

Building an Endowment

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Abstract

Directors of programs have increasingly been called upon to assist with or engage in fundraising activities. Although fundraising is important to the financial health of programs they are also time-consuming activities that are often not included in criteria for tenure and promotion. This paper argues that development efforts are important for securing the resources for the future but must be managed carefully to ensure a director's professional obligations can be satisfied while meeting expectations for tenure and promotion. The paper is based on four assumptions. Fundraising efforts will be more successful when directors can (1) create a community of alumni, (2) nurture that community through frequent contact, (3) explain the needs of the program, (4) and communicate a program's accomplishments. Given these assumptions, a strategy for developing the social networks necessary for fundraising activities is offered.

Speech and debate programs are vital components of departments of speech communication and colleges of communication, fine arts, and liberal arts (McBath, 1984). Increasingly, however, as financial pressures are brought to bear on colleges across the country, directors would be wise to seek external sources of support for their programs.

The first step is to understand the history of one's program so that a director might create a forensic community composed of alumni competitors "across the decades." Knowing whom the alumni are and building a network of prospective donors is necessary to creating an audience for your appeals. Second, directors should develop communication campaigns designed to activate desirable team memories, convey the needs of the program, and build relationships of goodwill and support—a kind of social capital (Putnam, 2000)—that might take the form of a financial investment in the future of the program at some point in time. The last consideration, however, concerns the challenges that fund raising poses to directors in relation to competing professional priorities. Directors, tenured and untenured, younger and older, face a number of challenges in seeking to develop an endowment for their program. This paper argues that, while fund raising is a time consuming process, it is manageable and necessary to the long-term viability of a program.

Understand the History of Your Program

To build an endowment, a director needs to discover the history of the program. Further, directors should realize that they are responsible for sustaining the story of their program by creating memories for students who represented the school during their tenure as director.

Tell the Stories of Your Program

All teams have histories-stories about that time a specific group of students came together for a season. Each season is unique with its own seasonal highlights, legendary competitors, moments of commemoration, memorable adventures, cast of characters, etc., that make up the historical memory of competing on a college team. Directors need to know whom the competitors were in the past, when they competed, what they achieved, and what was significant for the students for each given season.

Assuming that one has just taken a position as director, that you have successfully recruited a team, created a tournament schedule and completed all of the other tasks necessary to starting a season, you should carve out time in your schedule to research the history of the program. Many colleges have yearbooks with the names of team members, pictures of teams, and highlights of the season. In addition to reviewing yearbooks, consider exploring departmental archives for names of team members, seasonal highlights, photos, etc., as well as interviewing past directors and team members who are available for reminiscing.

Modern technology allows us to recreate that information and those images in digital form making it accessible to team members across the decades. So having gathered team history from yearbooks, team archives, departmental closets, past directors and students, etc., the next step is to develop a website with all of this information provided for alumni to visit. This is a significant amount of work and unless a director is familiar with the technology should seek a student assistant or departmental support for completing this task. Depending on the amount of work, departmental requirements, and a director's vision for the website, in some cases, it might be appropriate to offer a student academic credit in the way of an Independent Study for completing a team history.

While websites are as creative as their designers can be, at a minimum, you need a cover page providing current information about your program: Director's name and contact information, types of speech and debate activities the program pursues, a brief mission statement of the educational objectives for the program, how to join the team, scholarship availability, and links to the history of the program, current tournament schedule, special events planned (for example exhibition debates or tournaments to be hosted), information for alumni (for example, how to make a contribution to an endowment fund), and announcements for alumni events. When alumni click on the link to the history of the program, they should be able to find their name, tournaments attended and awards won in a given season, and photographs of team members. Finally, directors should verify that the webpage and its links are consistent with departmental, college, and university standards for official university web-based documents.

Write the History of Your Program

Assuming you have the history up for alumni to view, you need to make sure that you preserve the history while you serve as director. My advice is to pre-

pare a year-end forensics report that details the activities of your program: names of competitors, tournaments attended, possibly what they majored in, awards won, team sweepstakes awards won, exhibition speeches and/or debates given, service activities, team officers, and any other honors worth noting over the course of a season. Some programs have awards for Most Improved, Most Successful, Peer Appreciation, Team Spirit, etc. Those awards can be noted in the report as well.

The forensics report works as both a historical document and a public relations tool. A director can list highlights on a page of the report, take a paragraph to explain the significance of a particular award or tournament, or note the achievement of an important team goal. The report can serve as an overview of the program for prospective team recruits as well as a way of communicating the activities, value, success, and unique showcase of a college's most talented students to administrators and community members who are unfamiliar with speech and debate activities.

Knowing the past of your program and creating the history to add each year provides a way for you to activate the memories of your alumni and build a positive image of your program in the university and local community. Once you have the messages to appeal to teams of the past, you will have reconnected past team members with current ones and reminded the alumni that future teams can advance the traditions, success, and educational values of the program with their support. A team website provides a cheap, efficient, and timely way to communicate with alumni especially as you develop your vision for hosting alumni events.

Communicate with Your Alumni and Program Supporters

Once you have a historical understanding of your program, coordinated with your development office to build a mailing list, and created a website for alumni to access, you need to communicate with your alumni and prospective supporters. There are five main strategies for contacting and interacting with alumni: internet channels, direct letter campaign from you, contact by college development officer, creating alumni networks and alumni events, and following through on building and maintain positive relationships.

Internet Channels

Internet channels involve at least two elements. The first is the program's website. Here the history of the program can be uploaded along with the forensics report for each year. The website allows alumni to contact you. However, the forensics report can also be burned on a CD possibly with photos and sent to alumni, or distributed as an email attachment in text form for convenient mass distribution via the internet to alumni on an email list. Contacting your constituencies through email allows you to craft appeals for support, explain the needs of the program, announce the generosity of other donors, thank contributors for their support, etc., in an efficient and timely fashion.

Direct Letter Campaign

A letter from the director is a second strategy. Enlisting the support of former program directors helps as well. It is important to describe the program's needs. Most former competitors understand the need for scholarships and to some extent the cost of equipment and supplies. However, if you seek the support of local business leaders, members of the community, or a specifically targeted group of professionals that might be willing to support speech and debate activities, you need to build a case. First, you need to describe what speech and debate activities entail. Second, you need to explain why tournaments are vital forms of educational experience. Third, you need to translate your needs into terms your audience understands. Why is it necessary to have portfolios to carry around visual aids, or financial support for ten students creating visual aids, or boxes to carry debate evidence or extemp files, or a laptop computer for a debate tournament? Why is it important to send students to a national tournament? And why must we send so many students to a national tournament? What's the significance of having a fund for Interstate Oratory if there were no guarantee your students will qualify each year? While we understand the reasons for these expenses our audiences might not.

Develop a repertoire of appeals. Different individuals are motivated by different arguments and combination of appeals. Barge (1994) has identified four broad classes of compliance gaining strategies that can be used by leaders: reward-based strategies, punishment-based strategies, altruism-based strategies, and rationale-based strategies. A list of possible appeals adapted to fundraising is provided in *Appendix A*. These strategies represent only a starting point for developing appeals for your alumni. However, regardless of what strategies you use, it is important to remember to adapt your appeals. Some alumni might be motivated by an appeal to altruism; others by pride in the program; yet others by an appeal to duty; or possibly by an appeal to reduce one's tax liability by contributing to the program. Sometimes appeals can be combined in ways to maximize effectiveness. To ensure your message is persuasive, use your knowledge of the program's history and your knowledge of the individual to whom you are appealing for funds when designing your message.

Coordinating with the College Development Office

Another form of contact is through your college development officer. First, a director needs to create a partnership with the college Development Officer. This is necessary to obtain sources for contacting alumni. More importantly, working with your college development officer prevents confusion about funding priorities. Often, a college development office is working on a number of projects. Funding sources tend to be classified in two ways. Private sector funds might come from alumni, community members, and corporations. Funds might also be obtained from the public sector in the way of grants to support a program's activities in the community.

Not every potential donor can fund every request. Typically, administrations create priorities. If you cooperate with your development officer, you are more likely to enjoy their assistance when the time is right for the administration to prioritize your program needs. Second, in some cases, you might want to approach an alumnus or community member who has had a successful career to request support for a special project, for example, a specific type of scholarship or a post-season travel fund. Development officers have the time, the training, and the experience in cultivating these contacts that, in some cases, is needed but not necessarily in your repertoire of skills or time constraints as a busy director. In this instance, it is vital to communicate your needs clearly to your development officer so that s/he can present that to possible donors, whether they are alumni or not.

Alumni Networks and Alumni Events

It is essential to activate alumni networks. A director should identify alumni who were team leaders in a given era and ask them to lead a campaign seeking support for a component of the program. Often, an appeal from a director and a former teammate create a more compelling appeal for support. When an alumnus contacts teammates from a particular era with the request to build financial support for the program, the appeal can be perceived as more personal, more credible, and possibly more urgent. The idea is to create an alumni culture of cooperation in building a vision of program support.

A final way of reestablishing and developing alumni connections is through alumni events. Directors need to be creative. Alumni events can be as simple as reunions. Or directors might want to build an annual event into the program's calendar. Hosting an annual tournament or having a team banquet at the end of the season with an open invitation for alumni to return are at least two examples. A director could issue a challenge to the debaters of one era to debate debaters from another. A director could invite alumni back to reprise their performances in one or more events. Alumni events need not be built around speech activities if they prefer to golf, camp, play tennis, etc. The most important element is to recreate community, to connect the alumni with the current students and current program so that a renewed sense of commitment and value takes place on the part of the alumni.

It is important to plan campaigns in coordination with the development office. You should identify major prospects for large contributions and keep an up to date list of individuals to approach. While those major prospects might take time to establish and nurture, do not hesitate to create a culture of support with smaller donations. A sizable endowment can be established with smaller donations, given annually, by a wide network of supporters. However, campaigns should be developed with as much attention to strategy to ensure the best use of your time. Nurture annual generosity as much you can.

Follow Through

Building an endowment should be about the values of communication, relationships, and staying connected as a community. Not everyone has money to contribute when they are contacted, but in ten, fifteen, or twenty years, they might have something to contribute. In this respect, it is important to maintain contact, stay in touch literally and figuratively whether contributions flow or not. Keep alumni and prospective supporters informed of the program's activities, competitive success, educational values, and needs. When a contribution is made, say "thank you." Write thank you notes and get the students to help. Tell donors who the money supported, how it helped, how much closer you are to the goal, the vision, etc. Knowing what is accomplished with one's contribution is vital to maintaining the relationship and the motivation to donate when funds are available.

Challenges for Directors

Fund raising is rarely described as a part of a director's job and probably not covered in many directing speech activities courses at the graduate level. Yet who would be more uniquely suited for the task of communicating and persuading others to support a cause like a forensics endowment than a forensics director? Still the demands of fund raising need to be acknowledged.

First, fund raising places increased demands on a director's time. Directing speech activities already is a time consuming activity. To manage the pressure, directors should develop a multi-year plan with specific objectives identified for each year. This focuses efforts on achievable goals, staves off frustration or disappointment, lets fund raising coexist with other professional priorities, and reflects steady progress toward the goal.

Second, directors need to sort through conflicting professional priorities and get advice from department chairpersons regarding where fund raising fits into evaluating him/her in relation to teaching, research, service, and professional activities. With that feedback, it might be necessary to revise the multi-year endowment building objectives if tenure demands take precedence.

Third, a director should seek support from alumni, from current students, from previous directors, from the departmental office, and from the development office. Building an endowment, like building a successful program, should be a team effort utilizing the resources of everyone available for the task. Chances are that you do not have all of the skills, information, time, or energy to complete the task yourself.

Fourth, building an endowment is a process that unfolds over decades. It is important to start building relationships now. Your program might not become endowed under your tenure but with a dedicated effort, it is possible to build a foundation for the future. Investing your efforts now will pay dividends later for future directors and future students who come to represent your college as you have during your career.

References

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Appendix A

Reward-Based Strategies

Ingratiation: The director offers compliments or praise before asking for support.

Example: "The contribution you made to the team in 2001 was essential to the many team sweepstakes awards we won that year. I am writing to you now in the hope that you can contribute again so that the team will have the resources it needs for the future."

Promise: The director promises some kind of exchange in return for the contribution.

Example: "While a one-thousand dollar contribution seems like a great sum of money, I want to point out the tax benefits of supporting the endowment. 'The net cost of a \$1,000 cash gift to a donor in the 30% marginal tax bracket is only \$700 after his or her \$300 tax savings.' And this does not count any deduction you might have from your state income tax." (Quotation taken from CMU Development Office brochure, *Ways to Give.*)

Debt: The director refers to a past obligation or debt as a way to gain a financial gift for the endowment.

Example: "When you competed for our team, you were supported with a generous scholarship. I'm writing now to explain that your scholarship was made possible by a generous alumnus who remembered how much the program helped her in her career. I'm hoping that you can see the only way for us to support excellent students is through the generous contributions of alumni, of which you are now one." **Positive Self-esteem:** The director explains that there will be a positive psychological benefit to contributing a gift to the program.

Example: "Your gift to the program will be appreciated by all of the students who qualify for nationals this year and the years to come. Your contribution makes national tournament travel possible for our students."

Positive Moral Appeal: The director indicates that contributing is part of a larger ethic of generosity, of giving back to the program that supported them.

Example: "One of the few things we have control over is our own generosity. At times like these, it is important to do the right thing, to become part of the larger family of friends for the speech and debate endowment."

Allurement: The director notes that by complying the contributor will be noticed by others.

Example: "A \$1,000 contribution makes you a member of the Gold club and your name will be listed among the others who have generously donated funds in the Annual Alumni Honor Report, a report well read by the alumni community."

Punishment-based Strategies*

Threat: The director explains that the excellence, competitive success, or reputation of the program with which the prospective donor identifies will suffer unless contributions are made.

Example: "Unless loyal alumni like yourself choose to support the endowment, our competitive success will falter."

Aversive Stimulation: The director indicates that unless contributions are made, the program will continue to erode, or in a more humorous tone, some punishment like emails from other teammates will be visited upon the alumni until s/he complies.

Example: "Now is a critical time for the program. Unless financial support can be generated for a long term scholarship program, we will continue to lose gifted students in need of scholarships to other programs with greater resources."

Negative Self-esteem: The director informs the prospective donor, perhaps in a humorous way, that other alumni members of his/her team will regard his/her unwillingness to donate in a negative way.

Example: "All of the other E-Board members of the 2001 team have contributed generously to the endowment. So I'm writing to you again in the hope that you can avoid the enmity of your fellow teammates with a contribution to the endowment this year."

Negative Moral Appeal: The director argues that the alumni's behavior is wrong, inappropriate or unfair.

Example: "Not contributing when so many others have does not seem like the generous person I knew you to be as a member of the team in 2001." **Warning:** The director explains in a humorous way that not complying with the request for a contribution will result in some unwanted result. Example: "Should you fail to respond to our request for support, your name will be dropped from the honor roll of the team of the decade and like a Soviet-era history text your appearance in team photos will be erased, your name forgotten. Please donate!"

*It should be noted that directors have little, if any, reward and punishment power over alumni. "Punishment" strategies of compliance gaining should be used rarely, usually when attempting a humorous effect, and only when a director is absolutely certain that the strategy will be interpreted appropriately as a legitimate fear appeal about threats regarding the future quality of the program or as attempted humor.

Altruism-Based Strategies

Counsel: The director offers to help the alumni work with other alumni to accomplish fundraising goals.

Example: "Together we contact the other members of the team of 2001 and build a gift for the future competitors of the program. Please let me help you reconnect those memories so that others might consider giving to the endowment." **Favor:** The director asks the alumnus to comply with the request for a contribution as a favor to him/her.

Example: "I am asking for your support of the program. I need each and every one of the students from my time as director to come together to create this fund." **Duty:** The director explains that the alumnus has a duty to contribute to the fund. Example: "It is your duty as a (fill in the school mascot here) to help with the endowment fund."

Altruism: The director appeals to the alumnus' sense of well being of the team or the program.

Example: "Your contribution is the key to the future of the speech and debate program. Please consider making this vision of the future come true."

Rationale-Based Strategies

Direct Request: The director simply asks for financial support for the program.

Example: "We have been working on an endowment for the state championship and I am asking you to contribute to that fund."

Indirect Request: The director might set up an appointment to sound out, discuss, or frame a request for funds to a prospective donor.

Example: "I was hoping we might meet to discuss the future of forensics at Central Michigan University. I'm interested in hearing what your best memories were and I'd like to share some of the challenges we're facing next season."

Explanation: The director presents a case to persuade the prospective donor to comply with the request for support.

Example: "Since you have graduated you'd be surprised at the number of students who seek scholarship support, the ways in which travel costs have risen, and the needs for technology that programs have in order to remain competitive. Let me explain, for example, some of the ways our travel costs have increased..."