

EDITOR'S FORUM: A Summary of the National Developmental Conference on Individual Events

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In August, 1988, ninety-two people met in Denver, Colorado, for the first National Developmental Conference on Forensics. While no one was quite sure just what to expect, everyone seemed excited, willing to cooperate, and committed to work for the good of the field. Over the next three days, the Conference participants attended work sessions in nine different areas. They socialized together at the Conference luncheons, dinners, and social hours. In the final hours of the Conference, everyone met to provide colleagues, students, and administrators not attending suggestions for improving Individual Events. By examining the preparation for, execution of, and evaluation of the Conference, an understanding of what actually happened in Denver can be achieved.

PREPARATION

At the second National Developmental Conference on Forensics at Evanston in 1984, the group working on issues related to Individual Events recommended that a conference devoted to Individual Events be held. After several months of deliberation and exploration, we volunteered/were appointed to forge ahead to see if there were any real interest in such a Conference.

Backed with the support and approval of all of the major forensic organizations, we designed a survey to determine areas of interest, appropriate dates and times, and individual interests. This questionnaire was mailed to all schools/universities on the AFA and NFA mailing lists, as well as any other names/addresses we could obtain. The response was overwhelmingly positive. After tabulating the results, ten areas of interest/concentration were established:

- standards for evaluation/judging of individual events;
- role of research in individual events;
- tournament management practices;

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- high school-college connection in individual events;
- use of workshops for training judges/coaches;
- creative events/original material in individual events;
- of graduate assistants in the individual events program;
- administrative support/publicity;
- ethical questions for coaches and competitors; and
- a rationale for events to be included in IE competition.

The date was set and the location was finalized. We were on our way!

EXECUTION (THE CONFERENCE)

While a publication will be forthcoming with all of the papers and conference proceedings, an overview of the conference is appropriate. We were very encouraged when, at registration, we had copies of all but three of the papers to be presented. (In defense of the three missing papers, their authors had been told by their respective Chairs that papers were not necessary at Registration!?) People were clearly well prepared and ready for this conference.

We were also excited about the fact that there were representatives from 25 states representing 45 programs. Forensic students from high schools, junior colleges, commuter campuses and universities all were present. There was also an excellent cross-section of the "old and new." From newly-retired forensic directors to newly-degreed forensic coaches, the experienced, tried and true met with the excited to be tried and new!

Attendance was excellent at all of the sessions. Even though the weather was beautiful in Denver, and the hotel had a tempting health club complete with pool, sauna and masseur, people attended the sessions regularly. The Chairs responded promptly by submitting the summaries of the work-group's accomplishments. The undergraduate and graduate students from Mankato State University and Regis College worked long and hard to type, copy, and distribute these summaries to conference participants.

In the final gathering, everyone met to discuss the various suggestions provided by the respective groups. While most suggestions were accepted with little disagreement or dissension, there was enough conversation to keep the session lively. However, we do feel we set a record by actually ending a conference EARLY! While there were suggestions made concerning all of the areas of concentration, the prevailing attitude was that Individual Events has certainly come a long way from its humble beginnings a few short decades ago. Given the relatively young age of our field, the

concerns and problems we are experiencing are normal "teenage problems." Unfortunately, several of the issues that have confronted us from the very beginning are still troubling us today. Ethical issues, winning vs. educating, and over-burdened coaches are but three issues that will undoubtedly continue to confront us.

EVALUATION

An in-depth and complete report on the evaluation of the conference will be presented in the Conference publication; however, two areas emerged as issues for special attention for the next conference. These issues were parliamentary sessions and publicity.

The first issue concerned the last session. Since this Conference was patterned after the first two Developmental Conferences on Forensics, we included a parliamentary procedure meeting for the final sessions. However, after the pamphlets had been published and the schedule set, we started to receive a great deal of concerned feedback about that session. To avoid any negative feedback from people not attending and to accommodate the limited time available, we announced that votes would not be taken on issues; instead suggestions would be presented for discussion, and all of the discussions would be published in the Conference Proceedings. While some people disagreed with this decision and felt mere suggestions carried no weight, others liked the idea of the entire group meeting together for discussion and sharing. It is definitely an item to consider for the second Conference.

The second area of concern was publicity. People responded on the evaluations that "more people should have been notified." Over seven hundred letters/pamphlets were mailed out during our preparation period. We attempted to reach everyone involved with IE, and we were very pleased with the turn-out. The Second Developmental Conference on Forensics had 125 participants from both debate and individual events. For us to have almost as many people attending a Conference for just IE was rewarding.

We are very aware, however, of the need to reach even more people for our next conference. High school representatives, administrators, and students are all people we would like to have attend. We are also aware of the need to publicize in the newsletters and publications of the professional organizations. While many of these publications were notified, we were not listed in their calendars. All in all, however, the evaluations indicated that the Conference was a positive step forward for the field and they it should be succeeded by others.

Many of the positive aspects of the Conference cannot be addressed in the suggestions presented by the groups. The spirit of cooperation and reconciliation was very encouraging. People worked together regardless of affiliations and philosophies. Plans for a national newsletter are currently underway. Research projects and ideas are being formulated. New suggestions are being incorporated into tournament rules and regulations, and talk has already begun for the next IE conference. We are looking forward to planning the next conference, and we welcome your suggestions, ideas, and, most importantly, your attendance and participation!