

Efforts to Increase Diversity on College Forensic Teams

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Forensic programs are found "in all 50 states and range from rural high school programs with few participants to urban university programs that may sponsor a hundred or more competitors" (Bartanen, 1994, p. xiii). But within that broad range of programs, researchers criticize college and university teams for being elitist, homogeneous and, therefore, unrepresentative of societal demographic trends. Koslowski (1993) finds "many programs exhibit an elitism that discourages widespread participation. . . . Tournament qualifications, judging idiosyncrasies, entry level criteria, and specialized styles of presentation have created barriers that hinder total student involvement" (p. 2). Derryberry (1989) suggests "the total forensics program must remain sensitive to the problem of access in admission, theory, and practice" (p. 12). He notes "forensics programs have not escaped the harsh red pens or the annual conference tables where deliberations determine what programs remain and grow and which activities meet diminution or deletion" (p. 1). Swanson sees elitism and ethics as the two major crises facing forensics and warns that by 2001 the field may "create an elite group of people whose key skill is to talk 'forensics' to each other" (1989, pp. 22-23).

In light of the argument by some that forensics is fundamentally a pedagogical activity, a lack of diversity also may limit the effectiveness of forensics to educate scholars

(Derryberry, 1989; Kay 1990; Preston, 1991). Loge (1990) says the lack of opportunity for all to compete in forensics deprives some students of a valuable educational experience, and that the "lack of cultural diversity means that issues are not explored completely" (p. 5). The criticism assumes greater significance when viewed in light of the growing numbers of culturally and racially diverse students involved in higher education. By the mid-1990s, approximately 30 percent of all community college students were classified as non-white, while approximately 25 percent of all students attending four-year universities and colleges at that time were classified as non-white (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996).

This study focuses directly on diversity, defined here as the contrast between the established norm traditionally held by the forensics community in terms of sex, age, and race of competitors and coaches and the norms of the outside society. The purpose of this study is to examine the current level of diversity in forensic programs and the extent to which forensic programs have made efforts to increase the diversity of their participants and coaches. It also examines the techniques used in encouraging diversity and what factors help explain the variance between programs that made such efforts and those that did not. In terms of debate, the forensic norm has been identified by Loge (1990) as a white male domain; in terms of individual events, the forensic norm has been identified by Koslowski (1993) as a maintenance of the white status quo despite an expressed positive attitude toward diversification.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF FORENSIC PROGRAMS

In the long, 140-plus year history of forensic activities at American colleges and universities, there was little discussion of diversity until the last 10 years. Preston (1991) focused on the issue by developing a forensic philosophy geared specifically to

urban commuter colleges. He argued that for these educational institutions, an ideal forensic program "combines doing the greatest good for the greatest number with cultural diversity and effective and ethically sound forensics pedagogy" (p. 12). Preston's philosophy was not unprecedented, yet his call to incorporate an emphasis on cultural diversity within a forensics program was innovative. Beyond Preston, the subject of diversity within forensics has not been widely researched. Two studies that addressed the issue are Loge's 1990 examination of "Black Participation in Intercollegiate Debate" and Kosloski's 1993 study, "Considering the Role of the Physically Challenged Student in Individual Events Competitions."

Loge's survey, based on responses from 64 of the 201 CEDA schools, found only 40 of 692 debaters (5.7 percent) were black. Loge noted, "many directors of forensics expressed concern over the lack of black participants—yet only nine reported making special efforts to increase the ethnic and racial diversity of their teams" (p. 3). Loge concluded, "if we are to educate all of our students to the best of our abilities, then the lack of cultural diversity in CEDA clearly is a problem" (p. 7). Loge's study (1990) did not include non-CEDA forensic activities, such as individual events and National Debate Tournament debate. It focused exclusively on blacks and, therefore, excluded other diverse groups, such as women, Hispanics, Asian Americans, Native Americans, reentry students, and handicapped students.

Koslowski (1993) examined the demographics of physically challenged competitors in individual events. He surveyed 113 directors of individual events, drawn from the membership of the National Forensic Association and the American Forensic Association. Fifty-two schools responded; eight (or 15 percent) had at least one physically challenged student. Koslowski argues that diversity in forensics is not merely an ethical or pedagogical concern, but is also an economic one: "With ever-increasing budget cuts and ever-

decreasing administrative support, the forensics community must secure its future by working to reflect within its ranks the diversity and uniqueness of the community it serves" (p. 8).

The limitations of the Loge (1990) and Koslowski (1993) studies, especially in their focus on a single part of the forensics community, highlight the need for additional research in the area of diversity within forensics. While the forensic community has voiced some concern about the lack of diversity in its ranks, no study to date has provided comprehensive data that describes what efforts have been made to increase diversity across many types of forensic activities.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study seeks answer to the following questions:

- RQ 1. How diverse are college forensic programs in terms of the sex, age and race of their participants and coaches?
- RQ 2. To what extent do coaches make efforts to promote diversity on their teams?
- RQ 3. If diversity efforts have been made, what methods were the most common?
- RQ 4. To what degree is the effort to increase diversity explained by the variance in the age, sex, and race of its competitors and its coaches and the variance in the institutional characteristics of the teams?

Derryberry (1989) reminds us that "we who believe in the activity of forensics must continually ask important questions, queries which examine our programs and give direction for existence in the following decades" (p. 19). Additional research is warranted as the forensic community struggles with two significant issues: evidence of a lack of diversity and the general lack of quantitative research in the field

(Logue & Shea, 1989; also Scott & Birkholt, 1992; Porter, 1990; Kay, 1990; Logue, 1988; McBath, 1984). By examining these questions, this study hopes to provide evidence of whether forensics has indeed become an activity devoted to doing "the greatest good for the greatest number," as Preston suggested in 1991, or if a lack of diversity remains a problem for forensics.

METHOD

Sample

The study was based on a survey of the entire population of forensic directors at universities and colleges registered as members of the American Forensics Association (AFA), Phi Rho Pi, and the Cross Examination Debate Association (CEDA). To account for possible duplication, forensic programs registered in more than one association received only a single survey. The final population of the study was 566.

To aid in attaining an adequate response rate, the researchers initially sent an introductory letter and survey on November 1, 1996, to the 566 schools. The letter requested that the director of forensics at each institution complete and return a survey questionnaire with no name or identifying mark attached, thus assuring respondents of anonymity. A stamped addressed postcard was included with the survey. Respondents, if they so chose, could give their name and use the postcard to request a copy of the research. Beyond offering an incentive to participate in the study, the use of these postcards made it possible to monitor survey returns while maintaining participant anonymity. A second mailing was sent November 25, 1996, to those schools that still had not returned the postcards and yielded an additional 98 responses.

Of the 566 survey questionnaires mailed, 208 were returned. However, 10 were disallowed upon discovery the respondent was not involved with a speech and debate program,

but rather was responding on behalf of a criminal or medical forensic program or reporting the dissolution of a previous forensic program. Consequently, 198 valid responses were received, yielding a response rate of 35 percent.

The population parameters of the sex, race, and age of all forensic participants and coaches at colleges and universities in the United States are not known. However, the researchers were able to compute the population parameters in terms of (1) the type of school, and (2) the region of the country for the 566 schools initially surveyed (Appendix A). An analysis of the returned surveys showed the responses from two- and four-year schools in the sample approximated the percentage of each type school in the population; responses also reflected the general geographical breakdown of the schools surveyed. The sample, therefore, appears to be an accurate representation of the population for at least these two variables.

The responding schools were fairly evenly distributed across each region of the country, except for a lower number from the Northeast (Appendix B). Almost half the programs (44 percent) offered both individual and debate events, with the balance split fairly evenly between the two types of activities. (For a more comprehensive discussion of the demographic data, including a breakdown of two-year vs. four-year programs, see Valdivia, 1997).

Survey Instrument

The survey also assessed the level of diversity among the student participants and coaching staffs. Respondents were asked to list the number of student participants by sex, age level (17-20, 21-25, 26-30, 31-35, 36 and older), and race (white, black, Asian American, Hispanic). Respondents were asked to identify coaches in the same categories. The respondents were asked to describe, in terms of their overall team, whether their program was at a two-year or four-year school, the state in which it was

located (later recoded into four regions of the country), whether the team took part only in debate, individual events or both, and to which national forensic organization(s) they belonged. Finally, the survey asked, "Since 1991, has any special attempt been made to increase diversity levels in your forensics program? . . . If yes, what has been done to increase forensics diversity in your program? Please be specific." (Despite the work on handicapped team members done by Koslowski (1993) and growing interest in the rights of gay students, this study does not focus on those two groups because of its broad scope and the presumed low percentages of participants.) The final survey instrument was pretested by directors of forensics and coaches at Butte Community College in Oroville, California, and the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California.

Analysis

In the first stage of analysis, the percentage of schools stating they had made an effort to increase team diversity over the past five years is reported. The schools that reported making such efforts then were asked what specific steps they had taken. In the final stage of analysis, multiple regression was used to better understand which characteristics of forensic participants, coaches, and programs explained why some schools undertook diversity efforts. Multiple regression allows the researcher to analyze the impact of each independent variable on a dependent variable while holding a set of additional independent variables constant. It also allows the researcher to gauge the collective impact of all the independent variables and see how much of the variance they explain in the dependent variable.

The dependent variable in the study centered on whether respondents said they had promoted diversity on their teams. The characteristics of student participants and coaches and information about the teams in general served as independent variables. Since the dependent variable is dichotomous (0 = no

diversity effort, 1=yes diversity effort), the Logit multiple regression procedure was used. Logit is more efficient at analyzing a dichotomous dependent variable from a set of independent variables than other forms of regression (Aldrich & Nelson, 1984).

A hierarchical regression format was used to better understand the impact of participant, coach, and team characteristics. Variables representing the sex, age and race of the participants were entered into the first regression model. The corresponding variables for forensic coaches were added in a second regression model. Finally, team characteristics were added in a third regression model. This procedure allows the researcher to see more clearly the impact of the participants' characteristics, the coaches' characteristics, and the teams' characteristics.

Results

The 198 schools varied greatly in terms of the sex, age and race of participants and coaches (see Table 1). Each team had an average of seven female and six male students. The average team had nine participants between ages 17 and 20, three from age 21 to 25, and one who was age 26 and older. Each team had an average of 10 white participants and two minority group members. (The large standard deviations for such subgroups as females, males, and whites showed teams varied widely in terms of these variables.)

Table 1
Profile of Forensic Participants, Coaches, and Teams

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Efforts to Increase Diversity	0.31	0.46
<u>Team Participants</u>		
Female	7.21	4.91
Male	6.12	4.47
<u>Age</u>		
Age 17-20	8.54	6.39
21-25	3.22	3.31
26-30	0.58	1.54
31-35	0.17	0.51
36+	0.19	0.57
<u>Race</u>		
White	10.14	6.59
Black	1.19	2.02
Asian	0.50	1.11
Hispanic	0.64	1.20
<u>Team Coaches</u>		
Female	0.39	0.49
Male	1.32	1.21
20-25	0.64	1.12
26-30	0.48	0.72
31-36	0.51	0.68
37-45	0.37	0.66
46-50	0.15	0.37
51+	0.16	0.38
<u>Race</u>		
White	2.08	1.51
Non-white	0.16	0.47

NOTE: n=198. However, the 198 coaches supplied data on a total of 2,760 students and 463 coaches.

A male was three times more likely to be a head coach or assistant coach than a female. Most coaches were under age 37 and white.

Despite the call by forensic researchers for greater efforts to promote team diversity, coaches at more than two-thirds of the programs surveyed said they had made no effort to increase diversity in student participation in the past five years (Table 2). Only 31 percent of coaches (n=62) said their program had made such an effort, compared to 69 percent which said they had not. A comparison of responses from four-year vs. two-year schools showed no statistically significant difference; 67.4 percent of four-year colleges and universities answered that no effort to increase diversity had been initiated, while 70.5 percent of two-year schools responded in like manner.

Table 2
Efforts by Forensic Programs To Increase Diversity,
by Type of School

	All	<u>2-Year</u>	<u>4-Year</u>
Effort made	31.3%	29.5%	32.6%
Effort not made	68.7%	70.5%	67.4%
Total	100%	100%	100%
(n)	(198)	(61)	(135)
		$X^2 = .18, df=1, p > .05$	

The survey asked the 62 active coaches what specific steps they had taken to increase diversity in the past five years

(Table 3). More than one-third (37.1 percent) said they used general promotional strategies to increase the diversity of forensic participants. Other coaches cited efforts to target specific types of students (minority students, 19.4 percent; women, 9.7 percent; reentry students, 8.1 percent; women and foreign students, 6.5 percent; foreign students, 4.8 percent). Coaches also mentioned efforts to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of their coaching staffs (6.5 percent), holding activities fairs (3.2 percent), recruiting at high schools (1.6 percent), and general recruitment workshops (1.6 percent).

Table 3
Specific Efforts To Increase Diversity

<u>Activity</u>	<u>% Cited</u>
Promotion	37.1%
Recruit Minority Students	19.4%
Recruit Women Students	9.7%
Recruit Reentry Students	8.1%
Recruit Women & Foreign St.	6.5%
Hire Racial/Ethnic Staff	6.5%
Recruit Foreign Students	4.8%
Hold Activities Fair	3.2%
Recruit at High School	1.6%
Recruitment Workshops	1.6%

Note: Multiple responses were recorded from the 62 coaches who said they had made efforts to diversify in the past five years.

The final stage of the analysis focused on factors that might help explain why some forensic programs made efforts to promote diversity and others had not. (Table 4). The first regression model shows that characteristics of the student

participants explained 10 percent of the variance ($r^2 = .10$) in the dependent variable of whether any diversity effort had been made. Several variables were significantly related to diversity. Teams that already had larger numbers of women participants in 1996 were less likely to have made an effort to diversify ($r = -.16$). However, those teams with younger student participants, aged 17-20 and 21-25, were more likely to undertake diversity efforts ($r = .14$, $r = .19$, respectively). Teams with larger numbers of students of age 36 and higher also reported making more efforts to further promote diversity. Race and ethnicity were not significantly related to diversity efforts; whether teams already had large or small numbers of minority participants did not significantly explain whether the team made efforts to further diversify.

Table 4
Hierarchical Regression Analysis of Variables Associated with Efforts to Increase Diversity (Logit coefficients)

Participant	Regression 1	Regression 2	Regression 3
Male	+	+	+
Female	-.16*	-.24**	-.33***
Age 17-20	.14**	.22***	.29***
21-25	.19**	.27***	.35***
26-30	.10	.05	.13
31-35	-.19	-.13	.30
36 +	.78*	.92*	.92*
White	+	+	+
Black	.07	.06	.11
Asian	-.10	-.19	-.30
Hispanic	-.00	-.03	.08
Coaches			
Male		+	+
Female		.67**	.97***
20-25		-.38*	-.42*
26-30		-.83**	-.94**
31-36		-.32	-.57
37-45		-.11	-.06
46-50		.15	.44
51 +		-.30	-.34
White			+
Non-white		.07	-.01

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<u>Program</u>				
2-year			+	
4-year			1.44 [#]	
West			+	
Midwest			.10	
South			.30	
Northeast			.15	
Both individual and debate			+	
Individual only			1.01 [#]	
Debate only			1.59 [*]	
CEDA			+	
AFA			.42	
NFA			1.03 [*]	
PRP			1.68 [#]	
PKD			-.36	
NPDA			.86	
NDT			-.86	
Constant	-1.72***	-1.89***	-5.33***	
X ²	21.68**	35.46**	52.57***	
Pseudo r ²	.10	.16	.22	
n	195	192	189	

NOTE: ⁺omitted control category (needed for nominal independent variables).

*p < .10; **p < .05 ***p < .01 ****p < .001

Pseudo r² = x² / x² + n

The second regression model adds the coaching characteristics to the student characteristics, increasing the variance explained from 10 percent to 16 percent. All of the variables that were significant in the first model remained so in this expanded environment. Several characteristics of coaches

also were significantly related to diversity efforts. A very strong, positive relationship existed between the number of women coaches and diversity efforts ($r = .67$); the more women coaches, the greater the effort by the team to promote diversity. Teams with younger coaches, in the 20-25 and 26-30 age range, were significantly less likely to make efforts to promote diversity. The race of the coaches was not a significant factor in explaining diversity efforts.

The final regression model adds team characteristics to the student and coaching characteristics. Together, the independent variables in Regression 3 explain 22 percent of the variance in diversity efforts. All of the variables significantly related to diversity in the first two models remained significant. Teams sponsored by four-year schools, those with just individual or debate events, and those affiliated with NFA and PRP were positively related to efforts to promote diversity. The region of the country where the program was located was not significantly related to diversity efforts.

In summary, the study found a majority of college forensic participants were young and white students, but there were more women participants than men and two of every 12 students were from minority groups. Coaches were far more likely to be white men under age 37. Less than two-thirds (31.3 percent) of forensic programs reported efforts to promote diversity. Several characteristics of forensic participants, coaches, and teams were significantly related to efforts to increase diversity: teams with female coaches and those with larger numbers of young forensic competitors were more likely to have undertaken diversity efforts.

DISCUSSION

A lack of baseline data makes it impossible to conclude whether today's college and university forensic teams are more diverse than those of the recent or distant past. Women, who

now constitute a majority of college students overall (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996), constitute a majority of the forensic participants studied here. The percentages of forensic participants from minority groups and the over-26 age group trail the comparable percentages among all college students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1996; Chronicle of Higher Education, 1995). Yet any stereotype of all forensic participants as young, white, and male finds little support in this study.

Most teams report making no effort to further increase diversity in the ranks of student participants, despite repeated calls in the literature to do so. The lack of effort may be a result of the time demands inherent in forensics, rather than antipathy toward such changes. As Boylan (1994) notes:

Forensics may place a greater demand on students and faculty than any other college or university course. Even when students and faculty are not traveling to a tournament, their free time is usually spent writing, revising, and practicing for the next tournament. Furthermore, forensics coaches often have other classes to teach, professional obligations to meet, administrative responsibilities to fulfill, and personal commitments to consider. (49)

The high stress level accompanying forensic involvement, in combination with a low compensation level (Gill 1990), may also contribute to the small percentage of coaches actively involved in increasing diversity levels in forensic programs. Whatever the reason, this study shows the warnings that the current system has not encouraged diversity and has limited the ability of quality students to compete (Derryberry, 1989; Loge, 1990) remain relevant today.

One avenue for further research lies in discovering what motivated 31 percent of coaches to invest their time, energy, and money in promoting forensic diversity, and what, if any, were

the returns on their investments. Were these programs successful (or not) in increasing diversity, and if so, what worked (or did not work) in their attempts at diversification?

In light of the study's findings that most coaches made no attempt to increase diversity, a second unanswered question arises: Why not? Does the forensic community no longer believe—if it ever did—that increased diversity is an important aim? Is it satisfied with current levels? Specifically, what are the forensic community's attitudes toward diversification?

The regression analysis shows both the complexity of the diversity issue and the need for additional work in this area. This study does pinpoint some variables closely associated with increased diversity efforts, such as programs with female coaches and younger participants, and some variables negatively associated with diversity, such as programs with younger coaches and those that already have more female competitors. Yet most of the variance in diversity efforts remained unexplained in the final regression model.

The issues of homosexuality and physical disability also deserve further study as components of diversity within forensics programs. Although not reported in this study, some respondents self-identified as homosexual, asking why a separate category addressing homosexuality had not been included. Although this number was low, the issue highlights another potential avenue for future research. A second area not reported by this study was the participation of disabled competitors and coaches. Although responses were limited, their very existence reveals the potential for future research, perhaps replicating and extending Koslowski's 1993 study.

Finally, any effort to increase cultural diversity in forensics might consider what impact the communication patterns in minority cultures might have on participation in such activities. A minority culture that has a strong oral tradition but emphasizes discussion rather than persuasion, or one that tends not to draw attention to oneself, might complicate well-meaning

efforts by coaches to increase that culture's diversity in forensics.

This study notes some diversity in the composition of the average college forensics team, despite the fact most coaches are not increasing efforts in this area. Whether current efforts meet Preston's call (1991) for "doing the greatest good for the greatest number with cultural diversity, and effective and ethically sound forensic pedagogy" is likely to remain an ongoing debate in the field.

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**Appendix A Comparison of
Population and Sample Characteristics**

	Surveys sent to population	Surveys received from sample
Type of school		
2-year school	40%	34%
4-year school	60%	66%
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TOTAL	100%	100%
(n)	(566)	(198)
Region		
West	25%	27%
Midwest	32%	28%
South	32%	34%
Northeast	10%	11%
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TOTAL	100%	100%
(n)	(566)	(195)*

*Three schools did not identify their state.

Appendix B
Profile of Forensic Teams Surveyed

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Overall programs		
2-year	0.31	0.46
4-year	0.69	0.46
West	0.27	0.45
Midwest	0.28	0.45
South	0.34	0.47
Northeast	0.11	0.31
Both individual and	0.44	0.50
Individual only	0.27	0.45
Debate only	0.29	0.45
CEDA	0.51	0.50
AFA	0.65	0.48
NFA	0.24	0.43
PRP	0.25	0.44
PKD	0.19	0.39
NPDA	0.17	0.37
NDT	0.17	0.37

NOTE: n=198. However, the 198 coaches supplied data on a total of 2,760 students and 463 coaches.
