

Review of Professional Resources

Millard F. Eiland, Editor

PARTICIPATING IN COLLEGIATE FORENSICS

by Don R. Swanson and Raymond F. Zeuschner

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Some things in nature are inevitable—the return of the swallows to Capistrano, the frenzied rush of tiny lemmings off cliffs to a certain death, the yearly gathering of Monarch butterflies in Pacific Grove, California, and the semi- (or Tri-) annual migration of new students into Directors of Forensics' offices. Always they ask that same plaintive question. "What's 'fornensics' (or was it 'forentics')?" In response, the ever patient Directors of Forensics carefully explain the intricacies of team membership and tournament competition, as well as the varied individual events available, being careful not to omit even a single vital detail. After approximately the fortieth such lecture during the first week of classes, should even the casual observer wonder why so many Directors of Forensics exist on a diet of strong, black coffee; unfiltered cigarettes; and Cepacol lozenges?

Almost in answer to an unvoiced prayer for relief comes Swanson and Zeuschner's *PARTICIPATING IN COLLEGIATE FORENSICS*. At present, the book stands as the definitive introductory text for forensic competitors. The weary Director of Forensics with myriads of novice students would do well to consider giving their voices a break and strain the eye sight of their students instead. Certainly the text is not without flaws (which I will deal with later in this review), but to borrow an old CEDA cliché, "on balance" the positive values outweigh the negative ones.

Swanson and Zeuschner have gleaned the event rules, descriptions, as well as tournament and program procedures for their book from the American Forensic Association, the Northern California Forensic Association, the Pacific Southwest Collegiate Forensic Association and Pi Kappa Delta. In doing so, a broad cross-section of national practices is covered, avoiding for the most part any tendency toward a regional approach to forensics. Thus, Directors of Forensics nationwide should find the text applicable, regardless of their geographic location.

Containing five chapters and an extensive appendix, the text's over 200 pages cover an impressive array of forensic related topics. Chapter I (Introduction to Forensics) includes what forensics is and what team membership entails. Chapter II (Competing at

Tournaments) explains the inexplicable—how a tournament works and what is expected of a participant. In Chapter III (The Nature of Individual Events), Swanson and Zeuschner detail all ten A.F.A. individual events, as well as Readers' Theater, Duet Acting and an "innovative" event, Argumentative Analysis. The detail evident in Chapter III is less apparent in Chapter IV (The Nature of Debate). Nonetheless, NDT and CEDA debate, along with evidence procedures are dealt with. The new Director of Forensics, rather than the novice competitor, may find Chapter V (Hosting a Forensics Tournament) most interesting and instructive. Finally, the appendix of PARTICIPATING IN COLLEGIATE FORENSICS is a treasure trove of useful forms for the Director of Forensics and the student. From "Ballot Analysis and Personal Growth Plan" forms, to "Planning Sheets" for various individual events, to "Competitor's Record" forms, these pages should need only small adaptations to be helpful to almost all forensics squads. Sample ballots included may also help ease the anxiety of novices who wonder about those mysterious pieces of paper judges are scribbling on at tournaments. Of particular use to the harried Director of Forensics may be the "Absence Forms" which politely inform other professors that a student will be absent because of a forensic tournament. Thereby, the Director of Forensics can avoid wasted minutes (which compute to wasted hours over the year) at the typewriter tapping out these excuses.

In an attempt to ease the initial "jargon shock" which can afflict the novice student, Swanson and Zeuschner have included a glossary of terms in the text's appendix. We, as the initiated, sometimes forget that many of the words and phrases we regularly use can be and often are highly confusing to the beginner. "Breaking out" certainly conjurs up visions of prison bars and striped uniforms, while "briefs" must connote underwear to at least a few of the uninitiated—and a "bye" could mean a wave, a hug and a kiss to a few novices. Plus, despite the social atmosphere at tournaments, "pairings" have nothing to do with significant relationships.

A major concern for forensic programs countrywide is how administrators perceive forensics and how to maintain or improve these perceptions. Swanson and Zeuschner have done a laudatory job of defending the value of forensics and of explaining goals that students and administrators can be inspired by. Two of the main goals are:

1. "Forensics programs provide students with an opportunity to practice and increase communication skills through both competitive and non-competitive activities."

2. "The college fields and funds a forensic team which proudly represents it in intercollegiate competition at tournaments." (pg. 3)

Whether administrative pressures are aimed at a program which is focused primarily on number of trophies won or on number of "bodies" on the roll sheet, these goals are clearly in keeping with good educational practices. An administrator or budget committee would not likely quarrel with the nature of such goals.

As a recruitment tool the text may also be useful—assuming, of course, that inquisitive students take the time to scan Chapter I. The chapter develops an interesting and cogent presentation of both the reasonable responsibilities and the tangible benefits of team membership. In addition, Swanson and Zeushner use a strategy many Directors of Forensics have found helpful. They point out the success of former forensic participants and persuasively imply that present and future participants can also expect to reap similar rewards in their careers.

Perhaps the most anxiety-relieving chapter for the nervous novice is Chapter II (Competing at Tournaments). With an amazing amount of detail—while avoiding confusing digressions—the text explains postings, panels, what to do when your code number isn't posted, and other vital "rites of passage" for the novice. At the same time, Swanson and Zeuschner espouse a courteous and responsible approach to tournament competition. An example of the good counsel offered is: "If you make a small error or slip, don't let it throw you—continue on as well as you can under circumstances— we don't apologize, we give speeches" (pg. 13). With this kind of advance information on what to expect and how to behave, the novices should be able to concentrate more on performance and less on perplexity at their first tournament.

In developing the chapter on individual events, the authors again are laudably thorough. The discussion of each of the ten A.F.A. events (plus Readers' Theatre, Duet Acting and Argumentative Analysis) includes purpose, description, procedure, limitations of material or topic, and evaluative factors. Furthermore, the beginning interpreter will learn how to select materials for interpretation, as well as how to prepare and use a manuscript. The section for each event also includes basic organizational patterns— a boon for students who have "forgotten" (or never learned) the value of organization while taking introductory speech.

Outlining is also covered in this chapter, although the percentage figures attached to each section of the speech could cause confusion and could confound the novice. "But coach, my conclusion is a

disaster because it's more than 3% of my speech!"

As I've alluded to in the previous paragraph, *PARTICIPATING IN COLLEGIATE FORENSICS* is not without minor flaws. Though not significantly detrimental, these small imperfections are worth noting. The text is probably not for the squad that focuses only on debate or only on I.E.s because its basic philosophy is that: "Forensic teams are not organized to serve only one type of competitor . . . There is a place for the debater and the individual eventer . . ." (pg. 3). With this orientation, the text is really aimed at multi-dimensional teams.

For some teams, also, the statement, "Any regularly enrolled student is eligible to participate in forensics" (pg. 4), may be a gross overstatement. Many programs have strict unit and grade requirements. Thus coaches may have to exercise their vocal cords again in explanation. Later in the text, the authors do suggest that a "full load" of units and good grades are sometimes required, but, given the earlier statement, this latter one seems almost contradictory.

In keeping the text clearly organized, Swanson and Zeuschner make happy use of numbered lists. At times this emphasis seems tedious (at least to this reader). The text could be jokingly referred to as forensic's answer to the *BOOK OF LISTS*.

Sometimes the reader may be confused as to whom the text is aimed. Language shifts in the same paragraph from a "most squads" approach to an "our squad" focus. As a result, the text may seem to some people more of an "in house" publication for use by the Cal Poly SLO squad than a handbook for forensic squads in general.

Yet, despite these small flaws (after all, authors—and Directors of Forensics—are human), *PARTICIPATING IN COLLEGIATE FORENSICS* remains a valuable resource for the forensic student and for the perpetually overworked Director of Forensics. The book may not taste as good as a Cepacol lozenge, but it certainly makes the old vocal cords feel a lot better!

CHARLENE ARNOLD HILL
Director of Forensics
California State University, Los Angeles