

## **Thinking about Wellness (in Forensics): A Poetic Reflection**

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I have been reflecting on wellness and what it means to be well.

Well - not the cavernous hole, but certainly that which offers refreshment and renewal; a source to draw from like strength, energy or focus. Well(s) - not to rise to the surface ready to flow, but certainly like the emergence of a good idea or inspiration and the impulse that guides action.

I am thinking about being well, as in healthy.

I am thinking about wellness; which indicates that state, quality, or condition of being well. Not just the physical body, but the organizational body of a healthy institution. The collective body that engages constructive criticism of its practices and the well-being of its constituents.

I am thinking about wellness as an instituted program for forensics; a health initiative, a call to remembrance, and a mandate on caring.

Mandated caring. That seems oxymoronic.  
Surely all DOFs care.

But I am thinking about donuts for breakfast, fast foods for lunch and pizza for dinner. I am thinking about late tournament ends and early beginnings. I am thinking about district wide travel in university cared for vehicles. I am thinking about long drives and late night departures. I am thinking about seat belts. I am thinking about Minnesota winters and rocky terrains. I am reminded of accidents, and injuries, and deaths. I am thinking about the caution of caring and the culpability of not caring.

I am thinking about long tournament seasons, rigorous travel schedules, rehearsal schedules, the pressure to succeed and the penalties for not. I am thinking about student parties, sanctioned and "un." I am thinking about student drinking, sanctioned and "un." I am thinking about competition as pedagogy and pedagogy as competition, and where wellness fits in.

Mandated caring. That doesn't seem odd.

I am thinking about wellness, like governmental mandates against smoking in public buildings and mandates against sexual harassment in the work place, in the classroom. I am thinking about the administrative responsibility of caring, like counseling and nurturing in the job description of a DOF.

I am thinking about wellness;  
physical wellness - the body,  
psychological wellness - the mind,  
academic wellness - graduation?

I am thinking about re-framing the competitive drive to foreground the caring impulse; the pedagogical imperative with the focus on the student in the competitor, the person in the student, the student at risk.

Well, it is good and prudent to be thinking about wellness;  
it is good and proper,  
it is satisfactory,  
it is well.

But often we resist mandates — like drinking and driving, speed limits, smoking in public buildings, seat belts - we resist it like caring equals cost or at least convenience. Well it does.

What are the costs? Not cost as in \$\$ though some would argue it.  
Cost as in a reduced calendar season; beginning late - ending early.  
Cost as in a humane tournament schedule; beginning early - ending early.  
Cost as in healthy snacks; an apple, an orange, a bagel offered throughout.  
Cost as in pedagogy over competition,  
Oops excuse me that equals benefits.

What is the cost of caring? The benefits are obvious.

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and what it means to be well.

To be well is to have a balance between  
the internal and the external,  
the pedagogical and the competitive,  
the goals and the practices.

Caring + Healthy = Wellness.

Endnotes

"Health Initiatives" AFA-NIET Fall Minutes, Dec. 8, 1998: Initiatives passed the Spring AFA-NIET Business Meeting.

Porter, S.B. & Sommerness, M.D. (1991). "Legal Issues Confronting the Director of Forensics." *National Forensic Journal*, 8 109-123.

For discussions on the pedagogy and competition, and the pedagogy of competition see Simerly, G. & McGee, B.R. (1991). "A Conceptual scheme for assessing the education function of a forensics program." *Speech and Theatre Association of Missouri Journal*, 21, 5-14.; Stephen C. Wood and Pamela A. Rowland-Moring (1989) "Motivational tension: Winning vs pedagogy in academic debate: *National Forensic Journal*, 7 (2), 81-98.

For a description of goals, objective, and responsibilities of forensic program and DOFs see Danielson, M.A. and Hollowitz, J. (1997) "Evaluating Directors of Forensics: From Dimensions to Prototype", *National Forensic Journal* 15 (1) 1-20; Alexander, B.K. (1997) "Border Crossing or Forging Gaps" Pragmatic Tensions Between Supporting Individual Events and Debate" *The Southern Journal of Forensics*, 1 (4), 276-281.

For good discussions that link the growing body of literature on at-risk population to the forensics activity see Hunt, S., Garard, D., & Simerly, G. (1997). Reasoning and risk: Debaters as an academically at-risk population. *Contemporary Argumentation and Debate* 18, 48-56. see also Alexander, B.K., (in press) "Reasoning and Risk: The Pedagogical Imperative: A Response to Hunt, Garard, and Simerly" *Contemporary Argumentation and Debate*.

In addition to some of the above sources see the following source for a basic discussion on the benefits of forensics participation. Kapp, G.T. (1979). "College extracurricular activities: Who participates and what are the benefits." *An Unpublished thesis at the University of California - Los Angeles*.