The Need for a Forensic Civic Virtue
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Billings succinctly expresses the problem in competitive forensics. Students, intent on doing well and succeeding, give the judges what they want. As a result, ethical concerns are ignored or minimized by competitors, judges, and coaches. I agree with the author that judges play an important role in the reestablishment of ethical competitors. Coaches and directors certainly act as role models and arbiters of what is ethical communication, but once the student gets into the room, it is the judge who actually sees the student present the information. It is also important that as the information age gives way to the information overload age all audience members learn and practice the skills of critical listening. Our words to our students that they need to critically examine the source, context, and content of evidence they use in their speeches is hollow advice when we as judges are sponges at the back of the room, content to merely count sources and look for the occasional international or otherwise "sexy" source.

I also agree with Billings that the national forensic organizations have a stake in the ethical practices of its competitors. An intercollegiate "style manual" would provide a great service to the discipline and the students, especially if the manual was consistent between the American Forensic Association and the National Forensic Association.

I disagree, however, that the primary onus belongs to the judges or the forensic organizations. As the author reminds us, we rely on lay judges at tournaments, and given the pitiful amount we pay them we can hardly expect Supercritics well versed in the particulars of intercollegiate forensics of the day. More importantly, another book of rules does little, by itself, to impart to students why these rules exist, why proper, complete and accurate citation of evidence is important. And more rules will not help with the enforcement of the rules.

Instead I would go even further than the author. Or rather, I would go farther back in the history of rhetoric to suggest solutions that place the responsibility on the shoulders of the rhetors and those who teach them.

From the very inception of rhetoric, theorists and teachers of the art have been faced with the issue of ethics. The art of rhetoric is powerful; through rhetoric speakers can "make savage nations civil, wild people tame, and cruell tyrants not only to become meeke, but likewise mercifull" (Peacham, ABifiv). The capacity for a speaker to use the power of rhetoric for good as well as for evil makes rhetoric morally questionable. Rhetoric is equally available to the moral orator striving...
to lead the soul of the audience and the nefarious despot pandering to the lowest desires of the masses; as Augustine wrote in On Christian Doctrine, "...the faculty of eloquence is available for both sides, and is of very great service in the enforcing either of wrong or right..." (Book IV). Thus many early theorists and pedagogues of rhetoric conscientiously developed criteria and guidelines for ethical speakers, a person who Plato said "knows the various forms of the soul... [and is] able to speak and to do everything, so far as possible, in a manner pleasing to the gods" (Phaedrus, 272-273). Twentieth-century teachers of rhetoric are faced with the same problems of ethics in speaking. Unlike the early days of rhetorical theory, however, twenty-first century rhetors are not as thoroughly inculcated in the ethical and moral obligations of an orator.

Instead, we tell our students that forensic competition is a "game" and intercollegiate forensics is a separate culture with different rules and behaviors than "the outside world." Aden (1991), among others, has criticized this perspective on forensics, rightly stating that it removes forensic practices from those of the real world. As a result student competitors aspire to both "pass" in the forensics culture and win at tournaments. Directors may post the rules of competition in the office or squadroom but there is no discussion about why these rules exist and their applicability to post-forensics speaking. In addition to this lack of instruction in proper citation, forensics students are not systematically educated in how to construct arguments and apply theories of persuasion. Usually a student says they want to do a persuasive speech, or even better, comes with an idea and preliminary research. We give them basic information on organizational patterns like problem-solution or Monroe's Motivated Sequence, we give suggestions on style and support, and then send them on their merry way to compete. As a result we don't provide students with the information and skills they need to draft a persuasive or informative speech that appropriately uses evidence. Instead they pick this information up "on the streets," from veteran competitors who tell the students how to win by citing lots of sources and from judges who write the same comments on their ballots.

We need to follow the rules that already exist in forensics. We should not only provide students with clear explications of the rules of competition, including citation of sources, but we should place these rules within the greater context of the rights and responsibilities of orators who possess "civic virtue ("arete")" (Conley 20). When students rely more heavily on data and less on providing the warrant or reasoning in their argument, we cannot hold them accountable unless they have been instructed on how to effectively build an argument. Too often coaches, judges, and competitors think someone else will or has confronted violations of ethical rules. When we know or ought to know about an unethical practice, we must report it. We need to teach our students to be moral and ethical communicators because the ultimate responsibility and power is theirs, not ours.

**References**


