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Reflections on Voice: Debate and Community Engagement

Academic professionals, specifically forensics coaches, have a limited amount of time to complete tasks and engage students. Forensics provides significant positive benefits to those that choose to participate in it (Allen, Bekowitz, Hunt, & Lounden, 1999). However, communication educators often fail to promote these positives benefits to administrators, students, the community, and other interested publics. I believe building a unique team identity is a logical first step for team cohesiveness, identity, and recruiting (Schabot, 2013). In addition, activities that build positive narratives to promote the benefits of forensics and communication studies must utilized to provide a positive image to those publics.

Public relations professionals stress developing narrative human-interest stories to promote products, events, and organizational goals (Parcell, Lamme, & Cooley, 2011). To support those narratives clear facts and examples are an essential part. Extensive knowledge of an organization, their goals, and their community presence is used to build an appropriate factual story (Bremmer, 2014). Public relations is a process that many in the forensics community simply do not have time to engage in. Each of the authors in this issue discusses activities that both engage the community and allow students to apply communication skills. Christian Ivey uses open mic nights as a "venue" to promote forensics and dialogue. Amy Arellano explains how engagement in a prison debate program enhances student growth and builds skills for the participants. Jim Hanson addresses issues of public availability to build forensics communities. Pack-Jordan unpack the use of debate in small communities to engage students and communities alike. While not immediately speaking to issues related to Debate, Simmons, Wahl, and Spates expand on the areas where graduate students training can enhance the student experience, skills that are directly related to our engagements with graduate students who work with debate programs. These approaches provide a starting point with supportable narratives to engage interested publics to promote the positive benefits of applied communication studies.

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Maintaining Agency: Taking Debate into Prisons

Amy Arellano

As educators, we find ourselves within an interesting contemporary moment, specifically at the intersection of increasing civic engagement while safeguarding limited budget resources. Historically, this tension has been handled by promoting forensics as a co-circular activity (Millsap 1988, Walker 2015, Pelliteir 2015). Based on the current sociopolitical environment, forensics students often utilize their specific event choices as an instrument for civic engagement and/or protest. With the move to stabilize forensics as a place for resistance and advocacy, I suggest forensics educators adopt a community engagement pedagogy to increase the possibilities for societal change (Coasta and Leong, 2012). Based on these assessments, I explore how forensics engagement within the prison system can help promote the value of both advocacy and social justice.

In the fall of 2016, I joined the ranks of Boise State University and inherited a prison debate initiative that was started the year before. As a forensics educator, I was ecstatic to volunteer to teach debate to inmates once a week. An added benefit is that the BSU prison debate initiative allows me to strengthen the program's roots regarding community engagement pedagogy, or what some refer to as service learning. Within our partnership with the prison, I accomplish the following things that help our program's development and community engagement: the program is comprised of 25-30 inmates, I utilize student volunteers from the team, we spend 24 weeks teaching speech and debate skills, and graduation includes a debate exhibition for their family and friends. Based on this, I am also providing an applied experience for competitors to learn the relationship between advocacy and education. Thus, I look at how a prison program benefits the department, the volunteer students, and most importantly students within the initiative.

First, on a departmental level the initiative is understood as a tool for community outreach. It serves as a visible application of the department's commitment to advocacy as a learning outcome. As I operate the program as a volunteer, I can utilize the program to count towards faculty community service expectations. Additionally, the prison debate initiative is an official partnership with the Idaho Department of Corrections. The program is the first educational partnership the prison has made within the community. Forensics is more than just tournaments and trophies. This debate program has allowed the expansion of need and advocacy outcomes to serve as strong justification for maintaining the initiative. In turn, participation shows the direct benefits of teaching communication competency both to the student volunteers as well as the prison participants. The prison program acts as an exemplar on how a department can achieve core learning objectives within the community and not just classroom.

For the student volunteers, the program helps highlight the vitality of accessibility. As a gatekeeper, I pay special attention during student lectures to how

jargon is being used and insist the program remains focused on communication skills as opposed to a technical style of debate. This requires students to adjust their language choices for inclusion. Additionally, the initiative allows me to have a space for volunteers to learn how to construct, deliver, and unpack lectures. The opportunity for development helps the growth of students not only wanting to coach in their future, but also is extremely beneficial for my pre-law students as it allows time for hands on experience utilizing forensics skills outside of the activity.

As a forensics educator, my intent behind the program is twofold: to teach critical thinking as an alternative form of dispute resolution, and to teach each inmate how to advocate for their own interests and needs. I see the work that we do over the year as active engagement to resist the prison industrial complex that tends to focus on punitive outcomes.

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Outreach to Grow Speech and Debate

Jim Hanson

In Washington state, there are just over 115 high schools with active speech and debate programs (Hanson, 2017). Sadly, there are more than 900 high schools without active speech and debate programs (High-Schools.com, 2017). Nationwide, there are well over 22,000 public and private high schools (Educational Directories, 2011, but also see, 37,000, from US Department of Education, 2014) yet there are less than 3,500 speech and debate programs that belong to the National Speech and Debate Association (NSDA, 2014). Obviously, some programs are not part of the NSDA and still participate actively but only 15 to 30% of high schools have active speech and debate programs.

The failure to offer speech and debate programs leaves students without the opportunities and growth that forensics offers. Those of us that are involved see it in students who come out of their shell, students who fervently research for the best evidence, students who put on amazing performances of their interpretation cuttings, and supportive administrators who are wowed by how well students present themselves. Among many articles on the benefits of forensics, Jack Rogers (2002) engaged in a longitudinal study and concluded that students involved in forensics showed higher social responsibility, greater cultural understanding, academic success, and ethical support for justice in society.

There are efforts to provide help to schools. It is mainly content information including textbooks, written activities for teaching, and especially materials with content for speech and debates such as evidence from Planet Debate, Victory Briefs, and my own West Coast Publishing. These are helpful but I am not aware of systemic efforts to provide in person help to coaches to start, manage, instruct, and build up their programs. There is some peer support in some regions but in other areas, overworked experienced coaches have left new coaches in the lurch. Even among schools with programs, many coaches are thrown into the role of speech and debate director without any training and with little support to succeed.

Working to increase the number of programs participating and opportunities for underserved students is a time intensive effort as I have found working with the Climb the Mountain Speech and Debate Foundation (Climb). Leading Climb has exposed me to the multitude of problems that coaches face—some of which I had not faced in my previous coaching experiences which were mostly at established and well supported programs. Some school administrators are not supportive especially with funding and in some cases are even hostile to the speech and debate program. Transportation can be a problem as well with some schools not providing vehicles, safety concerns about the use of the 15 passenger van, and onerous restrictions on who can and cannot drive. At some schools there is a financial barrier to participations. One barrier is the need to work during the weekend when a typical tournament would take place. At other schools,

students have very diverse interests and are less likely to commit to participating regularly. At many schools, teachers who might be interested in running a program are overwhelmed with correcting papers, completing paperwork, and participating in meetings.

There is no simple solution to the difficulties but we can make progress toward the goal of increased participation. Climb has worked with over 600 students and coaches at existing and new programs. Based on these experiences, here are suggested actions that can make a difference:

1. Have people available in your area to help. Have a main contact person who can answer basic questions and then direct coaches and students to specific people who have expertise such as in policy-cx debate or in handling transportation issues. In my experience, new and even experienced coaches cannot find tournament schedules, invitations (some of which are not on the plethora of online registration systems), who the NSDA district leaders are, as well as the basic request of "how do I teach interp" and "I can teach the basics of public forum debate but what about for my experienced kids?"

2. Offer low cost clinics providing training to students and coaches particularly at the beginning of the year but also as new debate topics are announced. At these clinics, coaches should be provided with practical information on recruiting, traveling, working with students, choosing partners for teams, etc. Coaches and students can also benefit from observing and engaging in practice on speeches and current debate topics. Legal sharing of debate evidence, access to interpretation pieces, extemporaneous articles, etc. can be invaluable to coaches.

3. Offer more accessible tournaments. Shorter tournaments that do not take all of Friday, Saturday and Sunday can be a life saver for programs with overburdened coaches. Saturday afternoon or a 3 or 4 hour event in the evening can be great venues for some programs. Programs can also save a great deal of money by participating in online tournaments. While the technology is not perfect, it is entirely acceptable—with usually good audio and video—and the payoff is big. Online tournaments cannot replace the in-person physical closeness and community building, those should definitely continue, but I have been amazed and delighted by how much socializing happens in the online tournaments.

4. Engage in outreach to schools. While you can cold call, mail, and email—having a known contact is really the way to go. One of our Climb staff helped start small programs at seven schools by using teacher to teacher networks. I've seen the same happen in the Seattle middle school debate league where students and parents are clamoring for this opportunity. Further, these middle school kids are moving on to high schools including some high school that do not currently have programs. Working to get these students to begin programs at their high schools should be a priority.

5. Be open to a diversity of forensics offerings. There are believers in specific kinds of programs—ones that offer everything, ones that offer policy-cx debate only, ones that offer public forum and extemporaneous/impromptu speaking, others that offer individual events only. None is the uniform preferred approach. Each coach and each school has unique characteristics that will work with differing speech and debate events. In some schools, coaches would be best served creating more informal debating and speaking that matches with the time commitments of students. In other cases, the coach may have a strong theatre or literature background and so an emphasis on interpretation events will be best. Those working with these varied programs should listen and follow the lead of the coaches and students.

6. All of this requires time and money, resources in short supply in the speech and debate community. In my case, I am committed to the effort with my position with Climb but financially, it might not be sufficient for others. In other areas, recently retired coaches or former competitors that have time off, or former coaches whose children are now in college, might lead up the effort. Current coaches can also help out—but as I've noted, time is at a premium for these hardworking folks. Funding will still be a challenge. Climb has relied on donations and low cost fees for our clinics, camps, tutoring, and tournaments but available money has most definitely limited our ability to reach out and start more programs. Online donation campaigns can help. Reaching out to former speakers and debaters especially those in jobs with larger salaries can help. Writing grants could be fruitful as well.

Speech and debate is so valuable and we should be actively looking to make it more available. This article offers just a starting set of suggestions for building up programs. We have more work to do.

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Putting the 'Forum' Back in Forensics

Christina Ivey

"Forensics" is derived from the Latin *ensis*, which many have roughly translated to 'forum' ("What is forensics?"). Competitive speech and debate took on this name as an homage to the *polis*, or spaces for public deliberation used by the Greeks. Returning to this history can guide us in looking for innovative ways of contemporarily recruiting, marketing, and promoting forensics. An open mic (or, as I have called it in the past: 'The Venue' – a rhetorical nod to creating a 'forum' for discourse) promotes forensics on campuses and supports teams in a variety of ways. Depending on resources/space/interest, the team could host 2-3 open mics per semester. During each of these events, coaches decide when specific team members participate and how. For example, when teams I have worked with in the past held open mics, half of the squad (two out of four members) would be required to perform one of their events during the open mic. The other two team members would then alternate as emcee of the event. The rest of the time slots were filled with other campus talent; such as: poets, musicians, singers, dancers, etc. The broader the types of acts, the more diverse the audience to witness the forensics performances.

Beyond explanation of the difference between forensic science and competitive speech and debate, it can be difficult to explain exactly what it is that we as forensicators *do*. This can be especially hard when trying to explain the activity to someone who has never been exposed to it. Even when tournaments are hosted on campus, it can be challenging for individuals to be exposed to a variety of events due to decorum (the assumption that the audience will stay in one room for the duration of a round). In an open mic setting, multiple events could be shown in succession, allowing for a more diverse glimpse into the activity – a type of team visibility. To combat the argument given by administrators that forensics is too specialized to appeal to a wider audience, the visibility an open mic provides is applied demonstration of the skills learned on forensics teams (Preston, 1997). Teams can cite the event as a form of campus involvement: a campus wide opportunity for individuals to witness what the team is doing, as well as participate alongside team members. The visibility also means the open mic can function as a form of recruitment. If students were never exposed to forensics in high school, they often only know about forensics via public speaking classes. Though an important part of a school curriculum, these classes only skim the surface of what is possible in competitive forensics. Open mics allow students on the team to demonstrate the types of events and messages that are seen at tournaments every weekend.

For those students who do not have the luxury/privilege to travel (or, for those teams with an extremely small budget), the open mic acts as a space to perform pieces/events for another audience. Alternatively, this unconventional audience potentially embraces messages that are avoided at competitive forensics tournaments. For

example, there have been moments where I have had students that were determined to do a topic they have felt passionately about, but that topic was 'over done' or 'not socially significant enough' according to voices in the judging pool (Ivey, 2016). At that moment, I had to decide what was more important: allowing the student to explore a topic that could mean personal growth, or protecting a student from the vulnerable position of performing a personal topic for an audience that may attack their choice for not being 'relevant' or 'competitive' enough. Yes, part of this activity is learning how to adapt a message to a specific audience, but part of this activity is about finding agency and voice. For many students, finding their voice means going against specific conventions that are highlighted in the competitive realm of forensics (Cronn-Mill & Golden, 1997). In my experience, not only are these topics acceptable at open mics, but they are *praised* by the types of audiences that populate open mic events. Therefore, open mics simultaneously allow students to perform these events, as well as give students an audience that can increase personal growth and acceptance.

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Remembering Rural Debate

Erin Pack-Jordan
Jason Jordan

Participation in high school debate has been a life-changing, formative experience in the lives of many young people in the United States. We know this from personal experience as teachers that have worked in historically underserved rural communities. While monumental gains have been made in expanding the access to participation in competitive debating, these efforts have almost exclusively focused on urban educational contexts. As rural high school students, one of us was not afforded access to competitive debate, while the other was only able to experience this unique learning opportunity due to the determined efforts of one teacher.

The goal of this article is to begin the process of rethinking competitive, interscholastic debate from the perspective of rural learning communities by way of revisiting the memory of rural debate as a radical and democratic pedagogy. As high school teachers, researchers, and debate coaches that were schooled by and have taught with rural communities, this article names a project that attaches our own pedagogic experiences to broader trends in critical memory research (Blair et al., 2010; Giroux, 1979/2011, 2014; hooks, 1990). Giroux (1979/2011, 2014) explained that one of the pernicious technologies of the neoliberalization of education has been the creation of a sanitized, flat form of historical memory that generates a malaise in students and educators toward the liberatory potential of school sites. Against this, critical memory work seeks to bring forth from the collective archive stories, histories, and values otherwise forgotten as a resource for creating new critical strategies against oppression and marginalization (Giroux, 2014, p. 58).

Our aim is informed by our experiences as public, secondary educators. However, engaging rural debate as a form of praxis is really a process of remembering a history of pragmatic, progressive educators from the early twentieth century and seeking insights from these critical memories in order to re-constitute debate in the contemporary rural context.

Our approach within this article is part literature review, part educational history, and part theory building. In this way, we seek to demarcate seemingly disparate academic and disciplinary conversations and suture them around the project of increasing access to debate in rural learning communities. At the same time, we reflect upon what constitutes debating within a rural learning context. This article begins with a discussion of the contemporary rural experience in the United States as a distinct site of social and material marginalization. Next, debate as an activist pedagogy is discussed. To conclude, we begin to trace out one history of rural debate activism and offer a set of theoretical and practical proposals for future action.

Rural Learners

The increasing urbanization of the American population, the monopolizing of mass media outlets in the U.S., and the stripping of rural political clout through gerrymandering have all made the contemporary rural experience uniquely problematic. While multiple forms of material poverty have often been intertwined with rural life, these instances of material exclusion have both been exacerbated by, and reified through their intersection with a contemporary culture that marginalizes rural persons. The following section discusses specific ways in which contemporary rural communities in the United States are materially excluded, before discussing the cultural system of ruralism.

Rural life and material exclusion

Students in public secondary schools in the United States have been hindered by the evolution of standards as an educational goal, to standardization as a general paradigm for educational policy (Vinson et al., 2001). Unfortunately, these general problems facing all public secondary schools in the United States have had unique, deleterious impacts on rural schools. While taken as an aggregate (usually including what might more properly considered suburban schools) rural schools seem to have done better than urban schools in the wake of standardization, the actual implications of the policy changes that federal educational standardization has forced onto individual states are highly problematic.

First, many states have created artificially high test numbers via school district consolidation programs that tend to disproportionately undermine the success of impoverished rural school districts (Education Week, 2011). Additionally, Schwartzbeck et al. (2003) noted that standardization has forced many rural school districts to both reduce the salary they pay teachers while at the same time requiring their teachers to teach a higher number of distinct classes. This has led to both a general problem with teacher attraction and retention, and degradation in the overall quality of staff rural schools employ. Furthermore, Education Week (2011) reported "Rural schools also wrestle with state funding formulas that often favor larger and wealthier districts" so that "In many states, the dependence on local property tax revenues to finance education fuels funding disparities between urban, suburban, and rural districts." The combined effect of these policy realities is that rural public schools in the U.S. are teaching fewer non-required courses (such as debate) with teachers that are overworked and, in many cases, ill-prepared to teach the courses they are assigned.

Beyond these merely educational hurdles placed in the way of rural communities, the day to day life of the rural secondary student and their household in the U.S. is further affected by multiple forms of material marginalization. According to the USDA (2013), rural communities are afflicted by a higher rate of poverty than urban and suburban communities. Furthermore, Farrigan and Parker (2013) have indicated that the disproportionate rate at which minority groups experience economic poverty is much higher in rural communities compared metropolitan areas. This general disparity in economic resources is exacerbated by a lack of opportunities for rural Americans to change their economic status. Jensen et al. (2003) argued that long term structural and political factors have guaranteed that rural communities in the United States suffer from a lack of economic opportunities both in terms of job training and occupational options.

While these material indicators of social and economic exclusion are troubling, we argue that they are both magnified and reified by a culture that marginalizes rural identities. Bassett (2006) explained "Our society distances rural poverty. We don't want

to see it, we don't want to talk about it" to the degree that "the distancing of rural poverty is literal as well as figurative" (p. 4). The next section of this paper discusses ruralism as one possible explanation of the cultural exclusion of rural populations in the U.S.

Ruralism

As high school debaters and coaches, we and our students were referred to as "hicks", "rednecks", "trailer trash", and "hay seeds" by competitors on more than one occasion. While these might seem to be instances of mere name-calling, or at worst classist utterances, they are really something quite different. These names discriminate against rural people on the basis of geography (Bassett, 2006). We argue that a general cultural attitude that places primacy on the urban majority, while also reifying stereotypes about rural dwellers exacerbates the previously elucidated material forms of rural exclusion.

Bassett (2003a, 2003b, 2006, 2011) has referred to this culture of rural marginalization as "ruralism". Bassett described ruralism as:

> Discrimination on the basis of factors stemming from living in a rural area. As is true of many other forms of discrimination, ruralism entails the projection of stereotyped attributes by a more powerful majority group onto a less powerful minority group. (Bassett, 2003a, p. 279).

Far from just a general denigration of the needs of rural communities, ruralism also creates and reifies problematic images of rural populations. Bassett explains the impact of these media representations:

> Portrayals in television, literature, and film, perpetuates various stereotypes of rural dwellers, ranging from the "country bumpkin," embarrassingly ignorant of basic social conventions, to the dirty, slow-thinking, slow-speaking "mountain men" with low intelligence quotients attributed snickeringly to family inbreeding. The harm to rural dwellers goes beyond stereotyping; discrimination against rural areas is seen in federal spending. The federal government spends more money on urban citizens than rural citizens (2003a, pp. 279-280).

On the level of the individual, these mechanisms of marginalization combine to create self-fulfilling prophecies of failure both in and out of school for rural students. These processes of social exclusion in turn mitigate the ability of such students to travel outside of their community, an act that is often needed in order to break the cycle of generational poverty via higher education and career building.

The notion of rural populations as the targets of exclusion might seem counterintuitive to some who view the rural dweller as white, male, and benefiting from the forms of privilege associated with these social locations. To the contrary Bassett claimed:

> Despite the racial, religious, and occupational diversity of rural America, however, rural dwellers are tied together by virtue of living in rural areas, and common issues exist for those residing in the most isolated -the most rural- of rural areas, including unifying themes of isolation, poverty, and lack of access to goods and services. (2003b, p. 746).

Thus, the exclusion of rural populations cuts across other forms of social marginalization both serving as its own form of oppression while at the same time intersecting in myriad ways with existent issues related to race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, and class.

Finally, ruralism removes political agency from rural communities. Bassett reports "Rural dwellers are politically underrepresented in proportion to their actual

numbers, and rural issues accordingly receive less attention. As a result, rural dwellers receive inadequate political representation" (2003b, p. 791). Beyond issues related to mere voting and representative politics, Bassett (2011) has shown through her analysis of the avoidance of rural jurors in the legal system that non-urban persons are often viewed by the legal system as irrational, biased, and untrustworthy. The implication of this is that rural persons are unable to effect meaningful change in the political and legal systems that have created their dearth of material necessities.

Thus, rural life can be seen as a unique location of social exclusion in the contemporary United States. We argue that this provides a basis for reconsidering the ways in which competitive debate can be responsive to the unique needs of rural educational communities. After all, multiple studies have indicated that participation in competitive debating is one of the best ways to increase academic achievement in the short term, as well as foster a love of learning throughout life (Peters, 2009). The next section of this article discusses other efforts that have been undertaken to make competitive debating responsive to marginalized communities, and briefly lays out some of the specific considerations that rethinking debate from the perspective of rurality entails.

Debate and Pedagogy

We believe that expanding access to competitive debating is an appropriate communicative, critical intervention to the deleterious effects of cultural ruralism and rural poverty. Davis (2011) reported that competitive debate offers pedagogic flexibility to meet individual/group student needs that traditional classrooms can't account for. Additionally, Kennedy (2007) claimed that "Debate as an active instructional strategy enhances learning particularly in the areas of mastering the content as well as developing critical thinking skills, oral communication skills, and empathy" (p. 188). Of note within the context of this article, we claim that debate as a pedagogy has evidenced the ability to both positively affect students' college readiness and access, as well as allowing a space for identity negotiation and creation.

Debate as Educational Intervention

Participation in competitive debating effectuates positive gains in the educational domains of critical thinking and content mastery, while also preparing students for acculturation into college norms and expectations. Colbert (1995) concluded that a variety of studies that had been conducted over the preceding fifty years seemed to indicate that there was a positive correlation between student involvement in competitive debating and student outcomes on objective measurements of critical thinking ability. We argue that this is because "Participation in a debate requires a more thorough mastery of the content than even giving a lecture does," however, "debates go beyond mastery of the content as students also develop critical thinking skills, such as recognizing inconsistencies and identifying assumptions" (Kennedy, 2007, p. 188). Additionally, participation in debate acculturates students to the expectations of higher education by equipping them with the skill set needed to succeed in such classrooms. Wade (1998) noted that previous debate outreach efforts have bore this out by increasing access to college for groups of learners that have traditionally not had access to higher learning.

Beyond merely preparing students for success within institutions of higher learning, participation in debate also allows a space for learners to engage in identity formation that goes beyond the identities they are exposed to within their communities and through mass media. This is because "students give consideration to various

viewpoints, particularly when" they are "not always defending their own viewpoint" (Kennedy, 2007, p. 188). Breger (1998) claimed that participation in competitive academic debate could serve as an appropriate intervention to properly cultivate a high level of authentic civic engagement in adolescent learners. Specifically, debating allows open conversation, provides direct instruction toward the mastery of civic knowledge, and serves as a catalyst for authentic experiences that engage this knowledge set in acts of civic engagement. In this way "Debating delivers a galaxy of alternatives and opportunity for those who are only offered hopelessness and despair" (Lee, 1998, p. 95).

Debate as Activism

The previous two decades of competitive forensics in the United States has yielded a multitude of examples of educators seeking to construct an activist pedagogy against perceived systemic oppression. While these efforts have arguably yielded both pedagogic and competitive gains for some historically marginalized groups, the context of the rural as yet remains un-theorized by forensic educators. Indeed, Bartanen and Littlefield's (2014) history of forensics in the United States discusses marginalization in the history of competitive forensics by exclusively discussing the experiences of African-Americans and women in the activity. Our concern is not that there is a "trade-off" in efforts to make competitive debating more responsive to the lived experiences of particular groups, or that the exclusion of rural populations is uniquely "worse" than that of these other groups. Instead, our aim is to build upon the work done in an urban context to rethink how we conceptualize competitive debating without merely replicating what has shown promise in an urban context.

Beginning in the 1990's, a number of Urban Debate League (UDL) groups cropped up throughout major urban cities of the United States. Reid-Brinkley (2012) noted that UDLs have empirically evidenced "an improvement in academic achievement demonstrated by increased GPAs, increased levels of participation in other extracurricular activities, and increased matriculation to four-year colleges" (p. 80). However, the material success of the students that have participated in UDLs is not without criticism. Reid-Brinkley (2012) claimed that in many instances journalists, policy makers, and UDL leaders have produced essentializing stories of urban suffering to fit the experiences of UDL participants into "good stories". Additionally, many coaches and competitors within the context of intercollegiate policy debate have questioned the value of African-American students participating in the debate forms that were created to serve white, middle class communities (Reid-Brinkley, 2008).

Thus, coaches such as Louisville's Ede Warner facilitated efforts to re-constitute competitive debate rounds as a forum for social activism (Reid-Brinkley, 2008). Polson (2012) indicated that these alternative forms of engaging in debate have prioritized the creation of organic intellectuals, and place a primacy on affective performance. Not only have these efforts to rethink debate from a particular, marginalized perspective afforded African-American debaters a forum to reclaim a level of agency in the activity, they have also yielded competitive success. Redding (2013) noted that Emporia State (a team using non-traditional arguments) was the first ever school to win both the CEDA and NDT championship tournaments in the same year.

Theorizing rural debate

Instead of simply seeking to replicate the work that has been done in the particular, urban context described above, we argue that rural educators and students should seek to theorize ways that they can create their own form of activist pedagogy in the forum of competitive debating. What then is unique about debating in a rural context?

First, it should be noted that "being" rural is a social identity that cuts across other static and dynamic social signifiers (Bassett, 2003b). This means that the notion of merely "performing" the rural probably lacks any meaningful content. After all, there are really (at least in the context of the United States) a multiplicity of rural identities that differ in material experience and performance. Instead, the rural experience is tied to a notion of place that is defined by its isolation as a primary marker. Thus, we argue that addressing the unique and deleterious implications of this trope of isolation ought to take preeminence in rethinking rural debating.

Additionally, Bassett (2003b) noted that rural communities in the U.S. are largely excluded from both state and national politics in any meaningful way. This means that debates of "policy" ought to be re-contextualized to the level of the local. However, this focus on the local as a point of political action is also a benefit for the rural context. Rural communities, because of both their isolation from other political interests as well as their small population sizes retain the ability to have intelligible political discussions on the level of the individual. Thus, re-focusing debates toward "grassroots" action doesn't "cede the political," it instead *seeds* the political. This focus on locality seems to be in line with Dewey's (1888/1997) pragmatic, progressive understanding of democracy:

> A government springs from a vast mass of sentiments, many vague; some defined, of instincts, of aspirations, of ideas, of hopes and fears, of purposes. It is their reflex and their incorporation; their projection and outgrowth. Without this basis, it is worth nothing. A gust of prejudice, a blow of despotism, and it falls like a card house. To say that democracy is only a form of government is like saying that home is more or less geometrical arrangement of bricks and mortar; that the church is a building with pews, pulpit and spire. It is true; they certainly are so much. But it is false; they are so infinitely more. Democracy, like any other polity, has been finely termed the memory of an historic past, the consciousness of a living present, the ideal of the coming future. (pp. 195-196).

So, focusing the creation of democratic action on the level of the individual student both fits the context of the rural, while also extending upon pragmatic, progressive ideals of democratic activism.

However, rethinking rural debate really ought to be a process of remembering. The next section of this article begins to reconnect the idea of rural debating as a unique pedagogical context with the memory of progressive, pragmatic activism in rural debate.

Remembering Rural Debate

Rural debate not only has a strong historical presence, but a rich identity that seeks to be both revisited and reconsidered. Within the archives of Texas' University Interscholastic League (U.I.L.), an organization for academic competition, athletics, and performing arts founded in 1910, primary and secondary sources abound. As two former multi-event U.I.L. competitors, we sought out histories, memories, and stories of rural debate.

We believe that a primary element of rethinking rural debate is remembering a largely forgotten past of rural debate activism. Blair et al. (2010) explained that collective memory "has a history" and is therefore "partisan" and "often contested" (p. 6). Thus, remembering particular historical memories can re-situate and inform contemporary politics. One historical antecedent to debate activism in a rural context is the work done

by Roy Bedichek as the director of the University Interscholastic League. This section begins to piece together fragments of disparate stories pertaining to Bedichek in an effort to remember his pedagogy as a rural, debate-focused educator and activist. It should be noted that our claim is not that Bedichek is the *only* such example of these actions, or that he ought to serve as "The" model of rural debate activism. Instead, the work of Bedichek offers a *particular*, intelligible example of a praxis of progressive pragmatism in the context of rural debate.

Roy Bedichek and the University Interscholastic League

When the precursor to the University Interscholastic League was founded in 1910, it was initially called The Debating and Declamation League of Texas Schools; it did not include athletics, music, or theater like its modern-day successor organization. Deweyan in nature, the primary purpose of the U.I.L. was "to foster in the schools the study and practice of public speaking and debate as an aid in the preparation for citizenship" (University of Texas, 1911).

This earliest incarnation of the U.I.L. was housed at the University of Texas at Austin's Department of Extension, which provided resources and education to remote parts of the state. In a detailed list of recruiting methods, the League targeted school principals "especially in the rural schools" (University of Texas, 1911). Although some outreach and assistance were provided, the League remained nascent. Despite limited efforts at rural recruitment, the U.I.L. "turned out to be a quite exclusive affair" that was limited "to fewer than two hundred high schools" (Bedichek, 1956, p.29).

Roy Bedichek, himself a product of a rural Texas school district, became director in 1922 when the U.I.L.'s first director, Edwin D. Shurter, resigned. As state director, Bedichek traveled frequently throughout Texas, visiting rural schools and encouraging them to join the University Interscholastic League. Some schools were so remote that Bedichek camped outdoors for accommodations (Hudson, 2010). He believed so strongly that educational competition would benefit students that he crisscrossed the large state of Texas several times. Under his efforts and circuit rider-like schedule, membership grew "to an astounding extent" (North Texas State Teachers College, 1934, p. 1). To Bedichek, competitive debate events needed to be local in focus, especially in regards to resolutions or arguments to be answered: "Surely, if one of the aims of education is to give pupils practice in living, we should consider the fact that speech is the prime means of establishing understanding between one human being and another" (Bedichek, 1956, p. 192).

Progressive educational philosophy heavily influenced how Bedichek directed the University Interscholastic League. In a column of *The Leaguer*, the U.I.L.'s semi-monthly newspaper, he wrote, "The Progressive School, whether or not it spells it with a capital "P" and a capital "S" uses the community in which it is located as a kind of demonstration laboratory" (Bedichek, 1942, p. 2). This pragmatic, Deweyan way of thinking lent itself to the promotion of competitive high school debate in Texas. Through this particular lense, debate was not only an important part of public school curriculum, but a ubiquitous part of the extra-curricular landscape at the time: "Considering the importance of speech-training and its tardy recognition in the curriculum, it is not surprising that it has been adopted as a favored activity in the extracurriculum [sic]" (Bedichek, 1956, p. 198). As a progressive educational thinker, he perceived debate to be an important part of both regular curriculum and as an extracurricular activity. This, to Bedichek, was a natural extension of the importance of public schooling in a democracy: "The public school is democracy's prime institutional device for maintaining its own

health and aggressive temper; hence, any violation of democratic principle in public-school administration must be classed among deadly sins" (Bedichek, 1956, p. 428).

When Bedichek assumed the role of state director, rural education was decidedly lacking. Many schools experienced shortages of teachers or resources necessary to provide a complete education for local children (Pack-Jordan, 2014.) Although the Farmers' Alliance, The Grange, and similar organizations attempted to set up skill shares, specialized academies, and civic events (Pack-Jordan, 2014), there left much to be desired in terms of educational experiences for rural students. The high school movement of the late 19th and early 20th centuries certainly helped in the promotion of a variety of extracurricular activities, notably debate and declamation (Pack-Jordan, 2014). Indeed, the creation of a high school debate and declamation organization in Texas and in several other states can be credited to this high school movement and its emphasis on educational extracurricular activities.

Yet, there was a disconnect between the University Interscholastic League and many rural schools in Texas. Consolidation of smaller school districts into larger ones in the early 20th century had a negative impact on educational competition. Less opportunities to compete were offered to rural students, and "Coincidentally, the rural divisions were discontinued, for the rural schools were reduced to an insignificant number in the same process" (Bedichek, 1956, p. 215).

According to a report from one rural Central Texas newspaper, Bedichek told local teachers and principals at a conference that "rural schools will be given a greater opportunity in the Texas Interscholastic League activities." He went on by saying that specific changes in rules would allow "rural schools can have a better chance to compete," (The Mexia Weekly Herald, 1925, p. 1). As a direct response to the lack of rural schools competing, Bedichek gave lectures promoting and encouraging rural participation in the University Interscholastic League. He also formulated a new competition structure of classifications determined by school size to directly benefit rural and small schools, so that "a division of debate was set up for rural schools. There was increased participation in the state meet" (Bedichek, 1956, p. 216). This system of classification, where schools compete against other schools of comparable size, was a boon to rural competition. These tiny school districts no longer had to compete with large, multi-school districts in metropolitan areas such as Houston or Dallas (Bedichek, 1956, p. 216). Competition flourished throughout the state and the classification system still remains firmly in place within the U.I.L.

Bedichek believed that "extracurriculars found their place in response to a genuine need. Do away with them and the need still exists. If this need is not supplied by the school administration, it will come from the children" (Bedichek, 1944, p. 2). Even during the leanest years of the Great Depression and World War II, Bedichek discouraged schools from cutting debate programs. He went so far as to say that rationing and travel restrictions were real concerns, but they were "no reason to give up debating. Walk [to local tournaments] if necessary" (Bedichek, 1942, p. 2). Furthermore, He emphasized local competition and perhaps more radically, the continued use of local and state topics rather than the standard practice of using national topics: "Aside from the very questionable policy of encouraging national championships, much is lost by selecting a question not of near and present interest, but watered down by compromises and often influenced by propagandist organizations" (Bedichek, 1956, p. 214).

Bedichek viewed debate as not only an educational tool for students; he believed in the power of debate against fascism and demagoguery: "Totalitarianism cannot tolerate

debate or public discussion in any form… Suppression of debate is an old, old story, one that dictators learned long, long ago" (Bedichek, 1956, p. 201). In his view, debate was essential for a free society and he continued to argue passionately for educational competition in general and debate specifically even after he retired from the League in 1948: "To dub an issue 'controversial'- and therefore tabu [sic]- or to call an individual 'controversial'- and therefore one who should be made to keep his mouth shut in behalf of 'harmony'- is to make an intellectual desert and call it peace" (Bedichek, 1956, p. 200).

The example provided by Bedichek follows the Deweyan conceptualization of democratic action beginning on the level of the individual in relation to the community. Dewey (1888/1997) argued that society is best understood not as the bringing together of "non-social atoms" but instead an always already existent "social organism" (p. 186). In this way, individual actors only gain agency whenever they act within the construct of the community. Thus, Dewey (1888/1997) concluded democratic action could be regarded as "not loss of selfhood or personality" but "its realization" so that "The individual is not sacrificed" but instead "brought to reality" (p. 197).

Re-Activating Rural Debate

In our estimation, the dearth of debate in rural school districts requires the articulation of theoretical foundations that are distinct and particular to the context in question while at the same time seeking specific, tangible actions that can be taken in reality. This praxis-oriented approach to rethinking debate is in keeping with a pragmatic, progressive pedagogical orientation. It also respects the rich history of Progressivism so intertwined with debate education. Dewey (1916/1997) explained, "since democracy stands in principle for free interchange, for social continuity, it must develop a theory of knowledge which sees in knowledge the method by which one experience is made available in giving direction and meaning to another" (p. 218). Thus, what follows are two general theoretical starting points for rethinking rural debate and two potential tangible actions that can be taken by educational leaders. This list is in no way meant to be authoritative or exhaustive. Instead, these proposals should be read as a starting point for a broader conversation that will likely have different answers in different particular rural contexts.

Theoretical Foundations

First, rural debate must provide an avenue for students to connect their own experiences and community concerns with the topics being debated. The application of what students learn in school and educational competition to their "real lives" is not only necessary but vital to a meaningful school experience. It might seem hard to conceptualize a rural reading of recent national competitive debate topics such as the exploration of space or Middle Eastern democracy promotion. However, the reality is that economic and foreign policy decisions always have a unique impact on rural communities, as they do in urban and suburban areas as well. Students and teachers involved in rural debate should seek ways of engaging debate topics that links scholarship with lived rural experiences. There is a well-established precedence for this type of debating, especially in the realm of competitive policy debate amongst rural high school students. This epistemic premise is consistent with Dewey's claim that (1906/1981) "truth is an experienced relation of things, and it has no meaning outside of such relation" (p. 185).

Second, Mitchell's (1998) notion of reflexive fiat seems like a useful way for rural debaters to craft advocacies that effectuate actual policy change. Specifically, debaters should consider advocating cases that highlight discreet issues in their community and identify the decision makers that can address these issues. In addition to addressing issues and policy-makers in debate cases presented at competitions, debaters may also choose to directly contact said policy-makers in order to create positive action within their respective communities. This method is an extension of the progressive, pragmatic educational paradigm in which educators sought to use the "world as the classroom" (Pack-Jordan, 2014). By engaging in serious research and discussion concerning policies, debate fulfilled this role. Extension education brought new and varied skills to rural places. Many community organizations, such as the Farmers' Alliance and the Lyceum Movements, pioneered public debates and lectures as a vehicle for community education. Contemporary efforts to grow a unique form of debating in rural communities should find ways to follow these examples.

Potential Actions

First, scholars and educators must push for policy change on both the local and state level. Specifically, advocating for debate classes as a graduation requirement seems to be a meaningful way to incentivize schools setting aside resources and time for teachers to train students in debating within the context of standardized educational policy. Indeed, Lynn (1998) noted that access to trained teachers and/or coaches and consistent funding are the key lynchpins to guaranteeing ongoing access to participation in debate within learning communities. The examples of Roy Bedichek previously discussed offer one way to approach this sort of work.

Second, state organizations and individual schools should take part in public debates about issues that are pertinent to their community. This method of linking up the competitive forum of interscholastic debating with community education was often utilized by progressive, pragmatic educators. The perceived need for rural education, via extension services or public events, was a major impetus of the progressive education reforms established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. When competitive debating societies and leagues were established, students, teachers, and principals were expected to hold public events for the "educational benefit of the community" (University of Texas, 1911). Competitive high school debate codified progressive practice by actively engaging rural communities.

Conclusions

The proposals made in this article in no way reflect a definitive stance on how to remedy the dearth of meaningful educational experiences in rural schools in the United States. Instead, the goal of this article has been to explicate the particular problematics of the contemporary rural experience in the United States and begin the process of remembering the previous efforts of rural debate activists in order to look toward the future for possibilities. Indeed, meaningful change will require scholars across a variety of disciplines to continually engage in a project of remembering the pragmatic actions and progressive politics of the past against a telling of shared experience that is continually "undermining our capacity to bear witness to a different and critical sense of remembering, agency, ethics, and collective resistance" (2014, p. 27). While some meaningful work has been carried out by groups such as the National Speech and Debate Association's diversity and inclusion working group (NSDA, 2015, p. 12-13), these efforts remain mired in assumptions of both the potential of rural school sites and the

scope of available strategies to affect meaningful change to the dearth of competitive academic debate in rural schools within the United States.

A vibrant and critically engaged debating experience has been a central part of the educational experience in rural schools since the beginnings of the 19th century. Instead of merely considering what is to be done then, we call on rural educators and scholars to recall what others have accomplished before us and reimagine how those strategies might be critically redeployed yet again.

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Focusing on Diversity and Civic Callings: A Graduate Teaching Assistant Training

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Rationale

Over the past few decades, colleges and universities have worked to increase efforts toward fostering diversity among the student body. Primarily, these efforts have manifested through the active development of diversity and inclusion programs that often share a core set of three goals and functions. Each aims to 1) develop more diverse on-campus learning communities through which culturally specific knowledge is fostered and shared, 2) devise a means of developing more "inclusive" cultural experiences through which students learn about and respect cultures other than their own, and 3) facilitate community engagement initiatives designed to make significant efforts toward recruiting and maintaining faculty and students that represent the diversity of the student body.

However, as colleges and universities continue to spend significant resources on improving these efforts, there are still significant deficiencies. On the surface, NCES data suggests that recruitment efforts have been rather successful over the past fifteen years, in the sense that more Students of Color are attending colleges and universities (NCES). However, recruitment does little for students without effective retention through non-cosmetic inclusion initiatives. For example, even as Black student enrollment more than doubled from 1990 to 2013 from 1.1 million to 2.5 million students (NCES), six-year graduation rates are at an abysmal 20.8% (NCES). Comparatively, White students are graduating at a rate of 43.3% (NCES). One primary reason for this systemic discrepancy is that inclusion efforts that focus on students from historically marginalized groups do not necessarily result in a climate in which cultural experiences are supported through relational partnerships with university faculty and administration (Hendrix & Wilson, 2014; Roy, 1995; Simmons, Lowery-Hart, Wahl, & McBride, 2013; Simmons & Wahl, in press). There are significant power-laden social and educational constructs that limit the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion programs in developing productive educational experiences for the diverse body politic that comprises college and university campuses. The 2015 events at the University of Missouri that resulted in the resignation of the president and chancellor, as well as other administrators at universities, lay the injustices in inclusion initiatives bare across the nation. Students of non-normative, often intersecting identities, including race, ethnicity, nationality, gender identity, sexuality,

and (dis)ability, need more from their universities, and communication faculty may be able to lead the way in this effort.

The following unit activity aims to develop better relationships between instructors and students at the classroom level. It specifically focuses on establishing a diversity-based framework for graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) to demonstrate and facilitate cultural competency within the classroom. This framework is best established through the communication in higher education course, and should prepare GTAs to more adeptly address diversity in the classroom.

The focus on GTA training in *Communication Teacher* is well established in presence and quality, yet it is somewhat limited in frequency. Bruss's (2009) essay focused on effective email communication for new GTAs and Young and Bippus's (2008) essay provided a model for assessing GTA training. We expand upon this trend by addressing diversity training for GTAs that offers graduate teaching assistants an opportunity to undergo a unit based diversity training that guides them in praxelogically developing communication strategies for developing and improving relational partnerships in the classroom.

The Activity

This unit training takes place over a period of four weeks and consists of three overlapping components: reading, reflection, and articulation. Our calendar is based on one graduate course per week. For the first three weeks, students will read and discuss six communication essays that focus on diversity. Instructors should assign two readings per week. Second, at the beginning of the first week, students will begin reflecting on classroom experiences by capturing memorable teaching moments through diary methods. Students will continue to keep the diary through the end of the fourth week. Third, students will articulate their knowledge through the construction of a communication inflected, diversity focused teaching philosophy. This philosophy should be turned in and discussed during the fourth week of the unit. The aforementioned training unit schedule is recommended. However, the schedule can be adjusted depending on department and training needs.

Readings

1) Foeman, A. K. (1991). Managing multiracial institutions: Goals and approaches for race-relations training. *Communication Education, 40,* 255-65.

Foeman's (1991) essay provides a framework for race-relations training that helps readers to discern between didactic, experiential, and groupwork models of training. Students should discuss the implications of each model of training including the strengths, weaknesses, and interplay among each model.

2) Simmons, J., Lowery-Hart R., Wahl, S. T., and McBride, C. (2013). Understanding the African-American experience in higher education through a relational dialectics perspective. *Communication Education, 62,* 376-94.
This essay employs relational dialectics to feature the concerns of African-America students on college and university campuses. Relational Dialectics provides strategies through which instructors may address concerns voiced in the classroom.

3) Lindeman, K. (2011). Performing (dis)ability in the classroom: Pedagogy and (con)tensions. *Text and Performance Quarterly, 31,* 285-302.
Lindeman's essay focuses on the classroom as a critical site of identity negotiation from the perspective of a marginalized student. This essay provides students with both applied and theoretical examples of how marginality functions in the classroom.

4) Hao, R. N. (2011). Rethinking critical pedagogy: Implications on silence and silent bodies. *Text and Performance Quarterly, 31,* 267-84.
Hao's work provides a critique of how instructional communication scholars tend to privilege a Western construct of verbal deliberations of voice in the classroom, particularly when speaking against oppressive actions.

5) Heinz, B, (2002) Enga(y)ging the discipline: Sexual minorities and Communication Studies, *Communication Education, 51,* 95-104.
Heinz's (2002) essay argues for the incorporation of GLBT issues in the college communication classroom as a disciplinary goal and offers specific guidelines for this incorporating.

6) Warren, J. T. (2001) Doing whiteness: On the performative dimensions of race in the classroom. *Communication Education, 50,* 91-108.
Warren's (2001) essay frames whiteness within the dimensions of performativity by ethnographically analyzing public performance within the entry-level communication classroom.

Reflection

The goal of this component of the training is to teach students about developing a critical sensibility in the classroom through praxis. Baxter (2004) argues that a critical sensibility is a type of dialogue that obligates participants to "critique dominant voices." (p. 16). In order to develop critical sensibility as an ethical component of classroom teaching experiences, we suggest that students document and reflect on intercultural experiences in the classroom through diary methods. Diary methods are a well-established qualitative approach to documenting memorable messages and to better understand self-behavior (McBride & Wahl, 2005; Ellis & Smith, 2004). Students should be instructed to keep a diary over a period of four weeks to document the dynamics of diversity in communication in the classroom. Working with Ellis and Smith's methodology, students should "write diary entries that include one behavior that failed to meet and one behavior that exceeded their expectations for themselves that day" (p. 102). Slightly altering Ellis and Smith's approach, we suggest that instructors ask students to describe the teaching context in which the behavior occurred, to indicate between whom the communication context occurred, and the instructor's reflection upon their handling of the context.

Articulation

In 1938, Craig Baird published "The Educational Philosophy of the Teacher of Speech" in *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*. Far from the contemporary model of today, Baird's essay argued for a philosophy of instruction that should focus on "individual needs and capacities," be "adapted to individual differences", "provide for social integration", and function as "a reconstruction of the world" (pp. 547-52). Further, Brann, Edwards, and Meyers (2005) found that instructors with a progressive teaching

philosophy received higher ratings in perceived character and caring than instructors with a transmissive philosophy. With relationships as significant factors to retention and inclusion, caring plays a fundamental role in the classroom dynamic. Additionally, the development of a teaching philosophy is a well-established part of GTA training (e.g., Gaia, Corts, Tatum, & Allen, 2003, Young & Bippus, 2008). However, the diversity based teaching philosophy has garnered little or no attention. We propose that students draw from the provided readings and the resulting cohort discussions and conversations and the teaching diary they have kept regarding teaching experience, in order to develop a philosophy of fostering diversity in the classroom.

Debriefing

It is essential to discuss the implications of the training as a means of fostering the complex nature of diversity in college and university contexts. First, ask students to respond to the training through guided discussion. We suggest instructors ask students to consider the complexity of diversity in the classroom. We suggest four sets of questions to guide the conversation.

1. In relationship to the guided readings, what topics, if any, were the most informative for you as a GTA? How might addressing intersectional identities, or the intersection of multiple diverse identities, complicate these issues for you as a GTA? Were any action statements or future steps taken to help students develop conversations about diversity outside of the classroom?
2. What topics, if any, emerged in your diary that challenged your personal values? How did you mange discussion of these topics in the classroom? How does the notion of critical sensibility play into this potential conflict?
3. Did any student share a personal experience related to diversity that was challenging for you, as a GTA, to address? How, if at all, did you address this interaction? How, if at all, would you address this situation in the future?
4. Did any tension emerge among students in the classroom regarding topics of diversity? How did you handle this? What, if anything, would you do differently in the future?
5. What major themes emerged in your teaching philosophy? How, if at all, does your philosophy challenge typical cosmetic articulations of diversity such as those that appear on university and corporate websites?
6. What additional topics emerged that might require additional training and/or resources?

Appraisal

The primary goal of this unit is to build upon a disciplinary foundation fostered by intercultural communication pedagogy through graduate students training to improve diversity and inclusion efforts in classroom contexts. Different GTA cohorts require different training needs. Therefore, we suggest a flexible training within the guided framework. This approach serves as a means for students to take ownership of diversity concerns in their classroom and campus communities. This commitment fosters a communication lead effort to improve diversity and inclusion programs in wider university contexts. However, this training need not be limited to new GTA's and adjuncts—instructors and full-time faculty can benefit from the aim of this training. Further, graduate students who choose to work in their respective professional fields outside of academia will have better knowledge of the inter-workings of diversity and inclusion programs in organizational contexts beyond academia.

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