"So, you want some advice on achieving tenure? First and foremost, make sure you develop a real research program. Don't spend your time doing that 'fluff stuff' that appears in forensic journals and at all those debate and forensic panels at conventions. The 'fluff' counts as service—no tenure and promotion committee in their right mind would consider as scholarship articles on such things as judge ratings at the NFA and AFA tournaments. Tenure will be based on doing real research." These words, uttered by a department chair to a young assistant professor who occupied the position of director of forensics, reflect an unfortunately pervasive attack on forensic-related research. At many institutions across our country and in many circles within our discipline's professional associations, forensic directors are regarded as second-class citizens and forensic-related research is perceived as less than a scholarly endeavor.

My aim in this article is not to join the apparently growing number of former forensic directors who have moved on to administrative positions and become forensic antagonists. Neither is my aim to become the apologist who attempts to rebut the charge that forensic-related research is not true scholarship. Rather, my purpose is to plead with members of the forensic community to ground their research interests in matters which simultaneously serve the community of forensics and the community of scholars who are dedicated to the understanding of human communication.

The major impetus for my pleading is what I term a "crisis of self-contentment" that seems to be pervading the various forensic communities. A brief historical digression is needed to make the point.

In the early days of forensic activities—the literary and debating societies of the 1800s and early 1900s—forensics was a goal-directed rather than process-directed endeavor. Students joined the societies because they found in them a place to practice argumentation, public speaking, parliamentary procedure, and literary interpretation. Students viewed the literary and debating society as a laboratory for learning the skills and practices they perceived to be vital to success in public life. Rules and procedures varied within and between the many literary...
and debating societies that flourished in large cities and small towns throughout the United States. Experimentation and flexibility, not codified rules and stylized formats, epitomized the conduct of forensic activity in the literary and debating societies.¹

Today, students join forensic activities for many of the same reasons as did their counterparts of the 1800s and early 1900s. The activity students enter today, however, is considerably different. Today's students enter one of many forensic fiefdoms—CEDA, NDT, NFA-IE, AFA-IE, ADA, national circuit IE, regional circuit IE and so on. Each fiefdom is marked by highly stylized rules of procedure and definitions of success. Often, the commitment to the practices within each fiefdom (each fiefdom views their own practices as superior to the practices of the other fiefdoms) overshadows the commitment to goal (forensics as a laboratory for the practice and understanding of human communication).

This brief historical digression highlights the crisis of self-contentment which I believe stifles meaningful scholarship in forensics. The self-contentment, combined with the competitive urge in each of us to prove that our own fiefdom is superior to everyone else's fiefdoms, promotes forensic research which is self-serving rather than community-serving. Our forensic journals thus abound with articles that focus on such matters as tournament practices, scoring systems, ballot design, and event rules - all written from the perspective of the relationship between the pristine forensic laboratory and the works which that laboratory attempts to simulate.

The crisis of self-contentment manifests itself in several ways. One of the most visible manifestations is the growing isolation of the forensic activity. Consider, for example, how infrequently research articles on forensics appear in the major refereed journals of our field. Consider further the infrequency of significant public attention (or discipline attention for that matter) to the activity in which we engage.

Another manifestation of our self-contentment is our failure to notice and take seriously the criticisms of our activity. I was shocked when my former college dean (a chemist who was well-versed in the importance of the laboratory) returned from a national conference of college deans and asked me to stop by his office. My dean informed me that in his conversations with other deans the subject of forensics was addressed. He proceeded with a diatribe of concerns about the sterility of the activity, the highly stylized rules that bear no resemblance to

real-world communication practices, the egotistical involvement of coaches, the abandonment of traditional rhetorical principles, and so forth. I immediately concluded that he was speaking about NDT-style debate. "Oh no," he said, "the concerns aren't about NDT. The deans were talking about individual speaking events and CEDA."

The most dangerous manifestation of our self-contentment is, I fear, that we have become so comfortable with our current rules and practices that we have lost sight of the fundamental goal upon which our activity is based - providing a laboratory in which students learn about human communication through experimentation and critique. Something is clearly wrong when the big disputes at our national policy-making meetings involve such items as whether or not to allow judge questioning in rhetorical criticism, to adopt a 9-3-6 debate format instead of a 10-3-5 format, to allow two or three teams per school at the National Debate Tournament, and to ban dancing in oral interpretation performances.

My plea is for our forensic communities (the plural is intentional) to transcend the lure of individual fiefdoms and rededicate itself (the singular is intentional) to viewing and designing the forensic activity as a laboratory. Such rededication would enhance the value of the activity for students and would better serve the communication discipline, the academic community, and the community of responsible citizens.

The vision of forensics as a laboratory is certainly not new. During and after the Sedalia Conference, the first national developmental conference on forensics, the notion of forensics as a laboratory took on considerable popularity. Sedalia conferees, in a definitional statement, noted that forensic activities "are laboratories for helping students to understand and communicate various forms of argument more effectively in a variety of contexts with a variety of audiences." The term "laboratory" is variously defined. Bartanen, for example, tells us that a laboratory is "a place for experiment, where theories and ideas are critically tested and ultimately validated, modified or discarded." Thomas draws upon Sedalia and interprets the laboratory as potentially fulfilling several goals: "(1) The laboratory may be a production workshop where something is made or analyzed as a public service. (2) The laboratory may be a teaching and learning environment. (3) The laboratory can be the setting for controlled scientific research."

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Applying these definitions to competitive forensics is certainly laudable. However, there is good reason to believe that the laboratory notion is often seen as only incidental to competitive forensics. Competitors and judges alike are usually more interested in the activity of forensics than the object of that activity. Zarefsky makes the point clear:

The distinction between 'forensics' and 'forensic activities' is not trivial. Rather, the first stands to the second as genus to species. But people in forensics, by and large, identify themselves with the species rather than the genus. They define their professional roles by reference to activity programs rather than to the object of their study.\footnote{David Zarefsky, "Argumentative and Forensics," in \textit{Proceedings}, 22.}

The forensic laboratory must have at its apex the pedagogical function. As Ziegelmueller summarizes in the proceedings of the Sedalia conference: the \textit{raison\'d\'etre} of forensics is pedagogy.\footnote{George W. Ziegelmueller, cited in McBath, 18.} Thus, a critical function of the forensic laboratory is pedagogical; the laboratory must teach students about communication and argumentation.\footnote{I subscribe to the position adopted at the first National Development Conference on Forensics that forensics, both debate and individual events, is rooted in the argumentative perspective. See McBath.} The laboratory should acquaint students with a variety of perspectives on communication and argument, provide a forum for testing those perspectives, and provide knowledge transferable to the genus (the real world of communication and argumentation) when the participants are removed from the laboratory.

In addition to this pedagogical function, the forensic laboratory should also "create" knowledge. The laboratory of the physical sciences is an appropriate analogy. Here students perform experiments to learn about various physical science principles. After gaining rudimentary skills, students continue to experiment in an effort to discover new principles—principles which may later be transferred to the real world. The forensic laboratory may create knowledge in several areas: knowledge about communication and argumentation strategies, knowledge about specific fields of communication and argument, and knowledge about argumentation theory. Several writers have argued that such knowledge creation can be achieved by academic debate. Goodnight, for example, claims:

Whether in the area of argument fields, value disputation, social analysis, or political assessment, development of debate theory has much to offer students of argumentation. Beyond that knowledge which can be provided by philosophical speculation or in the field of research among naive social actors, debate offers a challenge to those who construct theories of arguments to test those theories through an impartial and intense encounter of advocates. As
practices of argument in debate continue to evolve, there is much worth that can be shared with those who would study argumentation. There appears to be no inherent reason why the individual events laboratory cannot offer this intense interaction in the testing of theory.

Do forensic events, as currently practiced, provide an effective laboratory for argument? Unfortunately, the answer is no. Two indictments establish this claim. First, most forensic events lack a theoretical base. Although over the years forensic educators have liberally borrowed from persuasion research, psychology, and other fields, they have been relatively unconcerned with a "theory of argument." This point is raised throughout forensic literature. Bartanen, for example, argues:

Even more significant to the confusion about the role of individual events in argumentation is the absence of theoretical discussion about individual events and arguments. Recent years have found numerous studies of the relationship between debate and decision making, as well as the implementation of many decision making concepts into the actual practice of academic debate. No similar relationship exists between individual events and decision making. Larson and O'Rourke issue a similar claim:

Even though there has been an increase in the number and frequency of individual events offerings at forensic tournaments the literature on the use of argumentation in individual events is almost nil. Coaches and forensic experts have not taken the time to think out the argumentation dimensions related to individual events they have in the field of debate.

The notion that our pedagogy must be grounded in theory, or as Faules, Rieke, and Rhodes state, "pedagogy is generated by theory," is not a controversial one. When practice exists independent of theory—or, only loosely connected to that theory—the laboratory cannot be judged adequate. In addition to the missing theoretical grounding, the current practice of forensic events also demonstrates its inadequacy as a laboratory for argument. The overall point is supported by Bartanen:

Equally as important are some of the actual practices of individual events which detract from the ability of individual events to successfully teach argumentation. Henry McGucken, for example, criticizes the performance and analytical weaknesses of the individual events: "Extemp and impromptu frequently seem to stress the glib over the thoughtful, interp to stress the actor's finesse over the literary insight, and oratory may be the saddest event of all, for that event possesses the greatest potential for exercising reasoned eloquence. Instead, tournament oratory has given rise to a specialized form of discourse, a

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2Bartanen, 408.
3Suzanne Larson and Sean Patrick O'Rourke, "Predominant Forms of Argument in Individual Events," in Dimensions, 325.
'third sophistic' plumbing the affective depths of style and delivery, poor rhetoric and worse poetry, a kind of speech presently unheard and unheard of anywhere except in oratory contests.\footnote{11}

Although many factors contribute to the poor practice of argumentation in forensics, three factors stand out. First, with a few exceptions, most forensic events do not bear much resemblance to the practical discourse situations students will face when they leave the contest environment. In their study of argument forms in individual events, Larson and O'Rourke conclude:

There needs to be a stronger connection between forensic contest speeches and the actual public speaking situations students are likely to experience in real-life. In real-life a speaker seldom draws a national topic, outlines a speech, and then delivers the speech 30 minutes later. It is also highly unlikely that a speaker will memorize a persuasive speech on a serious social problem and propose a means of correcting the evil—all within a ten minute time limit.\footnote{12}

Without this "real-life" link the forensic laboratory is too artificial.

A second factor contributing to the poor practice of forensic events is the failure of the tournament model to incorporate intense interaction. The typical tournament involves events for which students enter a room in which sits a single judge. Students perform their event and then leave. Very rarely do students have the opportunity to challenge the ideas presented by other speakers. Aside from a single sheet of paper or a notecard the judge has little opportunity to interact with the student. The absence of interaction and the lack of intense challenging of ideas further divorces forensic events from practical discourse.

The third factor contributing to poor forensic practice is both situational and theoretical. This factor involves the nature of the audience which the forensic student addresses. The nature of the audience in academic debate has undergone significant change—ranging from the general lay audience to the more specialized hypothesis tester and public policy maker. The nature of the audience in individual events is less clear. In some ways the individual events audience resembles the "universal audience" identified by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca.\footnote{13} The vagueness of this concept, especially as applied to ten different individual speaking events, makes it difficult for judges and students alike to understand how argumentation should best occur. If we buy into the conclusions generated by argument fields research—that different fields involve different argument standards—then the universal

\footnote{11}{Bartanen, p. 408; citing Henry McGucken, "Forensic in the Liberal Education," \textit{Western Speech} 34 (1970): 137.}
\footnote{12}{Larson and O'Rourke, 334.}
The audience concept is inadequate and fails to contribute to a sound pedagogical experience.

I have argued in other works that the forensic activity should model its events upon real-world communication practices. The analogue approach to individual events and debate is presented as a means to improve the laboratory experience available to students as well as to provide a more realistic environment in which theory can be tested and social action can be critiqued.

Adapting competitive forensics to a laboratory which attempts to model either everyday discourse situations or specialized discourse contexts would do a great deal to enhance the pedagogical worth of forensic participation by giving students a more realistic speaking situation. By more closely resembling natural discourse situations, competitive forensics would allow students to utilize the results of scholarly research on persuasion and communication in their efforts to prepare for forensic competition. By mirroring the audience and interaction demands of natural discourse, students would learn a great deal more about the argumentation and communication process. In addition, viewing forensics as a laboratory for argument provides researchers with another forum in which to test theory.

The analogue approach is an important step in advancing forensic scholarship. The approach allows us to focus on questions of extrinsic value rather than intrinsic value. Questions such as "what is the relationship between judge geography and scoring at the NFA tournament?" would be replaced with questions such as, "What is the relationship between successful performance in the forensic laboratory and successful speaker performance in the business world?"

I certainly do not envision rapid embracement of the analogue approach. After all, most of us are content with the fiefdoms that have been established. Thus, I offer a more modest proposal. When we engage in forensic research we should constantly ask ourselves, "What is the importance of the question that I am asking?" The starting point for assessing the quality of research in any discipline is the insightfulness of the questions being asked. Tucker, Weaver, and Berryman-Fink write: "One of the most damning observations on a research study is contained in the words So what? or Who cares? Its implication is that the

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If our question serves only a small, isolated fiefdom, we are engaged in service. If our question advances knowledge about human communication, we are engaged in scholarship.

References
