

Forensics and the "New" Wellness

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Ten years ago, wellness on college campuses (with a few notable exceptions like Maricopa Community College, Ball State, and University of Wisconsin Stevens Point) essentially consisted of an occasional table tent in the dining hall with nutrition information and a converted storage room in the basement of a residence hall outfitted with the football team's cast-off exercise equipment. Wellness communities, made up of a handful of faculty and student "true believers" struggled against the university culture to stake out non-smoking dining rooms, television lounges and residence hall floors in public buildings that were supposed to be (by law) "smoke free" already. Those who promoted wellness were viewed with cynicism, their behaviors covertly monitored for any impure act that would destroy their credibility and hence, their impact. For a wellness promoter on campus, being seen eating french fries or drinking a beer at a picnic was viewed as the ultimate hypocrisy.

As Donald Ardell (1997) points out, information promoting wellness in companies and universities was almost always more like traditional health education and prevention, focused on reducing risks, assessing problems, and issuing dire warnings. The primary messages were based in medical models (recovery) and prevention models ("be well so you don't get sick") with an emphasis on the bottom line ("stay healthy and save us money in health care premiums"). As Ardell (1997) stated, "Too little so-called wellness was about insights for liberating people to think for themselves and recognize how to profit from embracing responsibility rather than deflecting it to someone else. Too little wellness was addressed to issues associated with optimal psychological and physical functioning" (p. 69). In essence, wellness *seemed* to be about becoming a vegetarian tri-athlete (with less than 8% body fat) in an effort to either overcome or ward off a myriad of other health problems and save the company money. Though widely held, this was a simplistic and inaccurate perception of wellness.

Clearly, there were a number of problems endemic in this perception. Mary Anne Benton (1993) outlined several:

1. People became universally concerned that they could never be "good enough" when it came to their personal health and well-being.
2. Health and wellness practitioners over emphasized the physical aspects of health and virtually ignored the social, emotional, and spiritual aspects.
3. There was enormous prejudice against various behaviors and traits, most especially smokers and those who were overweight.
4. Dissecting the problem was emphasized more than integrating the solution.
5. Rules seemed designed to protect people from themselves, which destroyed trust in themselves and discredited their own judgment.
6. Wellness was over-moralized and over-medicalized.

It was into this context, ten years ago, that the first paper integrating wellness and forensics was introduced at the National Development Conference on Forensics in Denver, Colorado by Hatfield, Hatfield and Carver (1989). Using tournament management as a starting point, this paper outlined a number of strategies that could be employed during a tournament to help forensics become a more 'well' activity. As anyone familiar with the paper and its response knows, the paper was widely discussed, not to mention wildly lampooned (e.g. as "the banana bread paper").

What a Difference a Decade Makes

A new understanding of wellness emerged in the 1990's which is more holistic, approachable, achievable, and *moderate*. Wellness is no longer presented or perceived as an emphasis upon super-fitness (which it never really was). Wellness is starting to be understood as an integrated sense of the whole person. Wellness has moved from a "no pain, no gain," model based on physical fitness and medical metaphors emphasizing risk factor reduction and competition to a pleasure model, emphasizing enjoyment in all aspects of one's life. While risk factors are still important, the new understanding of wellness is less about testing and diagnostics and more about play and communication. It is less about goals and more about processes. It is about enjoying life.

While the traditional dimensions of wellness have remained the same (Social, Physical, Emotional, Intellectual, Occupational, Spiritual), the wellness wheel has moved from an abstract, visual model to a concept that illustrates and embraces the synergistic nature of the dimensions. Simply, the wheel doesn't work well unless all of the spokes are in place.

Karen Carrier (1996) succinctly contrasts the new paradigm of wellness with the old:

Traditional Model

- Focus on physical parts
- Disease and avoidance themes
- Clinical and diagnostic emphasis
- Competitive approach
- External behavioral controls
- Goal orientation
- Autocratic professional style
- Cultural conformity demanded

Holistic Wellness Model

- Focus on physical/mental/ social "whole"
- Pleasure and growth themes
- Reduced clinical and diagnostic emphasis
- Cooperative approach
- Internal behavioral cues
- Process orientation
- Synergistic professional style
- Cultural diversity supported

The new wellness is proactive rather than reactive, inclusive and accessible to laypersons rather than the exclusive, privileged domain of just a few experts. It is not prescriptive - that is, it does not claim to have a rigidly-defined cluster of ideas, skills and goals which everyone must embrace in precisely the same way in order to be well. Rather, it involves a philosophy of self-respect and self-care that can be accessed by different persons in different ways, then nurtured

and extended into other areas of their lives. Wellness becomes an ongoing life style choice, not a one-time or intermittent prescription. It is predicated on persons' active involvement in behavior and choices that will empower them to live full, responsible, rewarding lives in an extremely complex world (Hatfield & Hatfield, 1992).

Wellness is a process which involves the striving for balance and integration in one's life, adding and refining skills, rethinking previous beliefs and stances toward issues as appropriate. Wellness is about growing. A person truly involved in wellness does not get "there"; they are always on the way, in process, alive and participating (Hatfield & Hatfield, 1992).

This change in the definition and philosophy of wellness has also been evident on college campuses. Wellness Centers and Life Centers are one of the most frequent building projects at universities across the country. These centers feature not only state-of-the-art exercise equipment but also offer counseling, nutrition, and other student support services. Distribution requirement physical education classes based on one specific activity are being replaced by lifestyle management courses in which fitness is but one aspect, along with stress management, nutrition, financial management, mediation, and career counseling. In some cases these centers and classes are funded by students, voluntarily assessing themselves additional fees.

Wellness and Development

Hatfield and Hatfield (1992) pointed out that the overarching goals of wellness lend themselves extremely well to a cognitive-developmental model. In order to make wellness truly accessible, the wellness community needs to think developmentally. Both developmental psychology and wellness speak to personal, individual empowerment; both speak to the promotion of humane relationships, organizations and systems; both speak to the vital need to focus on human skills and resources in the increasingly complex and interrelated problems of an ever-shrinking global community. The cognitive-developmental model focuses on the ongoing, overall development of a person. This development empowers individuals to live freely and fully in a complex world.

Developmentalism, like wellness, also is proactive, prevention-oriented rather than remedial in nature. It begins with the assumption that one must take people where they are as a starting point, then build on their capacities in growth-promoting ways which extend or "stretch" their functioning to become more complex. Simply, one can't give directions to anyone unless they know the point from which the other is starting (Hatfield & Hatfield, 1992).

All people are growing and can grow, given the appropriate combination of support and challenge in the environment. Development can be seen as a process that can and must continue through the life span. Like wellness, it never ceases. "Teachable moments" occur continuously, and can inform and refine the overall growth and development of the person - intellectual, moral, interpersonal, conceptual, spiritual.

Wellness and Forensics: That was Then, This is Now

And just as a new understanding of wellness has emerged over the past decade, so has a new attitude toward integrating wellness and forensics. The integration is now referred to as a "movement" which began with the presentation of the original paper at the developmental conference. Since that time, numerous papers have been presented examining the relationship. Convention panels are devoted exclusively to the wellness and forensics. This journal is a testament to the trend. A cynic would say that some of this interest is simply a relatively easy topic for those in forensics to write their theses or build their resumes with conference presentations. An optimist would believe that this interest is genuine and that the concept of wellness has finally gained a critical mass of support in the forensics community, to the point where positive change in the culture is possible.

Forensics and Academic Wellness

In 1997, Hatfield introduced the concept of Academic Wellness at the National Wellness Conference held in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. Academic Wellness was posited as an integrative concept, defined as the result of the successful, positive implementation of accepted principles of good practice by both faculty and students. The concept of Academic Wellness was based upon the circular nature of the traditional components of wellness (the wellness wheel) and how they could achieve Academic Wellness if there was a balance among all aspects of a student's life — on campus, off campus, in class, and out of class. The integrative nature of academic wellness is apparent to most faculty advisors (and forensics coaches). It is not difficult to tell when something is happening (or "out of balance") in a student's life. Behaviors, attitudes, and performance levels change.

The concept of Academic Wellness was based upon the Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education. This developmental model specifically related to undergraduate education has direct application to forensics and wellness. These principles, first developed by a team of renowned educators led by Zelda Gamson and Arthur Chickering, were designed to be accessible, understandable, practical, and widely applicable (interestingly, the same goals as the wellness movement). They identify a model for students to get the most out of their university experience, and serve as the teaching / learning model on numerous campuses across the country.

The final version of the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education first appeared as the lead article in the March 1987 issue of the AAHE Bulletin (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). It began by drawing attention to criticisms of undergraduate education and moved quickly to an emphasis on campus-level improvement, listing the Seven Principles and then describing them in greater detail, with practical examples from a variety of campuses. The response to the article was immediate, and plans began soon after to re-publish it as a special section in the June 1987 issue of The Wingspread Journal, a publication of The Johnson Foundation. Since 1987, hundreds of

thousands of copies of the principles have been distributed internationally.

The Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education, as identified by Chickering and Gamson (1987), are:

1. Good practice encourages student-faculty contact.
2. Good practice encourages cooperation among students.
3. Good practice encourages active learning.
4. Good practice gives prompt feedback.
5. Good practice emphasizes time on task.
6. Good practice communicates high expectations.
7. Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

Participation in forensics activities seems to be in alignment with many of the principles and vice versa. Forensics participation has the potential to play an important role in a student's academic wellness. However, it is critically important that forensics coaches and administrators not be blinded to the fact that there are still many ways in which forensics undercuts these principles and that vigilance is necessary to promote the overall wellness of forensics participants and coaches.

1. Student-Faculty Contact

Sturnick and Conners (1995) note that the first of the Seven Principles seems almost axiomatic. That students tend to benefit from interaction with faculty seems obvious. Besides the ample research-based documentation of the importance of student-faculty interactions, Sturnick and Conners point out that the romanticized image of the ideal teacher-learner relationship is part of a university's cultural tradition. The authors also note that, "heroic depictions of teachers in literature, on film and on televisions have reinforced the notion that magical connections between teachers and students can produce glorious academic achievement and transform lives" (1995, p. 9). Unfortunately, the reality doesn't come close to this image on many campuses and classrooms. Many university students continue to move through their college careers feeling little more than a student ID number.

Few activities on a college campus (except for perhaps a few sports) bring faculty and students together in both formal and informal situations as much as forensics. The length of the season, combined with the nature of the travel, often create strong bonds between and among team and faculty members. It is this interaction that in turn creates strong relationships between former forensics students and their universities. To the extent that appropriate boundaries in those relationships are respected, forensics is an example of this principle at its best.

2. Cooperation Among Students

Traditional university practice has involved conscious efforts to stimulate competition among students in order to promote their learning. With honorable intentions, fueled by myths ranging from competition as the best preparation a student can have for a "survival of the fittest" world, to competition as a key

builder of character, college classrooms - and forensics tournaments - have been places where competition has reigned. The natural result of this competition is that some students "win" and many students "lose." That is what competition is all about (Hatfield & Hatfield, 1995, p. 23). Unfortunately, competition does not create the kind of cooperative communities in which students will be expected to be able to function socially and professionally following graduation.

Cooperative experience is a foundation of many collegiate forensics programs. Even though the tournaments are highly competitive, many campus' forensics programs feature strong elements of cooperative learning practice: peer coaching, and collaborative research and work sessions in addition to the cooperative skills learned from traveling and living together on weekend tournaments. The attitude of the forensics coach is crucial in creating and maintaining a cooperatively spirited team / community. Assuming that bringing together a diverse group of students and keeping them together for six months (during which time they will work, travel, eat and live together) will automatically result in the creation of a 'team' in the true sense of the word is unrealistic. A cooperatively spirited 'team' needs to be nurtured by the coach and the senior members of the team - it doesn't just happen. The team members need to be taught that they are accountable to each other, and the coach is accountable to each one of them. It is that simple and that complex.

Further, the cooperative approach involves a commitment to a longer-term process of setting expectations and teaching cooperation skills during the course of the forensics season. The fundamental rules of a cooperative community will be foreign to the students who will need to be taught the new set of behaviors to go along with the rules. The cooperative behaviors, in turn, will need to be reinforced and rewarded. It takes time to build the kind of forensics team in which students truly become invested in the greater good of all members rather than individual gains or rewards.

Cooperative experiences are an important part of a student's intellectual and personal growth. Few skills besides the ability to communicate effectively and work well with others in a productive manner will have as much impact on an individual's future and career. Because forensics is so highly competitive (both externally and sometimes internally), coaches need to actively facilitate cooperative forensics communities - communities where everyone can "win" (Hatfield & Hatfield, 1995, p. 28).

3. Active Learning

Many college classrooms generally don't promote active learning. When faced with the confines of the academic calendar and ever increasing amounts of information, it becomes obvious how lecturing becomes an attractive mode of instruction. It is economical in terms of use of course time and number of students that can be served, it can be planned out in advance, it can be reused over and over, and it lets the teacher remain "in control" of the situation. Lectures leave little to chance. Students are moved from concept to concept, idea to idea, without an understanding of how the information relates to their own lives or the

lives of others, or how it has influenced the past, present, or future (Brown and Ellison, p. 39-40). And while lecture might be a very attractive method for teaching, it is not an effective way to learn.

Forensics participation is a great example of the principle of active learning. Ideally, forensics allows students the opportunity to explore new ideas, conduct research, integrate information from a variety of sources, and relate the ideas to what's happening in their lives and the lives of others. It is both 'active' and 'learning.'

In order to be effective, active learning must become an attitude on the part of both forensics students and coaches. Somehow, the process needs to be valued as highly as the result - even though it is only the results that bring home trophies. Active learning can best take place when coaches are aware that they are responsible for assisting their students' research and creative processes in a developmental way and when students assume responsibility for engaging in the speech construction process, instead of merely plugging information into formulas or templates. As this happens, our students will start the journey toward becoming lifelong learners.

4. Prompt Feedback

Feedback is a familiar concept to most educators and the basic element of forensics. As defined by Benson, Mattson & Adler (1995), feedback is any procedure used to inform a learner of the degree of appropriateness or correctness of a response to an instructional stimulus. What is crucial to the definition is that the learner is informed and can associate the feedback with a particular or specific response. To that end, truly useful feedback is that which is specific, timely, and clear.

Valuable feedback can come from a variety of sources. Students critiquing each other's speeches helps sharpen critical thinking skills, as well as the ability to articulate feedback appropriately. Student's self analysis provides the opportunity for critical self-evaluation and the identification of a personal plan for improvement. Feedback from coaches allows for yet an additional perspective on the speech performance, content and structure.

While prompt feedback is useful, the timing of feedback needs to be considered carefully. To be genuinely helpful, feedback needs to come at the time when students can best learn from it. For many of our students, receiving feedback after two days of competition isn't particularly helpful. For students who have multiple entries, remembering back to a specific round in which to ground the feedback is nearly impossible. Likewise, feedback provided only at the end of the tournament doesn't allow for any mid course corrections. Most forensics students have received ballots at the end of the tournament all pointing to the same issue (e.g. being overtime), something that might have been easily corrected in later rounds, if only the feedback had been provided "in time."

5. Time on Task

Time on task, while one of the most basic principles, is also one of the hard-

est to achieve. As Vorkink (1995) points out, a combination of college and university level efforts to create a diverse population of traditional and non-traditional learners, as well as economic realities facing all students has created a population for whom achieving time on task is a significant challenge. Many of our students are placed under tremendous strain as they try to balance significant demands of classes, jobs, and in many cases families, while pursuing their college education and attempting any participation in co-curricular activities. For these students, the time demands of forensics alone make even limited participation impossible.

For those students who can devote the time, participation in forensics is a valuable experience in this principle. Working with the same piece over a period of time and (in theory, anyway), revising it based upon new information and feedback is a classic demonstration of student time on task. It seems a safe assumption that few students devote the same amount of effort to most class assignments.

It is important that students in general and forensics students in particular be assisted in making best use of the often limited time students have available to devote to forensics.

Several questions arise. First, how can students be helped to maximize their use of the time they have available? Second, how can coaches facilitate effective use of time on task? And finally, how can the national forensics organizations be persuaded to address the time issue in terms of length of the season and number of national tournaments?

According to Vorkink (1995, p. 70), most institutions assume that students already know how to use their time productively, though the high school experience seldom prepares students for the time demands of collegiate life. Opportunities for students to improve their time management skills should be part of every student development program and reinforced by every instructor and forensics coach.

Finally, national forensics organizations need to consider the parameters of the season and the number of competing national tournaments that can effectively keep a student off campus and out of classes for three weeks during the spring. Many students' academic wellness comes into serious jeopardy in the spring when the demands of forensics start to overshadow all of their other commitments and obligations. It is up to forensics coaches and the national organizations to help alleviate this problem.

6. High Expectations

High expectations don't automatically result in higher student aspirations and greater student achievement. It takes talent, motivation, and experience in order for high expectations to produce results (Scott & Tobe, 1995). And as all forensics coaches know, not all students have equal talent. Any amount of encouragement and hours spent coaching will be moderated by the student's talent and ability. But coaches need to *believe* that all students can do better, even if not equally well. It is the role of the coach to encourage this improvement, not

necessarily expect national tournament breaks and trophies for all students.

Many programs welcome students who are participating in forensics for their own personal and professional growth as a speaker. Many programs do not. Even though all students can achieve growth through forensics, many programs and coaches still prefer to concentrate their energies and budget on those students who will "show me the hardware!"

A forensics program grounded in wellness recognizes that each participant has the opportunity to achieve personal growth through the activity - regardless of the outcome of the circuit.

7. Respect for Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

Designing programs to accommodate a diverse population of students is a critical task. Just as the indicators of institutions' efforts to diversify the student population becomes apparent on our campuses and classrooms, the results of these efforts can be seen on forensics teams as well. And we know that the differences are much deeper than the age, gender, race or nationalities of our students.

Forensics can both nurture and respond to diversity. Good practice should recognize, respect and reward a wide range of individual styles and choices in forensics events.

Conclusion

It is too early to tell what impact the new understanding and interest in wellness will have on the forensics community. On the one hand, forensics seems to support the practice of accepted principles of undergraduate education, contributing to a student's overall academic wellness. But that support can be tenuous. Student-faculty contact needs to respect boundaries. A cooperative spirit needs to be actively nurtured, not just assumed. Emphasis needs to be placed on the educational processes of forensics (active learning) and not just the result. The timing of feedback might need to be rethought to allow for mid-course correction. Time on task needs to be kept to within reasonable limits. Programs need to remain developmental in their focus, allowing students at all levels to benefit from the experience. And respect for individual differences in style and taste needs to be nurtured.

Wellness has come a long way over the past ten years. A broader understanding of the concept and reality of wellness has finally taken hold in the public consciousness. This new understanding is more forgiving and moderate than the previous interpretation that was seen by many as an unachievable ideal that was based upon fear, deprivation, guilt and obsessiveness. This new wellness follows a developmental model in which the process is important, if not more important, than the result. It takes a holistic approach emphasizing the synergistic relationship between the many components of wellness (Social, Physical, Emotional, Intellectual, Occupational, and Spiritual).

Forensics participation can contribute positively to students' and coaches'

lives and well-being. By adopting wellness as a fundamental tenant of all college forensics programs, forensics can enhance each participant's quest for personal wellness, not undermine it.

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