BEYOND THE TOURNAMENT: BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN COLLEGIATE

FORENSICS AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

by

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ABSTRACT

"Beyond the Tournament" is a podcast series that interviews collegiate forensics competitors—that is, collegiate speech and debate competitors—about the speeches and pieces they competed with during the 2022-2023 academic year. Each episode interviews a unique competitor from universities across the United States, speaking about an individual speech and debate "event." The format of each episode first explores the nature and rules of the event in question, then interviews a competitor about their experience performing that event, and finally concludes with a recording of the piece itself. Through the podcast medium, this project attempts to examine the gap between the insular speech and debate community as the typical audience of these competitors and a more diverse, outside audience. Though not all speech and debate events are persuasive in nature, all seek to examine a social or political phenomenon and either persuade an audience to shift their perspective or broaden their knowledge base. Because of the inherent demographic similarities among the competitors and judges who traditionally view these events, I ask competitors to examine whether the typical tournament audience can be persuaded or affected by their pieces. Finally, by publicly posting their interviews, I give them access to a more diverse audience typical of the world outside of collegiate forensics and open the door to outside engagement with the speech and debate community.

Spotify link: https://open.spotify.com/show/0eFpgtW7ryaxg6XZqbn8wL?si=333aae2f00fc435c

METHODS

I. The Podcast Medium

Although speech and debate performances are both an audio and visual medium, conducting these interviews through the audio-only podcast medium has two important advantages: ease of access and a focus on content rather than form. First, by posting episodes through the podcast medium, I hope that listeners will be able to receive the content in the easiest possible way. Unlike an audio-visual medium like YouTube, one can listen to a podcast while simultaneously engaging in many other activities. Considering that my average episode length is about 30 minutes, I recognize that most individuals may not be able or willing to devote that entire time to solely watching an episode. By utilizing the podcast format, I hope to make it easier for listeners to engage with the episodes, regardless of their length.

Second, my primary objective with this project is to allow competitors' arguments to be critically analyzed by an outside audience, making the content of the interviews themselves more valuable to that purpose than the visual form. A non-visual format also provides the added benefit of avoiding appearance-related bias. Because my focus remains on the content of competitors' arguments, I want to eliminate the possibility of an audience member making any determination about the competitor themselves or the quality of their argument based on appearance alone. For my discussion of interpretation events, which especially utilize blocking and physical acting, I added a link to the competitor's video performance in the description of the podcast episode. In this way, I maintain the series focus on content while also providing access to the full performance.

In order to edit the episodes, I used the audio-editing software Audacity. I utilized the website "Pixabay" to find royalty-free music for the introduction and conclusion of each episode.

To create the visual icon associated with the podcast, I used the website Canva. For the icon, I wanted to ensure that the imagery was easily associated with speech and debate and that the color palette reflected my association with Texas State University. I ultimately decided to post the episodes to Spotify because of its ease of access and large listener base. I created the podcast's own Spotify account as well as an associated email so that it could be easily searched within the application.

II. Question Selection

For each of the podcast's four primary episodes, I used some variation of these questions for the interview segment:

- Why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself?

- What team do you currently compete for?

- How would you describe your overall experience in speech and debate throughout your career?

- Which speech and debate events do you currently compete in, and which have competed in previously?

- How would you describe your general process for coming up with speech/piece topics?

- What led you to the topic of your current (name of event)?

- What kind of research did you include in your piece? And can you summarize your speech?

- Was there any content that you had to cut for the sake of time, but that you feel is important to your speech?

- Can you imagine any objections to your argument? How might you respond?

- Assuming that only those in the speech and debate community were to see your performance, do you feel as though your argument would actively change or expand their perspective?

- Can you describe what you feel is the perfect audience for your piece?

- When you perform this piece, what do you hope the audience will take away from it?

- What do you think the future looks like for you?

I selected these questions with the goal of both giving the audience adequate context for the competitor's performance and giving the competitor the opportunity to expand upon their arguments. Questions such as, "How would you describe your general process for coming up with speech/piece topics?" give an audience unfamiliar with speech and debate a look into how these competitors create the pieces they perform with. The question also illustrates the amount of effort required for these individuals to compete at all.

In creating the questions, the question, "Can you imagine any objections to your argument? How might you respond?" is the most central to the ultimate goal of the podcast. To subvert the "echo chamber" of the traditional speech and debate audience, I aim to give competitors the chance to anticipate objections to their arguments and then expand upon them. As a part of competing in speech and debate, all competitors receive ballots with critiques from every round in which they perform. However, at tournaments, competitors are not traditionally given the opportunity to discuss these critiques with the judge who wrote them or respond to any of the objections raised within the ballots themselves. Because this podcast is not constrained in the same way, I aim to provide competitors with the opportunity to respond to such critiques.

In asking these questions, I also permitted myself to ask additional or modified questions depending on how the interviewee responded. For example, in my interview of Louise Engohang

for episode three, she expressed that the speech and debate community was the perfect audience for her speech precisely because she wrote it with that audience in mind. Upon hearing this, I decided to ask, "If you had the opportunity to go back in time and write the speech again without specifically thinking about the speech and debate community as your audience, do you think you would have written it differently? And, in that scenario, do you think there would have been a different, perfect audience?" I asked this question because I wanted to know if the natural constraints of the speech and debate audience prevented Louise from writing her speech differently as she desired. I recognized that many competitors write their speeches for the speech and debate audience, compromising points they may have wished to make for the sake of keeping the audience in mind.

III. Competitor and Event Selection

For the purpose of reaching an outside audience, I determined that individual events from the platform speaking and interpretation categories would be the most understandable to an outside audience. Competitive debate is, by design, shrouded in technical jargon and filled with incomprehensible norms such as "spreading." Any attempt to translate competitive debate to an outside audience would likely require a different approach. Therefore, in the interest of representing both platform speaking events and interpretation events, I selected events that I felt were a comprehensive representation of the full gamut of events. Specifically, from the four platform speaking events outlined by the American Forensics Association—Informative Speaking, Persuasive Speaking, Communication Analysis, and After Dinner Speaking—I chose to include After Dinner Speaking and Informative Speaking. After Dinner Speaking is a persuasive medium that I determined could benefit from an outside audience, and Informative

Speaking accurately reflects that not all speech and debate events are persuasive endeavors. Alternatively, from the five interpretation events—Prose Interpretation, Poetry Interpretation, Drama Interpretation, Program Oral Interpretation and Dramatic Duo—I chose Prose Interpretation because of its simplicity and accessibility and Poetry Interpretation in order to discuss the practices of "weaving" and "blocking."

For episode one, I selected the competitor Hiba Faruqi from the University of Texas at Austin to speak about her After Dinner Speaking speech. Not only does Faruqi represent a high-quality speech, but her solution is practical and accessible to an outside audience. Additionally, I considered that outside audiences may be more resistant to highly political material. While Faruqi's speech does have political implications, her solutions emphasize personal improvement and empathetic dialogue. For episode two's discussion of prose interpretation, I chose the competitor Gavvy Lott from the University of North Texas. In my discussion of interpretation events, I wanted to highlight the fact that some competitors choose to perform literature that they have written and published themselves. Lott used her own self-written literature, which meant that I could ask her about her motivation for constructing the piece's argument as well as the creation of the literature itself.

For episode three, I wanted to ensure I interviewed at least one competitor from a university outside of Texas to mitigate the possibility of misrepresenting the national speech and debate community. Additionally, Louise Engohang, who competes at Eastern Michigan University, placed third in Informative Speaking at the American Forensics Association National Tournament in 2023. By interviewing this competitor, I aimed to showcase the kinds of performances that had seen success at the highest level of competition available in collegiate forensics. For the fourth and final episode, I chose to interview Callum Ritter from the Texas

State University speech team. Ritter's piece reflected the ability of speech and debate performances to create tangible change within our community. In the conclusion of the episode, I was able to reflect upon the legislation passed within the American Forensics Association, in part because of Ritter's discussion of sexual assault within the speech and debate community.

IV. Conclusion

Through the creation of "Beyond the Tournament," I was able to connect the efforts of speech and debate competitors to an audience that would have otherwise been unable to listen to their performances. By providing a space for competitors to expand upon their arguments, not only do I challenge them to delve deeper into their topics but afford them the opportunity to speak outside of the constraints of a ten-minute, judged performance. By sharing their performances and arguments with the outside world, "Beyond the Tournament" turns speech and debate advocacy into an opportunity for action.