forensics benefits that they used most frequently in their current careers, how much those benefits were emphasized within their forensics program, and finally, to rank the top five benefits. Participants also received a cover letter (Appendix C) explaining the study, and informing them that by completing the survey, they were giving their consent for their anonymous responses to be included in the data analysis.

A second survey was distributed to current forensics coaches and directors of forensics. This survey contained the same list of benefits found on the former participant survey, and asked the coaches/directors of forensics to rank the top five skills they believed to be the most important in forensics. All participants received a cover letter (Appendix D) briefly explaining the study, and were informed that by participating in the survey, they were consenting to allowing their responses to be used in any conclusions drawn from the study. The letter also informed the participants that data collection was anonymous. The surveys and cover letters have been approved by Western Kentucky University's Human Subjects Review Board (IRB Application # 311824-1) (Appendix E).

### **Limitations**

Several limitations presented themselves through utilizing this method of data collection. First, the researcher relied primarily on other individuals to distribute the survey. Thus, it is impossible to estimate the exact number of surveys distributed nationally and therefore, one cannot determine an accurate response rate. The surveys were distributed primarily through collegiate forensics teams' alumni email lists. However, the researcher has no indication of how complete those lists are. It is unknown

whether each of these email lists comprise a complete list of all potential participants, or whether there are significant gaps and large numbers of former participants for which the current coach or director of forensics had no contact information.

Similarly, most alumni email lists require members to opt-in, meaning that they had to take some form of initiative to join and stay involved with their former programs. It is possible that the majority of alumni email lists are comprised only of those individuals who chose to stay at least marginally involved with the activity by keeping abreast of forensics activities through these email lists. Individuals who felt no affinity toward their former program or the activity in general may not be represented in these responses, as the researcher had no way to locate them.

Also, while many coaches/directors of forensics expressed either in person or over email their willingness to distribute the surveys, it is unknown how many actually did. Nowhere on the survey were respondents asked to identify their alma mater, and therefore, the researcher was unable to determine whether each institution actually gave the survey to its alumni. It is possible that only a handful of institutions' forensics alumni received the survey, and, as a result, the responses may not reflect as many programs as one would hope.

## **Summary**

Chapter 3 has presented the research methodology used to analyze the responses and determine what, if any, forensics outcomes former participants utilize in their current occupations, the emphasis former participants feel each of their forensics programs placed on teaching or engaging students with each of these outcomes, and whether

coaches/directors of forensics agree with former participants on the outcomes needing to be emphasized in forensics training.

This chapter commenced with a discussion of the problem and the need for this research project. This research project could help bolster the reputation and necessity of forensics programs on college and university campuses nationwide. Understanding the benefits that forensics participation can provide could help higher education administrators determine the worth of forensics programs on their own campuses. Additionally, this study could assist coaches/directors of forensics by exposing them to the outcomes students most utilize in their occupations. If a particular forensics program is not emphasizing the outcomes most former participants find essential in their current careers, coaches and directors of forensics may wish to reconsider the focus of their programs to best benefit their students.

Next, the chapter described the research questions used to guide this study, as well as the participants surveyed. The researcher was only interested in responses from those individuals who had not competed in collegiate forensics for at least two years. It was the hope of the researcher that this limitation would help ensure that respondents are currently involved in some type of occupation, and that they would be able to determine which forensics outcomes proved useful in the day-to-day experiences they have within their jobs or careers.

Research measures were discussed. The researcher described the surveys that respondents would complete. The researcher developed these surveys by cross applying the results of several recent forensics studies which identified common forensics

outcomes. The researcher also consulted the statements of purpose of major forensics organizations.

In order to test the reliability and clarity of the measures, the researcher distributed a pilot survey to current coaches and forensics students. Using a test/re-test method, the researcher was able to determine whether or not the surveys were reliable. A discussion of the findings of this pilot study appeared in Chapter 3.

The surveys' validity is reinforced by the fact that all forensics outcomes on the survey stemmed from a compilation of previous studies seeking to identify the benefits of forensics participation. Additionally, the researcher consulted the stated purposes of the major collegiate forensics associations in compiling the list of outcomes appearing on the surveys used in this study.

The research methodology the researcher would use in gathering data was described. This section also presented information about the study's approval by Western Kentucky University's Human Subjects Review Board.

Finally, Chapter 3 presented some potential limitations, primarily concerning the methods used to gather data. While it is difficult to determine whether or not these assumed limitations actually exist, they are presented at the end of the chapter.

## **CHAPTER IV: RESULTS**

### **Introduction**

This study addressed the level of utility of key forensics outcomes by former competitors in their current occupations, as well as the former participants' perceived focus of their forensics programs on providing these outcomes. Additionally, the study sought to determine whether agreement existed between coaches/directors of forensics and students about which outcomes deserve the most attention in forensics training. Respondents completed two studies: individuals who fell into the former participant category provided answers relating to how often they employed forensics outcomes in their current fields and the degree of emphasis placed on those outcomes in their forensics programs. Coaches/directors of forensics completed a separate survey to determine which outcomes and skills they felt were most important for students to learn.

The study is significant because while previous research (Littlefield, 2001; Quenette et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2001) has determined that benefits result from participation in forensics activities, such studies have asked current participants to determine the benefits they presently derive from regular forensics participation and do not seek the input of former competitors concerning how beneficial these outcomes are in their current professions. Additionally, previous work does not address the level of consensus between former participants and coaches/directors of forensics about which skills students most need to learn. Thus, the forensics community has little scholarly research to consult about which skills are most beneficial to the greatest number of students and should therefore be emphasized in forensics programs.

Research Question 1 was designed to determine how frequently former forensics participants employ previously identified key forensics outcomes in their current occupations:

Research Question 1: To what extent do former forensics program participants use key forensics speech, debate, and public speaking outcomes as part of their current jobs?

Previous studies have detailed a number of benefits deriving from forensics participation from the perspective of current competitors. This research question seeks to determine how prevalent these benefits are in the daily working lives of former participants.

Research Question 2 seeks to determine the level of emphasis forensics programs place on these previously identified key forensics outcomes:

Research Question 2: To what extent do former forensics program participants believe key forensics outcomes were emphasized in their college forensics program?

Determining whether benefits exist from participation in forensics activities has already been accomplished by several previous studies. This study seeks to illustrate how useful these skills/outcomes are within the daily working lives of former forensics participants and the degree of emphasis placed on these skills by forensics programs.

Research Question 3 shifts the focus away from the perspective of former forensics participants and turns it toward the coaches and directors of the activity. This question seeks to ascertain whether or not forensics coaches/directors of forensics agree that important outcomes exist in the activity:

Research Question 3: Do directors of forensics/coaches agree that there are important forensics outcomes that should be taught?

By extension, Research Question 4 seeks to identify which outcomes coaches/directors of forensics feel students most need to comprehend:

Research Question 4: If so, which outcomes are rated high most consistently?

**Demographics of Survey Participants—Former Participant Survey**

Table 5 illustrates the gender breakdown and percentage of respondents to the former participant survey. One hundred twenty-one former competitors filled out the former participant survey.

Table 5

*Study Demographics: Gender of Former Participants*

Gender	N	Percentage
Male	68	57.14%
Female	51	42.86%
No Response	2	1.65%
Total	121	100.00%

Table 6 displays the age range and percentage for each range of respondents to the former participants survey.

Table 6

*Study Demographics: Age Range of Former Participants*

Age Range	N	Percentage
22-24	18	14.87%
25-27	26	21.48%
28-30	27	22.31%
31-33	22	18.18%
34-36	9	7.43%
37-39	8	6.61%
40-42	6	4.95%
43-53	3	2.47%



No Response	2	1.65%
Total	121	100.00%

The youngest respondents to the former participant survey were 22 years old. The oldest respondent was 53 years old. Two respondents did not provide their current age, but among the 119 that did respond to this portion of the survey, the average age was 30 years old.

Table 7 illustrates the employment areas of respondents to the former participant survey.

Table 7

*Study Demographics: Current Occupation of Former Participants*

Job Area	N	Percent
Management	11	9.09%
Business and Financial Operations	11	9.09%
Computer and Mathematics	2	1.65%
Life, Physical, and Social Science	5	4.13%
Community and Social Service	7	5.79%
Legal	8	6.61%
Education, Training and Library	51	42.15%
Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media	17	14.05%
Healthcare Practitioners and Technical	2	1.65%
Healthcare Support	1	0.83%
Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance	1	0.83%
Sales and Related	5	4.13%
Total	121	100.00%

All individuals responded to this section of the survey, meaning that all were employed in some field currently. A total of 23 different job areas were available to respondents on the survey; however, only 12 job areas were identified by respondents and thus, the other 11 were not included in this table. The majority of respondents (42%) held occupations in the field of Education, Training, and Library, followed by Arts,

Design, Entertainment, Sports and Media (14%); Management (9%); Business and Financial Operations (9%); Legal (7%); Community and Social Service (6%); Life, Physical, and Social Science (4%); Sales and Related (4%); Computer and Mathematics (2%); Healthcare Practitioners and Technical (2%); Healthcare Support (1%); and Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance (1%).

One survey respondent did not provide an answer to the section of the survey asking for the total number of years since the former participants last competed in forensics. Among those that did respond, the average number of years since respondents last competed in forensics was 8.24.

Table 8 displays the total number of semesters the respondents participated in college forensics.

Table 8

*Study Demographics: Total Semesters of Collegiate Forensics Participation*

Total Semesters	N	Percent
2	3	2.50%
3	1	0.83%
4	7	5.83%
5	2	1.67%
6	9	7.50%
7.5	1	0.83%
8	96	80.00%
10	1	0.83%
Total	121	100.00%

One hundred twenty respondents provided an answer and one did not. The majority of respondents (96 respondents, or 80%) participated in forensics at the collegiate level for eight total semesters.

Respondents to the former participant survey were also asked to indicate whether or not they participated in forensics while in high school. One participant did not

respond. Of the 120 who did respond, 110 (91.67%) did compete at the high school level, while 10 (8.33%) did not.

Table 9 illustrates the total number of semesters survey respondents spent competing in high school forensics.

Table 9

*Study Demographics: Total Semesters Of High School Forensics Competition*

Semesters	Frequency	Percent
2	2	1.82%
3	1	0.91%
4	14	12.73%
5	1	0.91%
6	20	18.18%
7	4	3.64%
8	68	61.82%
Total	114	100.00%

Sixty-eight former participants (61.82%) who filled out the survey indicated that they competed in high school forensics for a total of eight semesters.

Collegiate forensics is divided into two separate overall genres: Debate, which encompasses traditional debate activities such as Lincoln-Douglas debate, Parliamentary style debate, and policy debate among other forms; and Individual Events, which includes several interpretation of literature events, limited preparation speaking events, and several public address events. Survey respondents were asked to indicate whether they competed in debate or not as well as whether they competed in individual events or not. Two respondents did not respond to this section of the survey. Of the 119 that did respond, 48 respondents (40.34%) participated in debate while they were in college. Many more indicated that they participated in individual events, with 116 (97.48%) of respondents

indicating that they competed in the individual events category while they were college competitors.

### **Demographics of Coach/Director of Forensics Survey Participants**

A total of 33 coaches or directors of forensics responded to the second survey. While this survey shared some of the same elements of the former participant survey, there were also several items unique to this survey.

Respondents to this survey were asked to indicate the current size of their teams. Team size among respondents ranged from a total of seven student members to a total of 45 student members. One coach/director of forensics did not provide a team size. The average size of the teams was 26.21 members.

The survey for coaches/directors of forensics also sought input regarding the number of years each respondent had been coaching. Answers ranged from one year to 32 years. The average number of years that respondents to the coaches/director of forensics survey had been coaching was 9.87 years.

Coaches/directors of forensics were also asked whether or not their current team competed in debate and individual events. Twenty-one respondents (63.64%) indicated that their current team participated in some form of debate activity at the collegiate level. All 33 respondents (100%) indicated that their current team competed in the individual events activities.

Finally, respondents to this second survey were asked whether or not they personally competed in college forensics while they were students. Thirty-one respondents (93.94%) indicated that they competed at the collegiate level while in college while two (6.06%) stated that they did not compete.

## Findings Related to Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was designed to determine how frequently former forensics participants employ previously identified key forensics outcomes in their current occupations:

Research Question 1: To what extent do former forensics program participants use key forensics speech, debate, and public speaking outcomes as part of their current jobs?

Respondents were presented with twenty common forensics outcomes and asked to rate how often they use each in their current job or position using the following scale: 1 = 0-1 times per month; 2 = 2-4 times per month, 3 = 5-10 times per month, 4 = 11-15 times per month, and 5 = 16-30 times per month. Table 10 lists, in rank order from highest to lowest, the minimum rating for each outcome, the maximum rating for each outcome, and the mean rating for each outcome.

Table 10

### *Rank Order of "Current Use of Each Outcome"*

Outcome	Minimum Rating	Maximum Rating	Mean Rating	Standard Deviation
(A) Enhanced Communication Skills	3	5	4.77	0.45
(B) Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills	2	5	4.59	0.59
(R) Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct	2	5	4.49	0.75
(D) Increased Knowledge/Education	2	5	4.40	0.76
(O) Enhanced Listening Skills	2	5	4.33	0.82
(I) Enhanced Organizational Skills	1	5	4.29	0.91
(N) Enhanced Leadership Skills	2	5	4.29	0.85

(E) Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence	1	5	4.19	0.88
(J) Enhanced Ability to Think Fast	2	5	4.19	0.89
(F) Enhanced Argumentation Skills	1	5	4.15	0.96
(G) Enhanced Worldview	2	5	4.10	0.93
(C) Enhanced Research Skills	1	5	4.05	1.01
(M) Enhanced Teamwork Skills	1	5	4.04	0.93
(S) Enhanced Audience Analysis Skills	1	5	3.99	1.07
(P) Enhanced Textual Analysis Skills	1	5	3.91	1.13
(L) Increased Professional Networking Opportunities	1	5	3.83	1.05
(Q) Increased Exposure to Competition	1	5	3.77	1.22
(H) Enhanced Knowledge of Current Events	1	5	3.72	1.14
(K) Increased Exposure to Literature	1	5	3.12	1.45
(T) Enhanced Understanding of Rhetorical Theory	1	5	3.04	1.38

As Table 10 illustrates, the most commonly used forensics outcome is Enhanced Communication Skills. On a scale of 1 to 5, the average response to this survey item was nearly 4.78, meaning that on average, respondents used this outcome nearly 16-30 times per month in their current jobs. This finding is not surprising and is consistent with other studies pertaining to the value of communication in the workplace. For example, Hyman and Hu (2005) claim that multiple studies “indicate that communication and cognitive skills are consistently viewed as most important” (p. 109). Interestingly, the lowest value assigned to communication skills in the workplace was a 3, meaning that no respondent used communication skills less than 5-10 times per month. No other outcome had a minimum rating higher than a 2.

While communication skills seem to be very important among former forensics competitors in their current positions, others were not as frequently utilized. The least-utilized forensics outcome was an Enhanced Understanding of Rhetorical Theory. The average respondent used this skill just slightly over 5-10 times per month in his/her current position. Some respondents assigned this a score of 1, meaning they use it no more than one time per month in their current jobs.

### **Findings Related to Research Question 2**

The first research question sought to determine how often well-recognized outcomes of forensics participation are utilized by former participants. Research Question 2 sought to determine the level of emphasis forensics programs place on these previously identified key forensics outcomes:

Research Question 2: To what extent do former forensics program participants believe key forensics outcomes were emphasized in their college forensics program?

Respondents received the same list of outcomes and were asked to identify the level of emphasis their forensics program had placed on each using the following scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Rarely; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Often; 5 = Very Often.

Table 11 illustrates in rank order the emphasis forensics programs place on teaching students each outcome. The minimum rating for each outcome is listed, as well as the maximum rating and the mean rating for each.

Table 11

*Rank Order of "Emphasis in Your Forensics Program"*

Program Emphasis	Minimum Rating	Maximum Rating	Mean Rating	Standard Deviation
(A) Enhanced Communication Skills	3	5	4.73	0.51
(Q) Increased Exposure to Competition	2	5	4.64	0.69
(B) Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills	2	5	4.63	0.69
(R) Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct	1	5	4.50	0.85
(S) Enhanced Audience Analysis Skills	2	5	4.46	0.79
(C) Enhanced Research Skills	1	5	4.41	0.82
(F) Enhanced Argumentation Skills	2	5	4.38	0.80
(M) Enhanced Teamwork Skills	1	5	4.38	0.88
(E) Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence	1	5	4.36	0.92
(J) Enhanced Ability to Think Fast	2	5	4.34	0.81
(N) Enhanced Leadership Skills	2	5	4.33	0.83
(D) Increased Knowledge/Education	2	5	4.28	0.80
(O) Enhanced Listening Skills	1	5	4.23	0.90
(H) Enhanced Knowledge Of Current Events	2	5	4.20	0.84
(G) Enhanced Worldview	2	5	4.19	0.91
(P) Enhanced Textual Analysis Skills	1	5	4.17	0.93
(K) Increased Exposure to Literature	1	5	4.07	1.06
(I) Enhanced Organizational Skills	1	5	4.03	0.89
(T) Enhanced Understanding of Rhetorical Theory	1	5	3.64	1.09
(L) Increased Professional Networking Opportunities	1	5	3.54	1.15



Respondents indicated that Enhanced Communication Skills was the most emphasized outcome of their forensics program, with an average rating of over 4.7 on a scale of 1-5. The minimum value for this outcome was a 3, meaning that all respondents indicated that the enhancement of communication skills was at least sometimes emphasized in their forensics program. Again, this was the only outcome to receive a minimum response that high.

Conversely, the least emphasized response was Increased Professional Networking Opportunities. On a scale of 1-5, the average score for this response was only a 3.5. The minimum response was a 1, which indicates that this outcome was never emphasized in some respondents' forensics programs.

### **Findings Related to Research Question 3**

The third research question turned the focus away from former participants' responses to determine the attitudes of current directors of forensics/coaches about the value of various forensics outcomes. Research Question 3 sought to determine whether or not directors of forensics and coaches felt there are forensics outcomes which are beneficial to competitors:

Research Question 3: Do directors of forensics/coaches agree that there are important forensics outcomes that should be taught?

Respondents to the director of forensics/coach survey were asked to rank in order the top five outcomes they deem most important for students to experience through forensics participation. Table 12 illustrates those responses. The column labeled NR represents the number of ratings each outcome received. The column labeled MR represents the mean ranking each item received. Top rated outcomes received a value of 5, second

place rankings received a value of 4, third place rankings received a value of 3, fourth place rankings received a value of 2, and fifth place rankings received a value of 1. The column labeled STD represents the standard deviation for each item. The column labeled WR indicates the weighted ranking for the outcome. The weighted ranking value was derived by multiplying the item mean ranking by the number of rankings. Weighted ranking was utilized to differentiate outcomes based upon the number of times the outcome was rated.

Table 12

*Overall Ranking of Forensics Outcomes By Directors of Forensics/Coaches*

Outcome	NR	MR	STD	WR
(A) Enhanced Communication Skills	29	3.89	1.26	113
(B) Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills	28	3.75	1.00	105
(E) Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence	20	2.75	1.16	55
(G) Enhanced Worldview	12	3.91	1.50	47
(D) Increased Knowledge/Education	9	3.00	1.22	27
(R) Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct	11	2.27	1.48	25
(M) Enhanced Teamwork Skills	10	2.10	1.10	21
(S) Enhanced Audience Analysis Skills	6	3.00	1.09	18
(I) Enhanced Organizational Skills	5	2.80	1.78	14
(N) Enhanced Leadership Skills	5	2.80	1.64	14
(C) Enhanced Research Skills	5	2.20	1.09	11
(Q) Increased Exposure to Competition	8	1.37	0.74	11
(F) Enhanced Argumentation Skills	3	3.33	0.57	10

(L) Increased Professional Networking Opportunities	3	2.33	1.52	7
(P) Enhanced Textual Analysis Skills	3	1.66	1.15	5
(O) Enhanced Listening Skills	2	2.00	0.00	4
(H) Enhanced Knowledge of Current Events	2	1.50	0.70	3
(K) Increased Exposure to Literature	2	1.50	0.70	3
(J) Enhanced Ability to Think Fast	2	1.00	0.00	2

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As Table 12 indicates, Enhanced Communication Skills received the highest overall ranking of important outcomes for students to experience through participation in forensics. Nearly as close, directors of forensics/coaches indicated that Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills was among the five most important for students to experience. When examining the weighted values, one can see that coaches and directors of forensics overwhelmingly placed Enhanced Communication Skills and Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills among the top skills students should learn, with weighted scores of 113 and 105, respectively. The third choice had a much lower weighted score of 55. At the other end of the spectrum, four outcomes (Enhanced Listening Skills, Enhanced Knowledge of Current Events, Increased Exposure to Literature, and Increased Ability to Think Fast) only received two placements in the directors of forensics/coaches' top five most important outcomes. According to the respondents to this survey, an Enhanced Understanding of Rhetorical Theory was of little importance, as no single respondent listed it among their top five most important outcomes. Therefore, it was not listed on Table 12.

**Findings Related to Research Question 4**

The final research question seeks to determine which forensics outcomes are most important to both directors of forensics/coaches and former forensics competitors:

Research Question 4: If so, which outcomes are rated high most consistently?

This question could only be answered by looking at the top five outcome rankings for both groups. First, the researcher determined which outcomes were among the top five most valuable outcomes according to students by looking at how many respondents listed each as one of the five most valuable outcomes in their current profession. Similarly, the researcher determined which were listed most frequently in the top five on the coaches/directors of forensics survey. Table 13 lists the five which appeared most frequently in respondents’ lists of the five most valuable outcomes on both surveys.

Table 13

*Outcomes Appearing Most Frequently Among the Top Five on Each Survey*

Coach/Director of Forensics		Former Participant	
Item	f	Item	f
Enhanced Communication Skills	29	Enhanced Communication Skills	94
Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills	28	Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills	72
Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence	20	Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence	45
Enhanced Worldview	12	Enhanced Argumentation Skills	42
Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct	11	Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct	40

The first column of Table 13 displays, in rank order, the top five most common forensics outcomes appearing on the coach/director of forensics surveys. The second column of Table 13 displays how often an item appeared among the coaches/director of forensics’

top five most important outcomes. The third column of Table 13 displays, in rank order, the top five most common forensics outcomes appearing on the former participant survey. The last column of Table 13 illustrates how often an item appeared among the former participants' top five most important forensics outcomes.

Analyzing the responses that appeared most frequently among the top five on both surveys, one can conclude that there is some agreement between coaches/directors of forensics and former participants about the value placed on several forensics outcomes. The outcome appearing most frequently among the top five most important on both surveys was Enhanced Communication Skills. Twenty-nine (87%) of respondents on the coach/director of forensics survey included this outcome among their top five most important. Ninety-four (77%) of students included it among their top five. Therefore, one can conclude that most coaches/directors of forensics and former participants agree that this outcome is valuable.

Also, Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills frequently appeared on both surveys among the top five most important forensics outcomes. Twenty-eight (84%) percent of coaches/directors of forensics and 72 (59%) of former participants included this outcome among their top five most important.

Increased Confidence/Self-Esteem is also an outcome which coaches/directors of forensics agree with students is important. Twenty (60%) of coaches/directors of forensics listed this outcome among their top five most important, and 45 (37%) of former participants rated it among their top five.

Coaches/directors of forensics and former competitors also agreed that an Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct is among the top five most valuable

forensics outcomes. Eleven (33%) of coaches/directors of forensics and 40 (33%) of former participants listed this among their top five.

Twelve (36%) of coaches/directors of forensics listed an Enhanced Worldview among their top five. This forensics outcome ranked fourth among the most commonly cited by the coaches/directors of forensics. However, it did not rank among the top five outcomes frequently cited as most valuable among former competitors. Only 26% of former competitors listed this among their five most important forensics outcomes in their current jobs.

Similarly, 42 (34%) of former competitors listed Enhanced Argumentation Skills among their five most important outcomes, ranking that outcome fourth overall among the most frequently cited outcomes on the former participant survey. However, only 9% of coaches/directors of forensics listed this among their five most valuable forensics outcomes.

### **Other Findings**

In addition to the findings related to the four research questions, some other findings of interest emerged:

#### **Variations in responses between former debaters and former non-debaters.**

The former participant survey asked respondents to identify whether they participated in the individual events (IE) categories or whether they participated in debate. The inclusion of this information allowed the researcher to determine whether differences existed in survey responses between respondents who had debate experience as a collegiate competitor and those who did not have debate experience. The researcher could then determine if the specific genres of forensics participation had any effect on

which forensics outcomes former participants consider the most valuable in their current occupations. Using an analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure, the researcher was able to determine that there were, in fact, a few discrepancies between IE participants and debate participants about which outcomes former participants believe are the most valuable. A (*p*) value of .05 or less indicated significant variance in the responses of the two groups. Five of the 20 outcomes were found to be significantly different between debate participants and individual events participants: (1) Increased Exposure to Literature; (2) Increased Professional Networking Opportunities; (3) Increased Exposure to Competition; (4) Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence; and (5) Enhanced Worldview. Table 14 displays those results. The means for debaters are displayed first, followed by the standard deviation for those means, and the number (N) of respondents. Next, the table displays the means among non-debaters for each item, followed by the standard deviation and the number (N) of respondents.

Table 14

*Mean Rating of Survey Outcomes Found to be Significantly Different Between Debaters and Non-Debaters*

Outcome	Debaters			Non-debaters		
	Mean	STD	N	Mean	STD	N
Increased Exposure to Literature	2.58	1.36	48	3.43	1.41	71
Increased Professional Networking Opportunities	3.54	1.14	48	4.01	0.94	71
Increased Exposure to Competition	3.41	1.23	48	3.98	1.16	71
Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence	3.95	0.92	48	4.32	0.82	70
Enhanced Worldview	3.87	0.91	48	4.25	0.92	70

Results were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA. This analysis revealed statistically significant variance between debaters and IE participants with the outcome Increased Exposure to Literature,  $F(1, 117) = 10.74, p = .0014$ . The means (with standard deviations in parentheses) were 3.43 (1.41) for students that did not participate in debate and 2.58 (1.36) for students that did participate in debate. Participants in the non-debater group had significantly higher mean values than debaters. From these means, one can conclude that individual events students believe an Increased Exposure to Literature is more important in their current occupations while debaters do not assign that outcome as high a level of value.

Former participants also varied on the value they place on the outcome Increased Professional Networking Opportunities. Using a one-way ANOVA, the researcher noticed statistical difference between debaters and non-debaters,  $F(1, 117) = 5.99, p = .0159$ . The means (with standard deviations in parentheses) were 4.01 (0.94) for non-debaters and 3.54 (1.14) for debaters. Therefore, one can conclude that non-debaters believe Increased Professional Networking Opportunities gained through forensics participation is important, while non-debaters do not assign it the same degree of importance.

Debaters and individual events participants also differed on the value they place on Increased Exposure to Competition. A one-way ANOVA displayed significant statistical difference,  $F(1, 117) = 6.52, p = .01$ . The means (with standard deviations in parentheses) were 3.98 (1.16) for non-debaters and 3.41 (1.23) for debaters. As a result of these means, one can conclude that Increased Exposure to Competition is more important to non-debaters in their current jobs than it is to former debaters.



Individual events participants and debaters varied on the value they assigned to the outcome Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence. A one-way ANOVA revealed significant statistical difference,  $F(1, 116) = 5.18, p = .02$ . The means (with standard deviations in parentheses) were 4.32 (0.82) for individual events students and 3.95 (0.92) for debaters. As a result, one can determine that individual events former participants place more value on Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence than former debaters.

Statistical difference also existed between the responses of former debaters and non-debaters on the outcome Enhanced Worldview. Using a one-way ANOVA, the researcher noticed statistical difference between debaters and non-debaters,  $F(1, 116) = 4.89, p = .02$ . The means (with standard deviations in parentheses) were 4.25 (0.92) for non-debaters and 3.87 (0.91) for debaters. These means illustrate that former non-debaters place a higher value on an Enhanced Worldview than former debaters.

Former debaters and non-debaters alike placed similar importance on the majority of the outcomes appearing on the survey. However, in the case of five of the outcomes, discrepancies existed. Former non-debaters indicated that the outcomes of Increased Exposure to Literature; Increased Professional Networking Opportunities; Increased Exposure to Competition; Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence; and Enhanced Worldview are more valuable to them in their current occupations than these same outcomes are to former debaters.

**Variations in responses of groups divided based on length of time since individuals last competed in forensics.**

Additionally, respondents to the former participant survey also indicated the number of years since they last participated in forensics. The number of years since respondents last competed are displayed in Table 15.

Table 15

*Number of Years Since Respondent Last Competed in Collegiate Forensics*

Years	N	Percent	Cumulative Percent
2	18	15.00%	15.00%
3	8	6.67%	21.67%
4	11	9.17%	30.83%
5	6	5.00%	35.83%
6	12	10.00%	45.83%
7	13	10.83%	56.67%
8	6	5.00%	61.67%
9	5	4.17%	65.83%
10	11	9.17%	75.00%
11	4	3.33%	78.33%
12	5	4.17%	82.50%
13	1	0.83%	83.33%
14	4	3.33%	86.67%
15	2	1.67%	88.33%
16	2	1.67%	90.00%
17	3	2.50%	92.50%
19	2	1.67%	94.17%
20	4	3.33%	97.50%
23	1	0.83%	98.33%
27	1	0.83%	99.17%
35	1	0.83%	100.00%

The first column indicates the number of years since a respondent has last competed in collegiate forensics. The second column represents the number of respondents (N) corresponding to each year. The third column indicates the percentage of respondents

corresponding to each year. The last column indicates the cumulative percentage of responses.

In an attempt to divide the number of responses as equally as possible, the researcher separated the respondents into four groups based on the cumulative percentage of responses, attempting to separate them into equal fourths as closely as possible. Thus, the first group consisted of individuals who indicated it had been two or three years since they last competed, or 21.67% of the overall number of respondents. The second group, 24.16% of the total respondents, indicated that they had not competed in 4, 5, or 6 years. The third group, 29.17% of the overall number of respondents indicated that it has been 7, 8, 9, or 10 years since they last competed in forensics. The last group, consisting of individuals who have not competed in 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 23, 27, or 35 years, made up the remaining 25% of the overall number of respondents. Table 16 summarizes this grouping.

Table 16

*Groupings Based on Number of Years Since Respondents Last Competed in Forensics*

Years Since Last Participation	Number of Respondents	Percent
2-3	26	21.67%
4-6	29	24.16%
7-10	35	29.17%
11-35	30	25.00%
Total	120	100.00%

From the information the respondents provided indicating the number of years since they had last competed in forensics, the researcher was able to determine whether any variation in responses existed based on the length of time that had passed since an individual last participated in collegiate forensics competition. Of the twenty items, only

Enhanced Argumentation Skills and Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct were found to be significantly different between groups.

Significant difference existed on the outcome Enhanced Argumentation Skills based on the length of time since respondents last participated in forensics. Using an analysis of variance (ANOVA), this outcome displayed significant statistical difference between groups,  $F(3, 115) = 3.07, p = .03$ . The means for each group are listed in Table 17.

Table 17

*Means for “Enhanced Argumentation Skills” Based on Length of Time Since Respondents Last Participated in Forensics*

Group	Years Since Last Forensics Participation	Mean	STD
1	2-3	4.24	0.83
2	4-6	4.17	0.88
3	7-10	4.00	1.00
4	11-35	4.36	0.76

The means for each group (with standard deviations in parentheses) are as follows: The first group had a mean of 4.24 (0.83); the second group’s mean was 4.17 (0.88); the mean for the third group was 4.0 (1.0); and the fourth group’s mean was 4.36 (0.76).

Utilizing Tukey’s Post Hoc test, the researcher found a significant difference between group 3 and group 4. Thus, individuals who last competed between 7-10 years ago saw less value in Enhanced Argumentation Skills than those who competed between 11 and 35 years ago. Group 3 also ranked this response lower than those competing between two and three years ago and those competing between four and six years ago.

Also, significant difference in the value placed on an Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct existed between groups with varying lengths of time since they last competed in collegiate forensics. An ANOVA revealed significant statistical difference between the four groups,  $F(3, 115) = 3.86, p = .01$ . The means for each group are listed in Table 18.

Table 18

*Means for “Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct” Based on Length of Time Since Respondents Last Participated in Forensics*

Group	Years Since Last Forensics Participation	Mean	STD
1	2-3	4.11	0.90
2	4-6	4.58	0.62
3	7-10	4.74	0.56
4	11-35	4.44	0.82

The means for each group (with standard deviations in parentheses) are as follows: The first group had a mean of 4.11 (0.9); the second group’s mean was 4.58 (0.62); the third group’s mean was 4.74 (0.56); and the fourth group had a mean of 4.44 (0.82).

Utilizing Tukey’s Post Hoc test, the researcher found a significant difference between group 1 and group 3. Individuals who had not competed in two or three years saw less value in an enhanced understanding of professional conduct than those individuals who have not competed in forensics between 7-10 years. Individuals who had not competed in four to six years and those who had not competed in 11 to 35 years also found more value in an enhanced understanding of professional conduct than the first group.

## **Summary**

This chapter presented the results of the coaches/director of forensics survey as well as the former participant survey. After explaining the demographic makeup of respondents, this chapter detailed the forensics outcomes that were identified as most valuable by former participants, those outcomes listed as most valuable by coaches/directors of forensics, and an explanation of the results. Additionally, this chapter discussed some additional findings apparent in the data. Respondents who participated in debate assigned significantly different values to several of the items than those respondents who had participated in the forensics individual events. Similarly, responses for two of the survey items varied based on the length of time since a respondent last participated in collegiate forensics. The data presented in this chapter can be helpful in further proving the worth of forensics participation. Additionally, it can serve as a tool for coaches/directors of forensics to use in ensuring that the outcomes that are emphasized in their programs are actually useful to students once they begin their careers.

## **CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION**

This study investigated the extent to which former forensics competitors use commonly recognized forensics outcomes in their current jobs or positions. It also ascertained the extent to which forensics programs emphasize these outcomes, the perceptions of coaches/directors of forensics about which outcomes are the most beneficial for students to learn, and whether agreement exists between former competitors and coaches/directors of forensics about the most beneficial forensics outcomes.

Previous research exists to prove that participation in forensics is of great value to student participants, and previous research also identifies the most common outcomes of forensics participation. However, prior studies do not determine the prevalence of these outcomes in former participants' current jobs or positions. Likewise, prior research does not determine whether agreement exists between coaches/directors of forensics and former participants about the value of these outcomes. Essentially, to the researcher's knowledge, no prior literature makes a determination of whether or not forensics programs are teaching student participants what they will need to know once their competitive careers are over and they move into a job or career. Within the context of a void in such research, this study seeks to provide an answer to the question of which skills forensics programs should emphasize.

The first chapter identified the void in existing research and the significance of this research project in filling that void. The second chapter presented a review of current literature about outcomes commonly tied to forensics participation. The third chapter outlined the methodology used to gather data. The fourth chapter contained the results of

the data collection and analysis. This final chapter discusses the findings, draws conclusions based on the data analysis, and recommends directions for future research in this area. The following research questions guided this study:

Research Question 1: To what extent do former forensics program participants use key forensics speech, debate and public speaking outcomes as part of their current job?

Research Question 2: To what extent do former forensics program participants believe key forensics outcomes were emphasized in their college forensics program?

Research Question 3: Do Directors of forensics/coaches agree that there are important forensics outcomes that should be taught?

Research Question 4: If so, which outcomes are rated high most consistently?

The researcher designed a survey in order to collect data from former participants, and a separate survey for the coaches/directors of forensics. The content for both survey instruments was developed by cross applying the results of three of the most recent and widely circulated studies about the benefits of forensics participation (Littlefield, 2001; Quenette et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2001). These previous studies identified the most commonly associated benefits of forensics participation. After examining the recognized benefits from these previous studies, the researcher added the most prevalent among all three to the survey instrument for this current study. Also, the researcher reviewed the stated purposes in documents published by the National Forensic Association and the American Forensic Association. If, after reviewing these documents, the researcher felt as though additional intended outcomes of forensics participation emerged, he added them to the content of the survey. Ultimately, this process resulted in the creation of a 20-item list of outcomes stemming from participation in forensics.



One hundred twenty-one former participants participated in the study, as well as 33 coaches/directors of forensics. The former participants represented forensics programs nationwide, as well as varying degrees of time since last participating in forensics. The coaches/directors of forensics also represented programs from around the country and also coached teams of varying sizes, ranging from seven team members to 45 team members.

### **Findings and Recommendations**

This study added to the body of forensics research by considering the perspectives of former competitors and comparing those perspectives to the perspectives of current collegiate coaches and directors of forensics. The study highlighted some important trends in forensics education and brought to light some considerations for coaches/directors of forensics and others who develop collegiate forensics curricula.

As indicated in the previous chapter, some disparity existed on the value placed on five of the forensics outcomes by debaters versus non-debaters. Specifically, former collegiate debaters indicated that Increased Exposure to Literature; Increased Professional Networking Opportunities; Increased Exposure to Competition; Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence; and Enhanced Worldview are not as important to them in their current jobs as these same outcomes are to former non-debaters. As a result, collegiate coaches and directors of forensics should keep in mind that, depending on the competitive composition of their teams, some skills must be highlighted more in the forensics experience than others. If a team is comprised of primarily debaters, these five outcomes may not need as much attention in the forensics experience, because these individuals may not find them as valuable as other outcomes in the workplace.

Conversely, if a team has no debaters, a coach or director of forensics may want to consider placing more emphasis on these skills, as non-debaters find them more valuable once the competitive forensics experience is over.

Additionally, two items varied in their value based on how many years had elapsed since the respondent last participated in collegiate forensics contests. The data indicate that the longer it had been since an individual last competed in forensics, the more value they assigned to the importance of obtaining Enhanced Argumentation Skills. Similarly, the responses reflect the fact that the longer it had been since an individual competed in forensics, the more value they placed on Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct since individuals who completed their competition experience only two to three years ago assigned less value to this outcome.

Coaches and directors of forensics should keep in mind that the length of time that has elapsed since a person last competed can, at least in these two instances, alter the value former participants place on those outcomes. Accordingly, coaches and directors of forensics must realize that when constructing their curriculum, there may be outcomes which might not be considered valuable in the short term, but which can benefit former competitors later in their careers. While the temptation for coaches and directors of forensics may be to place less emphasis on those skills which may not be immediately valuable to competitors, those outcomes may be useful in the future, and should thus still receive ample attention when creating the forensics curriculum for students.

Coaches/directors of forensics and former forensics competitors seem to be in agreement about which outcomes are most important for students to learn, with two exceptions. First, coaches/directors of forensics placed more value on an Enhanced

Worldview than former participants. Second, former participants placed more value on Enhanced Argumentation Skills than coaches/directors of forensics.

Perhaps most revealing is an examination of which outcomes former participants indicated are most valuable in their jobs compared to the emphasis respondents indicated their respective forensics programs placed on those outcomes. Some agreement did exist between the outcomes deemed valuable and the emphasis that forensics programs place on those outcomes, but some discrepancies arose as well.

The following outcomes, in rank order, had the highest means for the frequency they are used in former forensics participants' current jobs: Enhanced Communication Skills; Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills; Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct; Increased Knowledge/Education; Enhanced Listening Skills; Enhanced Organizational Skills; Enhanced Leadership Skills; Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence; Enhanced Ability to Think Fast; and Enhanced Argumentation Skills. These outcomes are the forensics outcomes respondents cited as being used most frequently in their current positions.

However, four of the ten most frequently used outcomes were not cited among the ten most heavily emphasized in forensics programs by respondents. While Increased Knowledge/Education was recognized as the fourth most commonly used outcome, it did not rank among the top ten most emphasized in respondents' forensics programs. Similarly, while Enhanced Listening Skills, Enhanced Organizational Skills, and Enhanced Leadership Skills were cited among the ten most frequently used in the jobs of former forensics competitors, these skills were not cited among the most emphasized in respondents' forensics programs. In fact, while Enhanced Organizational Skills was

ranked sixth among the most commonly used outcomes, it was listed among the three least emphasized outcomes in forensics programs.

Coaches and directors of forensics must ensure that the skills and outcomes they are emphasizing in their programs are the skills that will be most valuable to competitors in the workforce. Specifically, more emphasis might be placed on Increased Knowledge/Education, Enhanced Listening Skills, Enhanced Organizational Skills, and Enhanced Leadership Skills, as these skills are among the most commonly used in the jobs of former forensics competitors.

The ten highest means, in rank order, for the emphasis placed on forensics outcomes in forensics programs are as follows: Enhanced Communication Skills; Increased Exposure to Competition; Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills; Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct; Enhanced Audience Analysis Skills; Enhanced Research Skills; Enhanced Argumentation Skills; Enhanced Teamwork Skills; Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence; and Enhanced Ability to Think Fast.

Four of the ten most emphasized forensics outcomes were not cited by former forensics participants as being among the most frequently used in their current jobs. Increased Exposure to Competition had the second highest average score among survey participants when asked about the emphasis placed on outcomes in their programs, but it was among the four least commonly used in former competitors' jobs. Also, Enhanced Audience Analysis Skills, Enhanced Research Skills, and Enhanced Teamwork Skills were listed among the most emphasized outcomes in respondents' forensics programs, but they did not appear among the top ten most frequently used in respondents' jobs.

Coaches and directors of forensics may be emphasizing outcomes in their respective programs which may not be very useful in their students' lives once they enter the workforce. Coaches and directors of forensics may consider placing less emphasis on an Increased Exposure to Competition; Enhanced Audience Analysis Skills; Enhanced Research Skills; and Enhanced Teamwork Skills and instead, focus more on Increased Knowledge/Education; Enhanced Listening Skills; Enhanced Organizational Skills; and Enhanced Leadership Skills.

### **Limitations**

Limitations for this study included the sample size and a lack of parallels between the two survey instruments. The sample size was certainly a limitation for this study. While the collegiate forensics community is definitely not as large as other competitive collegiate groups, the sample size for former participants in this study was small, with only 121 responses. Ideally, a study of this scale would have been able to include the responses of double that number.

Similarly, the response number for the coaches/directors of forensics survey was very small. Only 33 coaches/directors of forensics responded. There is not a large number of coaches/directors of collegiate forensics teams in existence, because not every college or university has a forensics team, but in order to determine a more accurate reflection of coach/director of forensics attitudes, future researchers may attempt to attain a larger sample size. Additionally, making a comparison between the attitudes of former participants and coaches/directors of forensics proves difficult when one sample size is nearly four times as large as the other.

A second limitation is that many elements of the former participants' survey were not included on the coach/director of forensics survey. The coach/director of forensics survey only asked respondents to indicate the top five forensics outcomes they felt were the most important for their students to experience and to fill in some general demographic information about themselves and their team. The survey distributed to former forensics participants also asked respondents to provide some general demographic information and to list the five outcomes they believed were the most important to learn, but it also asked them to indicate how frequently they used each outcome in their current job as well as the level of emphasis their program placed on each outcome. The coaches/directors of forensics were not asked to provide any information concerning the emphasis their program places on each outcome.

### **Future Research**

This study lays the groundwork for an even closer and more in-depth examination of this information in the future. Future researchers should replicate this study with a larger sample size for both groups. Expanding distribution methods, including posting the surveys to the IEL, the largest regulated online discussion forum for collegiate forensics participants, could help obtain a larger sample.

Also, future researchers may be able to obtain more accurate data using more parallel surveys for former participants and coaches/directors of forensics. If respondents were able to provide the same demographic information on both surveys, as well as to indicate the degree of emphasis of each outcome in their forensics programs, a broader picture of the worth of common forensics outcomes may emerge.

As more studies examining the benefits of forensics participation surface, researchers may wish to add or delete items from the surveys used in this study in order to more accurately reflect changing trends in forensics activity. The skills which respondents claim are valuable now may not be as valuable in subsequent years, so future researchers should take care to construct surveys using the most recent data on forensics outcomes available.

Finally, future researchers should look for trends between the job classifications people indicate and the value different individuals in different job areas place on various forensics outcomes. Former participants involved in certain fields may find certain outcomes more valuable than individuals in other fields. For this study, job classification was simply used in determining the demographic makeup of respondents. However, future researchers may use this information to determine which fields require the frequent use of particular outcomes. This information, combined with a knowledge of the future aspirations of their collegiate competitors, could be useful to coaches/directors of forensics in tailoring the curriculum of their forensics programs to the future needs of their students.

Also, this study did not examine whether the size of a team had any impact on the skills the coaches/directors of forensics of those teams felt were the most important skills for students to learn. Future researchers may wish to explore whether a coach/director of forensic's team size has any impact on the outcomes coaches/directors of forensics believe are the most important to teach students.

Also, future researchers may wish to consider whether a coach and director of forensics' own personal competitive background has any bearing on the skills they feel

are most important for students to learn. It is highly possible, since most coaches/directors of forensics participating in this study indicated that they were former competitors, that their own competitive background may influence the skills they think students should learn. Future researchers may wish to obtain a larger sample of coaches/directors of forensics who did not compete themselves, and see whether this lack of personal competitive forensics experience makes any difference in the skills they think are the most important for forensics students to learn compared to coaches/directors of forensics who did compete when they were college students.

### **Summary**

Former forensics participants in this study indicated the frequency with which they use commonly-recognized forensics outcomes in their current jobs, as well as the emphasis placed on each of these outcomes by their former forensics programs. Coaches/directors of forensics indicated the outcomes they believed to be most important for students to learn. From this information, the researcher was able to determine areas of agreement and disagreement, as well as which skills may be more important to debaters and which may be more important to non-debaters. The researcher also determined discrepancies in the values placed on certain forensics outcomes relative to the amount of time since a respondent last competed.

This study should help guide current coaches/directors of forensics in creating and shaping the forensics experience for current and future competitors. It should also serve as a valuable springboard for future research into this relatively unexplored area of forensics.



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APPENDIX

Appendix A. Former Participant Survey

**FORENSICS SURVEY**

**Below are listed a number of outcomes typically associated with collegiate forensics participation. In the left column indicate the extent you use each *in your current job or position*. Use this scale:**

- 1=Almost Never (0-1 times per month)
- 2=Very Infrequently (2-4 times per month)
- 3=Occasionally (5-10 times per month)
- 4=Often (11-15 times per month)
- 5 =Very Often (16-30 times per month)

**In the right column, indicate the extent to which each outcome was emphasized in your college forensics program. Use this scale:**

- 1 =Never (Not emphasized at any time)
- 2 =Rarely (Rarely emphasized-not often)
- 3 =Sometimes (Occasional emphasis)
- 4 =Often (Regularly emphasized-almost always)
- 5 =Very Often (Integrated into all aspects of program-always emphasized)

Current Use Of Outcome	Forensics Topic	Emphasis In Your Forensics Program
1—2—3—4—5	(A) Enhanced Communication Skills	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(B) Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(C) Enhanced Research Skills	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(D) Increased Knowledge/Education	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(E) Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(F) Enhanced Argumentation Skills	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(G) Enhanced Worldview	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(H) Enhanced Knowledge of Current Events	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(I) Enhanced Organizational Skills	1—2—3—4—5

1—2—3—4—5	(J) Enhanced Ability to Think Fast	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(K) Increased Exposure To Literature	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(L) Increased Professional Networking Opportunities	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(M) Enhanced Teamwork Skills	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(N) Enhanced Leadership Skills	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(O) Enhanced Listening Skills	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(P) Enhanced Textual Analysis Skills	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(Q) Increased Exposure to Competition	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(R) Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(S) Enhanced Audience Analysis Skills	1—2—3—4—5
1—2—3—4—5	(T) Enhanced Understanding of Rhetorical Theory	1—2—3—4—5

### Demographic Information

Your Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Your Age \_\_\_\_\_

#### Job Area

Below are listed a number of job classifications. Please place a check next to the classification area that BEST describes your current occupation. (Mark only one)

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Management<br><input type="checkbox"/> Business and Financial Operations<br><input type="checkbox"/> Computer and Mathematical<br><input type="checkbox"/> Architecture and Engineering<br><input type="checkbox"/> Life, Physical, and Social Science<br><input type="checkbox"/> Community and Social Service<br><input type="checkbox"/> Legal<br><input type="checkbox"/> Education, Training, and Library<br><input type="checkbox"/> Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, & | Media<br><input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare Practitioners and Technical<br><input type="checkbox"/> Healthcare Support<br><input type="checkbox"/> Protective Service<br><input type="checkbox"/> Food Preparation and Serving<br><input type="checkbox"/> Building and Grounds Cleaning and Maintenance<br><input type="checkbox"/> Personal Care and Service<br><input type="checkbox"/> Sales and Related |
|--|---|

- \_\_\_\_\_ Office and Administrative Support
- \_\_\_\_\_ Farming, Fishing, and Forestry
- \_\_\_\_\_ Construction and Extraction
- \_\_\_\_\_ Installation, Maintenance, and Repair
- \_\_\_\_\_ Production
- \_\_\_\_\_ Transportation and Material Moving
- \_\_\_\_\_ Military Specific

Forensics Experience

How many years since you last competed in college forensics? \_\_\_\_\_

What year did you graduate from college? \_\_\_\_\_

In what year did you last participate in college forensics? \_\_\_\_\_

How many total semesters did you participate in college forensics? \_\_\_\_\_

While in high school, did you participate in a forensics program? Yes/No

If you answered “yes” to the above question, how many semesters? \_\_\_\_\_

While in college, did you participate in Debate Yes/No

While in college, did you participate in Individual Events Yes/No

Top Five Forensics Outcomes

Looking at the outcomes commonly associated with forensics participation listed on the front page, please identify the TOP FIVE you believe to be the most important for students to experience by placing the letter that corresponds to your choices in the table below.

Rank	Topic Letter
1 <sup>st</sup> (Most important outcome)	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	
4 <sup>th</sup>	
5 <sup>th</sup>	

*Thank You For Your Help With This Research Project.  
Please Place The Survey In The Return Envelope-Be Sure To Seal The Envelope, Or  
Return To Me In Person.*



Appendix B. Coach/Director of Forensics Survey

**FORENSICS SURVEY**

Top Five Forensics Outcomes

Looking at the outcomes commonly associated with forensics participation listed below, please identify the **TOP FIVE** you believe to be the most important for students to experience by placing the letter that corresponds to your choices in the table below.

Rank	Topic Letter
1 <sup>st</sup> (Most important outcome)	
2 <sup>nd</sup>	
3 <sup>rd</sup>	
4 <sup>th</sup>	
5 <sup>th</sup>	

- (A) Enhanced Communication Skills
- (B) Enhanced Analytical/Critical Thinking Skills
- (C) Enhanced Research Skills
- (D) Increased Knowledge/Education
- (E) Increased Self-Esteem/Confidence
- (F) Enhanced Argumentation Skills
- (G) Enhanced Worldview
- (H) Enhanced Knowledge of Current Events
- (I) Enhanced Organizational Skills
- (J) Enhanced Ability to Think Fast
- (K) Increased Exposure to Literature
- (L) Increased Professional Networking Opportunities
- (M) Enhanced Teamwork Skills
- (N) Enhanced Leadership Skills
- (O) Enhanced Listening Skills
- (P) Enhanced Textual Analysis Skills
- (Q) Increased Exposure to Competition
- (R) Enhanced Understanding of Professional Conduct
- (S) Enhanced Audience Analysis Skills
- (T) Enhanced Understanding of Rhetorical Theory

**Demographic Information:**

Size of your team:\_\_\_\_\_

Number of years as a coach/Director of Forensics\_\_\_\_\_

Does your team participate in debate? Yes/No

Does your team participate in IEs? Yes/No

Did you participate in forensics as a college student? Yes/No

## Appendix C. Former Participant Survey Cover Letter

February 13, 2012

Dear Participant:

My name is Jace Lux, and I am a doctoral student at Western Kentucky University. For my dissertation, I am examining the extent to which former forensics competitors may use forensics skills as part of their current jobs, the extent to which former competitors feel these skills were emphasized in their collegiate programs, and the level of agreement between former competitors and Directors of Forensics/coaches about the most important skills to teach through forensics. Because you are a former forensics participant who has not competed in the activity for at least two years, I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the attached survey.

The attached questionnaire will only require 10-15 minutes of your time to complete. There is no compensation for completing this survey. In order to ensure that all information will remain confidential, please do not include your name. Copies of the survey will only be provided to my dissertation chair, Dr. Randy Capps. If you choose to participate in this study, I would ask that you please answer all questions as honestly as possible and return the completed questionnaire in the envelope provided. You may either mail the envelope to me, or return it to me in person.

Participation is strictly voluntary, and you may refuse to participate at any time. By filling out this survey, you are consenting to participation in the study and to having your responses included in any conclusions drawn from the data. All research will be conducted in accordance with the policies outlined by Western Kentucky University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. The data collected will provide useful information for Directors of Forensics, forensics participants, and college administrators. If you have additional questions or require more information, please contact me at 270-745-6340 or [jace.lux@wku.edu](mailto:jace.lux@wku.edu).

Sincerely,

Jace T. Lux

Appendix D. Coach/Director of Forensics Survey Cover Letter

February 13, 2012

Dear Participant:

My name is Jace Lux, and I am a doctoral student at Western Kentucky University. For my dissertation, I am examining the extent to which former forensics competitors may use forensics skills as part of their current jobs, the extent to which former competitors feel these skills were emphasized in their collegiate programs, and the amount of agreement between former competitors and Directors of Forensics/coaches about the most important skills to teach through forensics. Because you are a Director of Forensics or forensics coach, I am inviting you to participate in this research study by completing the attached survey.

The attached questionnaire will only require approximately 10 minutes of your time to complete. There is no compensation for completing this survey. In order to ensure that all information will remain confidential, please do not include your name. Copies of the survey will only be provided to my dissertation chair, Dr. Randy Capps. If you choose to participate in this study, I would ask that you please answer all questions as honestly as possible and return the completed questionnaire in the envelope provided. You may either mail the envelope to me, or return it to me in person.

Participation is strictly voluntary, and you may refuse to participate at any time. By filling out this survey, you are consenting to participation in the study and to having your responses included in any conclusions drawn from the data. All research will be conducted in accordance with the policies outlined by Western Kentucky University's Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Thank you for taking the time to assist me in my educational endeavors. The data collected will provide useful information for Directors of Forensics, forensics participants, and college administrators. If you have additional questions or require more information, please contact me at 270-745-6340 or [jace.lux@wku.edu](mailto:jace.lux@wku.edu).

Sincerely,

Jace T. Lux

# Appendix E. Institutional Review Board Approval



A LEARNING AMERICAN UNIVERSITY WITH INTERNATIONAL REACH  
HUMAN SUBJECTS REVIEW BOARD

In future correspondence, please refer to HS12-018, August 3, 2011

Jace Lux  
c/o Dr. Capps  
Forensics  
WKU

Jace Lux:


Your research project, *The Impact of High School and College Participation in Forensics Competitions on Future Careers*, was reviewed by the IRB and it has been determined that risks to subjects are: (1) minimized and reasonable; and that (2) research procedures are consistent with a sound research design and do not expose the subjects to unnecessary risks. Reviewers determined that: (1) benefits to subjects are considered along with the importance of the topic and that outcomes are reasonable; (2) selection of subjects is equitable; and (3) the purposes of the research and the research setting is amenable to subjects' welfare and producing desired outcomes; that indications of coercion or prejudice are absent, and that participation is clearly voluntary.

1. In addition, the IRB found that you need to orient participants as follows: (1) signed informed consent is required; (2) Provision is made for collecting, using and storing data in a manner that protects the safety and privacy of the subjects and the confidentiality of the data. (3) Appropriate safeguards are included to protect the rights and welfare of the subjects.

**This project is therefore approved at the Expedited Review Level until December 1, 2012.**

2. Please note that the institution is not responsible for any actions regarding this protocol before approval. If you expand the project at a later date to use other instruments please re-apply. Copies of your request for human subjects review, your application, and this approval, are maintained in the Office of Sponsored Programs at the above address. Please report any changes in this approval protocol to this office. A Continuing Review protocol will be sent to you in the future to determine the status of the project. Also, please use the stamped approval forms to assure participants of compliance with The Office of Human Research Protections regulations.

Sincerely,

  
Paul J. Mooney, M.S.T.M.  
Compliance Manager  
Office of Research  
Western Kentucky University



IRB APPLICATION # 12-018  
APPROVED 8/2/11 to 12/1/11  
EXEMPT EXPEDITED FULLBOARD  
DATE APPROVED 8/2/11

cc: HS file number Lux HS12-018

