"First Among Equals" is a common phrase used at the University of Minnesota to refer to the Director of Forensics (DF). The Assistant Director of Forensics (ADF) is "Second Among Equals." These "titles" are particularly appropriate for the Minnesota positions because they reflect the way the program is currently administered—under a co-directorship. The most striking explanation for this format is that the DF and the ADF are graduate students. Although it is not unique to have a forensic program completely administered by graduate students, it is rare. There are some issues unique to such a program and some issues that apply to all programs. The University of Minnesota Forensics Program itself has already been described (Endres and Anderson, 1986). Numerous articles have been written and panels have addressed the Director of Forensics position. However, there has been a significant lack of discussion on the role of the Assistant Director of Forensics. Therefore, this paper will add some new insights into the role of the Assistant Director of Forensics as seen through the eyes of a graduate student.

What does it mean to be an Assistant Director of Forensics who is a graduate student? Three areas will be discussed in answering this question: 1) being a student of Forensics at the graduate level; 2) the graduate student Assistant Director of Forensics working under a graduate student Director of Forensics; and 3) the Assistant Director of Forensics as a graduate student. Much of the information for this paper will be drawn specifically from the author's experience at the University of Minnesota and the experience of the students on the forensics team. The University of Minnesota program will be used as an example numerous times throughout this paper. The data is further supplemented by the panel discussion at the SCA Convention in November of 1988 in New Orleans, LA. It was titled, "The Assistant Director of Forensics: Just Who Is This Person?"

There are many issues to consider when examining the two roles of being a graduate student and being an ADF. In order to gain a more complete picture, it is important to examine both the


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positive and negative aspects. Whenever possible, it is also appropriate to examine not only the author's perspective, but also the perspective of the undergraduate students participating in forensics, the Speech Communication Department or other sponsoring group, and the forensics circuit.

What does it mean to be a student of forensics at the graduate level? For the undergraduate students of forensics, they see someone who is learning about the program just as they are. Even if an ADF has worked with a team before as a participant or a graduate student assistant, there is a lot to learn when making the switch to an ADF. Many hours are spent digesting information and learning the various roles to be fulfilled; it is a different perspective. Files need to be examined and skills need to be practiced to master the role of the ADF. The preparation is similar to creating a persuasion or a prose piece for competition. It requires a lot of work and then practice. The team members have fun watching this struggle for knowledge. It helps build rapport and trust to see someone in authority go through the same frustrations and eventual triumphs.

Yet, the undergraduate students on the forensic team may not like having to learn from another student. They are paying a lot of money to attend an institution of higher learning. They expect and deserve to work with top professors and other highly skilled individuals. In forensics, as with regular classes, the students deserve better. They feel a bit cheated when they do not have the benefits of a professor or a regular staff person as a coach. The graduate students are learning about forensics along with the undergraduate students; it may be unfair.

The Speech Communication Department (or other sponsoring group) finds itself in a position to offer a very unique experience. They are giving graduate students the opportunity to work with a forensics program. This work is much more than these individuals could gain in any other program. Unfortunately, the department is also giving itself a headache. Every two or three years the positions must be staffed again. Once people finish the MA or PhD, they move on to other work. The department is constantly finding new people to run the forensics program.

Personally, graduate students of forensics can learn a great deal by moving from the participant role into a judging and coaching role. By changing positions, students will learn new perspectives and gain new insights. The best advice for any graduate student of forensics is to become a vacuum. Everyone encountered can be a potential resource. The education may come from an undergraduate student on your own team or another team, other graduate-
students on the circuit, or other coaches on the circuit. Most people in forensics are very supportive. They are willing to listen to any questions or issues that may arise. After all, people in forensics are in the business of communication. Every person becomes a teacher, and every place becomes a classroom. Every experience can help define the appropriate role of Assistant Director of Forensics.

However, a graduate student of forensics will probably find more frustration than gratification. Graduate students are placed on an emotional and intellectual roller coaster, because very few are ever taught what it means to be a DF or an ADF. They are also rarely taught how to administer a forensics program or how to administer a tournament. Fifteen years ago at the National Developmental Conference on Forensics, participants agreed that departments have a "responsibility to support forensics by providing training to forensic scholars." Yet, Brand and DeBoer (1986) found very few colleges or universities currently offer formal training for graduate students of forensics. This has continued unchanged for a long time. The University of Minnesota is one of the many programs that offer absolutely no training on any aspect of forensics. For a program completely administered by graduate students, this situation is appalling. It is more often than not a learn-by-doing, hands-on experience.

Once in a while, there is an occasion where a PhD student receives some training at the MA level before transferring to a program like the University of Minnesota. This does not happen very often. Usually, the student will not receive any training at the MA level either. This obvious lack of resources only harms students and programs, yet graduate students know when applying to work with a forensics program that no training exists. If the person does not know, he/she should check into it. Ironically, as the Brand and DeBoer study brought out, the graduate student experience is viewed as a training ground for future coaches.

Also, graduate students may find it difficult to be scholars in forensics. Many programs may have only one or two other students working with forensics in the entire department. It is a small field, yet if the university does not actively support a forensics program with full-time faculty, it cannot draw this type of scholar. There will be no one there to discuss topics and ideas; learning does not stop at the classroom door.

What does it mean to be a graduate student Assistant Director of Forensics working under a graduate student Director of Forensics? In many ways, the answer to this question is completely
dependent on the individual personalities involved. After all, there is already a sense of equality because the two people are both graduate students; the titles do not change this fact. It seems more appropriate to examine this issue in light of the roles of the ADF and the DF regardless of the graduate student situation. Yet, some of the reasons these two people work well together or work poorly together may be strictly because they are graduate students.

As far as the undergraduate students are concerned, they see very little distinction between the ADF and the DF in the University of Minnesota program. The ADF and DF both teach clauses, both take classes, and both coach the team. The only difference they could identify based on title is who has the final say on money. This is a bit ironic, however, because the DF may not exercise power as he/she could. Some students may not even know there is a title difference, depending on how the ADF and DF run the program. Their students do not see a difference in the ADF and DF position.

The Speech Communication Department or other sponsoring program has made a conscious decision to appoint graduate students to the ADF and DF roles. Within these confines, they will usually try to appoint a PhD student to the DF position. The ADF may be a MA student or a PhD student. They will also tend to communicate with the person designated as the DF; they simply use the stated chain of command. This may make an ADF feel left out. However, the ADF and DF get paid the same amount of money and are given the same amount of release time. The DF does have the added responsibility of keeping the books. He/She also completes the necessary paperwork. Other programs may be administered a little differently; the differences between being an ADF and DF are affected more by title designations than graduate student status.

On the circuit, the graduate student ADF and graduate student DF seem to be treated the same way; there is no great distinction. Both are graduate students; however, there are occasions where the DF will be called upon because he is the DF. His/Her graduate student status is not a concern.

An ADF who finds him/herself working under a graduate student DF will have a very rewarding experience. There are some drawbacks, but they are far outweighed by the positive aspects. Personalities will dictate the terms of the relation of ADF to DF. At the University of Minnesota, the work and decisions are shared. This means a horizontal line can be drawn between the ADF and DF positions. It is seen as a co-directorship rather than
as superior and subordinate position. This definition of role is largely due to the fact that both people are graduate students. There is no built-in hierarchy due to experience or education level. As co-directors, responsibilities are shared; both are starting at the same level for the most part. Both do not know what to do at times. Both make housing and transportation plans. Both decide what tournaments to attend and who will travel with the team. Both decide whether students are ready to go to a tournament with an event. Under a co-directorship, the graduate students work together on every aspect of administering the forensics program.

In their relationships with the students, the coaches in a graduate student-administered program will probably not make a distinction between the ADF and DF. Students are encouraged to go to either person to ask questions and gain information. This is due to a belief in working with strengths, but developing weak areas. However, the roles with the students will probably be different. Each person will be good at different aspects of coaching. Sometimes the students may want to talk with a female and other times a male. Some coaches may be better at coaching oral interpretation and others better at coaching public address. Students decide who they are more comfortable working with on any one issue. The students are bright enough to pick up on what each coach has to offer, and these undergraduates will go to the appropriate coach.

In the University of Minnesota's forensics program, the ADF and DF are very different from one another. These differences help create a balance within the program. The philosophies tend to be the same, but the approaches are very different. The ADF and DF encourage one another to handle situations on their own. Yet they share their encounters afterwards to check whether the situation was handled well. This keeps the other one up-to-date with what is happening on the team. It also prevents power struggles the students may want to create between the ADF and DF. In other words, the key is communication between the ADF and DF. Also, people should work with strengths regardless of whether the role they are filling is as ADF or DF.

There is one aspect that makes it difficult to work under a graduate student DF. Many graduate students assume they can develop a mentor or a role model in forensics like in any other field. The ADF naturally turns to the DF for this role model. Yet, there is no role model for graduate students when a program is administered completely by graduate students. There is not a lot of opportunity to develop a mentoring relationship with someone in the same position as yourself and the same age. A problem exists
because the ADF position is often seen as a stepping stone to a DF position; yet, this is no way to train an ADF. When the Forensics field is asking for formally trained coaches, this type of situation is poor preparation for learning how to direct a program. Learning about forensics from the graduate student position adds a whole new dimension—not all of it pleasant.

What does it mean to be an Assistant Director of Forensics who is a graduate student? It basically means that the person is forced to be able to switch hats from coach to teacher to student and back again in an instant. Granted, these roles are probably not any different from some roles full-time faculty must fill, but the graduate student is feeling the pull of this demand for the first time. As has been discussed for years, the ADF has to be a coach, counselor, administrator, teacher, professional, and friend at the same time. Being a graduate student Assistant Director of Forensics has its pros and cons.

The graduate student Assistant Director of Forensics can provide some wonderful opportunities for the undergraduates involved in the program. For the students on the forensics team, they like having another for a coach. During some interviews conducted in December of 1988, the University of Minnesota students made several interesting comments. "You can relate to us better by understanding what we are going through." They see a graduate student who remembers what it is like to be a college student. They also feel a graduate student is more in touch with what goes on—what works and what does not work. "I like being able to relate to you as a peer—not a coach—sometimes." "You give more time to the team." Even though the undergraduate students know graduate students are students, they see this person giving a lot of time to their needs. Finally, they feel that graduate students like to have more fun and have more energy to work with a team.

On the negative side, the undergraduate participants in Forensics feel that it is difficult to work constantly with new coaches. They just get to know and trust a coach, and the person leaves. They also notice the high turnover and do not like it. They see how difficult it is to build a program with the staff constantly changing. The undergraduates also feel a bit cheated that they are missing out on some information. The graduate student may not have as much experience as a full-time faculty member. Finally, the undergraduates do not like to see skills being "shipped off" to other schools. The undergraduates experience fear and apprehension over what happens when the ADF and DF go off to other teams. This issue exists whether the ADF and DF are graduate
students or not, since it is a fact of life that people change positions; this issue is simply more prevalent with a graduate student-administered program. Students may find themselves asking a lot more questions.

For the Speech Communication Department or other sponsoring group, a graduate student is a lot cheaper to appoint than a full-time faculty member to the ADF position. Brownlee (1988) points out that graduate students help reduce program costs. They are "cheap, ignorant labor." The Department must still commit some staff and money, but it is more cost-effective if graduate students are used. Even if the program cannot find a full-time faculty member, they can keep the program afloat with graduate students. It pacifies most of the vocal people by keeping the program alive.

Unfortunately, the department or other sponsoring group must keep finding the staff to fill the position of ADF. Sometimes, it can be difficult to find qualified people to administer a forensics program. Some people have never worked with this area of communication. Others know it takes a great deal of time to work with a program—time they are not willing to invest. These people are qualified, but they are not interested. They want to finish their programs as soon as possible, or they may have other interests filling their time.

As for the forensic circuit, they see a graduate student ADF as another potential employee upon graduation. This person could work as an ADF or as a DF. It would depend on the particular university or college, whether the ADF would move into another ADF position or up to a DF position.

There is a problem in having a graduate student ADF on the circuit. This person is not fully included by the other coaches. The graduate student ADF is administering a program and has all the responsibilities this includes. This person must attend various district or state meetings; yet it does not seem to matter. The graduate student is usually excluded from committees and many other decision-making bodies (Endres and Anderson, 1986). Sometimes, the person is treated as a graduate student and sometimes as an ADF.

A person who is a graduate student and the ADF will find the opposing roles both rewarding and problematic. One area to note is the experience gained. The graduate student ADF is given the rare opportunity truly to administer a program. This will look good on the resume. This person actually has a position of power which involves making real decisions all year long. It is more than letting
a graduate student assistant be in charge of one complete tournament sometime during the year.

This person is not simply a graduate student either; he/she has a title. As a result, the graduate student ADF may be treated a little more like a colleague in the department than the graduate assistants not working with the forensic program. The quality of that experience is obviously debatable, however.

Personally, the negatives are outweighed by the positives. One problem is determining the roles that must be fulfilled. With no mentor, no role model, and no formal training, some graduate students may discover their roles simply by accident. These roles include safety monitor, career counselor, administrator, teacher, coach, chauffeur, parent, counselor, and friend. For instance, I had no idea that I would have to be a counselor to the students, yet little is done to prepare graduate students for these roles (Kostoll & McKeever, 1988; Kirch, 1988). This lack of preparation becomes frustrating for both the students and the coaches.

There are also a lot of high expectations. A graduate student must be a graduate student first. It is drilled into everyone's head beginning the day they arrive on campus. In fact, our chairman always mentions he never worries about our teaching responsibilities; he worries about our forgetting our own education. We spend too much time educating others through the classes we teach. This becomes more of a problem for graduate students administering a forensics program. This requires even more time than the normal teaching assistant position. These time commitments may force some people to take longer getting the MA or PhD. It is easy to see where all the time goes—coaching, going to tournaments, and tending to administrative duties.

There is also a problem of rank. A graduate student is not faculty, so it is often more difficult to get through all the lines and paperwork at the university. It is an education to learn through experience, but the process is slow. There are a lot of stumbling blocks; a lot of doors are not open, and a lot of people are not there.

Finally, the "coaching" role may have to be forced upon the individual graduate student ADF as well as on the undergraduates. This is particularly true if the graduate student goes from his or her undergraduate program directly into the graduate program. Some graduate students may be friends with some of the undergraduates on the team or undergraduates on other teams. This situation may require the graduate student ADF to distance him or herself from
people. The graduate student ADF must never forget the position he/she is holding within the university.

Success or failure as an Assistant Director of Forensics seems to depend more on the individual person than on being a graduate student. Success depends on the person's recognizing the need to balance life as a graduate student and as an ADF toward the goal of an advanced degree; the ADF position must come second. Second, the person needs to work out his/her relationship with the Director of Forensics ahead of time. Philosophies need to be discussed before the students arrive on campus. Third, as in any job, everyone should pay attention to his/her strengths. The graduate student ADF needs to recognize these strengths and weaknesses. Then, each person should work within this knowledge. Finally graduate students need to be a vacuum. Information can come from any place, person, book, article, or convention. To learn about forensics, graduate students are still on their own for now. At the University of Minnesota, we are still on our own to fulfill our roles as first and second among equals as well.
References


