Another Glance at the Want Ads:  
Forensic Positions 1990 through 1994

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Over the past several years, forensic practice has attracted significant scholarly attention. The speaking rates of participants at the National Debate Tournament have been examined (Colbert, 1981). The value attached to competitive forensics by university administrators has been assessed (Littlefield, 1991). The relationship between debate training and the enhancement of critical thinking skills has been investigated (Colbert, 1987; Hill, 1993). And, the effect of gender upon success in debate has received attention in recent years (Bruschke and Johnson, 1994; Shelton and Shelton, 1993). Despite these diverse scholarly investigations associated with competitive forensics, the pivotal role of the forensic director or coach has received little empirical examination.

Since the early 1900s, when the first debate coaches were hired by colleges and universities (Cowperthwaite and Baird, 1954), the forensic director or coach has played a central role in the activity. Forensic directors and coaches carry a heavy load, for they are often simultaneously responsible for student recruitment, budgetary decisions, tournament planning and administration, as well as all the other duties attached to any faculty position. The forensic coach has been described as a "jack-of-all-trade" teacher (Bartanen 1994) who needs to be familiar with administrative, coaching, and traditional teaching roles. Indeed, Hollihan (1990) has argued that the forensic coach possesses a unique "job description" that entails roles as coach, counselor, and teacher. Porter and Sommerness (1991) noted that the director of forensics is even legally responsible for many aspects of a forensic program.

In addition to pursuing the typical professional, scholarly, and service roles associated with other faculty positions, the forensic coach is often required to commit to many extraordinary tasks, including driving "all night through inclement weather to get home in time to teach the next morning" (Hollihan, 1990, 437). Bartanen (1994) noted the numerous duties attached to forensic positions:
The faculty person (often called the Director of Forensics or the forensics coach) is responsible for both the administration and teaching functions. The person is sometimes given release time or other compensation. Usually, the college or university expects the Director of Forensics to perform the other teaching, research, and service activities normally expected of a faculty member. This can make the forensics position a difficult responsibility and causes considerable turnover in the position (22-23). Thus, forensics positions represent unique professional qualities.

Some important literature for and about forensic coaches and directors is available. A number of significant texts have been written regarding the process of directing a forensic program (Faules, Rieke and Rhodes, 1976; Klopf and Lohman, 1973; Bartanen, 1994). Other works have provided detailed assistance for the planning and administration of forensic tournaments (Brown and Swisher, 1980; Zarefsky and Goodnight, 1980). And, a number of scholarly pieces have addressed issues related to the judging of forensic contests (Balthrop, 1983; Gass, 1988; Snider, 1992; Ulrich, 1981). These works represent a valuable contribution to preparation for and examination of positions in forensics, yet scant empirical investigation has been focused upon such positions.

One of the earliest attempts to garner information regarding the characteristics and responsibilities of forensic directors and coaches was a survey conducted by Cameron (1964). Cameron's survey generated a good deal of material regarding the common characteristics of collegiate directors of forensics. He found that the typical director was an assistant professor, or higher, within a speech department; that the typical director had little or no experience with high school forensics, but had been associated with intercollegiate forensics for six years or more; and that the typical director had completed a master's degree, and either holds or was pursuing a doctorate. Cameron also found that most directors had competed in intercollegiate forensics as undergraduates.

An effort similar to Cameron's was conducted by Klopf and Rives (1965). Klopf and Rives surveyed both intercollegiate and high school forensic directors. Klopf and Rives found that most
intercollegiate directors of forensics received some level of released
time for coaching and administration; that most programs were
carried out by one person; and that teaching experience varied
widely among directors of forensics. They also found that many
forensic directors believed that their professional advancement was
in some way impaired by their responsibilities in forensics.

Despite the valuable information generated by these early
studies, they provided little guidance for those interested in the
contemporary responsibilities of forensic directors. Further, both
surveys questioned individuals who held forensic positions;
however, they did not attempt to portray the duties that an
individual must consider for entry into the field or the characteristics
that departments seek when searching for candidates for these
positions. These surveys also failed to examine the types of
activities, debate formats and individual events, associated with
forensic positions, and they did not examine the specific teaching
responsibilities associated with the positions.

A more recent attempt to assess the characteristics and
responsibilities associated with forensic positions was conducted by
Shelton (1986). Shelton examined classified ads for forensic
positions posted in *Spectra*. This examination produced a number
of findings. Shelton found that the typical forensic position sought
a candidate who had completed the doctorate and who could be
appointed at the rank of assistant professor to a tenure-track
position. He also found that forensic candidates would most often
teach argumentation and fundamentals of speech courses. Shelton's
approach appears to be a good step in the direction of cataloging the
features associated with available forensic positions.

Unfortunately, Shelton analyzed forensics positions over a
decade ago and he included only positions advertised in 1982 and
1983. Thus, he offered no examination of relative interest in
individual events or in various debate formats. His study also failed
to distinguish between those positions designed for a director of
forensics, as opposed to an assistant or associate position.

Many questions remain unanswered with regard to forensic
positions. Do current characteristics associated with these positions
 correspond with findings from the 1960s or even the early 1980s?
Is greater emphasis placed upon individual events or debate?  Are
NDT, CEDA, or other debate formats more often featured? How many programs seek assistant directors or coaches? And what other features are important in the contemporary forensic environment? The present study addresses such questions.

METHOD

Data was gathered from classified ads for forensic positions appearing in *Spectra*, a publication of the Speech Communication Association (SCA). An SCA publication was selected because the vast majority of forensic programs are housed in speech communication or communication studies departments (Sorenson 1983; Stepp and Thompson, 1988). *Spectra* is published monthly, except for July, and is mailed to all SCA members. Fifty-five issues, from January 1990 through December 1994, were examined. A total of 2,356 classified ads appeared in these fifty-five issues, with an average of nearly 43 (42.84) ads each month.

Classified ads in *Spectra* may include information regarding qualifications and responsibilities associated with listed positions. Qualifications often include degree and experience requirements. Responsibilities often pertain to courses that are expected to be taught by candidates, as well as other duties associated with the positions. Information regarding rank of appointment and tenure, or term options, is also provided. Forensic listings often include information concerning forensic activities: individual events and debate formats. Information may also be provided indicating whether the candidate is to serve as director or assistant for a program. All of this information was examined.

All forensic positions were included for study, such as listings for directors of forensics, debate coaches, individual events coaches, and assistants in each area. Each position was considered only once, although a number of listings appeared in multiple issues.

Information regarding interest for involvement with individual events or debate was gathered and tabulated from the ads, as was information regarding the debate format associated with the position. Information regarding tenure, degree, rank, and experience was treated in a similar manner, as was information whether the position was for an assistant. Courses that candidates might be expected to
teach were tabulated and placed in rank order. Appropriate computations to generate percentage information were conducted.

RESULTS

A total of 185 forensic listings were examined. Nearly 60% (59.46%) of the listings indicated that the candidate would be expected to be involved with debate activities. Of this total, 15 listings (13.64%) indicated a preference for involvement with NDT debate, while 28 listings (25.45%) indicated a preference for involvement with CEDA debate. Only 4 listings (3.64%) indicated a preference for some other debate format, such as American Debate Association, National Educational Debate Association, Canadian Parliamentary, and public debate. Seventy-two of the 185 position listings (38.20%) indicated a preference for individuals to be involved with individual events. (Table I)

A total of 144 (77.84%) of the 185 listings reported information regarding term of appointment. Ninety (62.50%) of the listings indicated that the position would be eligible for tenure. Another 54 (37.50%) of the listings specified a term appointment.

A total of 164 (88.65%) of the listings reported information concerning degree requirements. Just over 60% (60.98%) or 100 of the 185 listings required the doctorate. Sixty-four (39.02%) of the listings required only a master's degree. Both degree requirements were expected in the communication discipline.

Just over 70% (70.51%) or 131 of the listings indicated a specific rank at which individuals would be appointed (Table II). Only 3 (2.29%) positions expressed a preference for an associate or assistant professor. Sixty-nine (52.67%) positions specified appointment at the rank of assistant professor. Another 19 (14.50%) indicated that appointment would be at the rank of assistant professor or instructor. Twenty-four (18.32%) listings specified appointment at the rank of instructor, while 16 (12.21%) specified appointment at the rank of lecturer. Just over 30% (30.53%) of positions were at the rank of instructor or lecturer. Over half (51.35%) of the listings expressed an interest in individuals with previous experience in forensics.

A total of 38 different courses were cited as those that forensic
candidates might be expected to teach. The 10 most frequently mentioned courses included public speaking, argumentation, fundamentals, interpersonal communication, persuasion, small group communication, rhetorical/communication theory, oral interpretation/performance studies, organizational communication, and rhetoric and public address (Table III). Other courses cited included rhetorical criticism, business and professional communication, interviewing, and a variety of mass communication subjects.

Forty-six (24.86%) of the 185 listings indicated that the candidate would be expected to assist with the forensic program. Over half (56.10%) of these listings required only a master's degree, whereas 43.90% required the doctorate. Nearly 60% (57.14%) of these positions indicated that a term appointment would be offered, while 42.86% offered a tenure-track appointment. Only 1 of these positions specified appointment at the rank of associate, while 34.48% specified appointment at the rank of assistant professor. Another 13.79% indicated that appointment would be at the rank of assistant professor or instructor. The rank of instructor was indicated by 31.03% of these positions, and lecturer was indicated by 17.24%.

DISCUSSION

The results have several implications for individuals interested in pursuing a career in forensics and for departments seeking candidates for such positions. Support for various debate formats may vary over time, but a general commitment to debate appears to be quite strong. In addition, the 72 listings that indicated a preference for individuals to work with individual events suggests that such forms of competitive speaking are also healthy. The results suggest that individuals who elect to specialize in either debate or individual events can find ready opportunities to practice that specialty.

The information regarding debate formats is also informative. Although a great diversity of debate activities exist—NDT, CEDA, ADA, NEDA, L-D, public, and parliamentary—most programs seeking candidates to work with debate do not specify a particular
format. One may account for this by noting that the format employed by a given program is often well-known in the debate community, and that such preferences could be made clear during the selection process.

The data regarding term and tenure appointments is reasonably consistent with previous research. Shelton (1986) also found that a clear majority of appointments were made to tenure-track positions. The term appointments appear to be correlated with those listings seeking individuals to assist with forensic programs, since nearly 60% of those positions involved term appointment. This suggests that the prospect of tenure is still in sight for a majority of those individuals pursuing a career in forensics; however, a significant number of assistant positions do not offer long-term job security.

The data concerning degree requirements is also reasonably consistent with previous research. Cameron (1964), Klopf and Rives (1965), and Shelton (1986) all found the doctoral degree to be preferred. This may be related in part to the fact that many of these positions are tenure-track and a terminal degree is a routine requirement to that end. This may also reflect the general trend in higher education to place an emphasis on the doctorate in a tight job market. However, nearly 40% of the positions required only the master's degree. This is correlated in part with the number of positions seeking individuals to assist with forensic programs, as over half of these positions required only the masters. The individual interested in a long term, stable career in forensics would still be well-advised to complete the doctorate. However, those individuals who have completed only the masters will not find themselves excluded from the forensic job market. Bartanen (1994) has argued that turnover is high among those holding forensic positions and part of that may be caused by the increasing number of term appointments in the field.

The data concerning rank of appointment is generally in line with that regarding degree requirements and term of appointment. Over half of the positions specified appointment at the rank of assistant professor, typically a tenure-track appointment for those holding the doctorate. The fact that only three positions indicated the possibility of appointment at the rank of associate suggests that few departments seek individuals with established credentials, for
they prefer candidates at the entry level. Just over 30% of the listings indicated appointment at the rank of instructor or lecturer. Such appointment preferences are true for nearly half of those who are sought as candidates to assist with forensic programs. Taken as a whole, this data suggests that individuals pursuing careers in forensics should be prepared to be appointed at the rank of assistant professor or lower.

The data concerning courses that individuals seeking forensic positions are expected to teach suggests that preparation as a communication generalist might be the wisest course of action for individuals interested in pursuing careers in forensics. The 38 different courses cited ranged from public communication, public speaking as well as business and professional speaking, to interpersonal communication specialties, such as family communication, conflict management, and nonverbal communication, to diverse specialties, such as public relations, gender communication, composition, and broadcasting. Each of the 22 areas of concentration listed for graduate programs in communication (Brooks and Berko, 1994) were represented in the forensic listings examined. This suggests that academic preparation in almost any area of concentration within communication could be translated into a forensic career.

The data regarding the most frequently cited course offerings (Table III) is quite illuminating. Public speaking and fundamentals are two of the most frequently cited courses, which indicates that such introductory courses are often assigned to individuals involved with forensics. This may be a departmental attempt to ease the burdens placed upon those individuals engaged in forensics. It could, equally, reflect the fact that many of the forensic positions are at the entry level and that introductory courses generate the greatest demand for faculty. Klopf and Rives (1965) found that nearly half of the individuals in their survey were fairly new to teaching. This may still be the case, as indicated by the heavy emphasis on introductory courses. The second-place ranking of argumentation in this ordering confirms the traditional relationship between debate and argumentation.

The fact that over half of all of the forensic listings indicated a preference for experience in the activity suggests that individuals
who plan to seek a career in forensics are well-advised to secure competitive experience, coaching experience, or both, in order to make themselves attractive candidates. This finding also suggests that most departments recognize that forensics is a unique activity that requires specialized training. This indicates some degree of respect for the uniqueness of the field.

As noted, the data regarding listings seeking individuals to assist with forensics programs is somewhat different from the more general data. Assistants are more likely to be required only to have completed the master's degree, to be appointed at the rank of instructor or lecturer, and to hold that position for a limited term. Although empirical evidence is lacking with regard to assistants, Bartanen (1994) has suggested that assistants in forensics are not nearly as typical or regular as in sports, which suggests that the director of forensics or coach must often go it alone. The present study lends credence to that conclusion because less than one quarter of all positions sought individuals to assist with forensic programs.

The present study has some possible limitations. For instance, one might argue that this data is very time-bound and cannot accurately reflect an ongoing view of forensic positions. This may be true. All potential research methods would, however, suffer from the same limitation. Further, the inclusion of data from a five-year period helps to assure that a reasonable reflection of information regarding forensic positions is portrayed.

Another limitation might be the failure to consider alternative sources for data on forensic positions, such as The Chronicle of Higher Education or the ICA Newsletter, a publication of the International Communication Association. This probably does not pose a serious impediment to the robustness of the present study. The Chronicle of Higher Education very rarely contains classified ads for positions not listed in Spectra and the ICA Newsletter virtually never posts classified ads for forensic positions. A brief, random check of these other publications tends to confirm the superiority of Spectra as a resource. Furthermore, Shelton (1986) argued that Spectra is "the most universal source for those seeking positions offered by Speech Communication departments" (124).

The present study suggests a number of areas ripe with potential for future research. One obvious possibility would be to replicate
the type of survey research conducted by Cameron (1964) and Klopf and Rives (1965). This would permit researchers to confirm that the items cited in listings accurately reflect what directors and coaches in forensics actually do. Indeed, such survey research could be conducted as an extension of the present study by directing questionnaires to the same programs that posted listings.

Another type of survey research would be to investigate the perspective of departments regarding forensic positions. Such research might determine if actual candidates reflect the material contained in listings. Further, such a survey might seek information to answer some of the questions that might have been raised by the present study, such as why are particular courses so frequently cited? what are the specific responsibilities associated with forensic positions? how are the various requirements and qualifications calculated in the actual hiring process? and how have contemporary social changes influenced the selection process for individuals seeking positions in forensic activities?

Investigators might wish to evaluate the relationship between specific forensic positions and other requirements for candidates. For example, one could determine whether candidates expected to coach both debate and individual events have different degree or background requirements. Such information could help illuminate some of the differences from one forensic position to another.

Another area that warrants future research is high school forensic positions. Klopf and Rives (1965) included an investigation of high school forensic directors in their study and Hensley (1972) structured a profile of high school forensic directors, yet little attention has been given to these positions since then. Research on the high school forensic coach or director might provide valuable information for those individuals seeking a career at that level.

In summary, the forensic coach or director has responsibilities that often entail coaching, administration, and teaching. The present study generated descriptive data that might help individuals and departments better understand the typical qualifications and responsibilities associated with forensic positions. Such data should help departments plan searches for a forensic candidate and individuals to plan a career that is "unique because it gives you an opportunity to work closely with gifted students, participate in a
worthwhile and challenging activity, and see the results of your teaching weekly throughout the season as students compete in tournaments" (Hollihan, 1990, 445-446).

REFERENCES


# TABLES

## Table 1: Forensic Activities

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<th>Activity</th>
<th>Listings</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>Individual Events</td>
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<td>Debate</td>
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<td>CEDA</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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## Table 2: Appointment

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<td>Assistant</td>
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<td>52.67</td>
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<td>Assistant/Instructor</td>
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<td>Instructor</td>
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<td>18.32</td>
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<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12.21</td>
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## Table 3: Ten Most Cited Courses

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<th>Rank</th>
<th>Course</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Public Speaking</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Argumentation</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Fundamentals</td>
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<td>Interpersonal</td>
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<td>Small Group</td>
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<td>Rhetorical/Communication Theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Organizational</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Rhetoric and Public Address</td>
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