

Please read through the Northwest Forensics (Speech and Debate) Conference Code of Ethics

NFC Code of Ethics

Sept. 9, 2017 Revision

PREAMBLE

Who we are, how we were founded, & what we represent:

The Northwest Forensics Conference (NFC) is a voluntary association of Northwest colleges and universities formed to promote and foster excellence in forensics education.

The NFC was founded in the early 1980s. In a 1984 paper presented at the Western Speech Communication Association conference in Seattle Michael Bartanen of PLU recounted the formation of the Northwest Forensics Association.

"The Northwest Forensics Conference was created to respond to some immediate and sometimes challenging concerns facing forensics teachers in the Northwest," wrote Bartanen.

Those concerns included "shrinking tournament sizes," a problem addressed by the creation of a system of "Designated Tournaments" initially held four times per year.

The seeds of the NFC may have been planted at an informal July 1982 "highly a hoc" committee meeting between three Northwest coaches: Kevin Twohy of Carroll College; David Frank of the University of Oregon; and Bartanen. They drew up a "working set of procedures and bylaws" that was subsequently presented to a gathering of coaches in Tacoma.

The "NFC experiment" resulted in four Designate tournaments that were, as hoped, larger than other local tournaments, drawing between 17 and 31 schools in the 1982-1983 school year.

From the beginning the founders saw the emergence of the NFC organization and its system of Designated tournaments as a classic "compromise" where individual programs put the good of the region before their own interests.

"The designated tournament format demonstrates the willingness of forensics educators to 'light a single candle' rather than 'forever cursing the darkness,' wrote Bartanen in 1982. "The vitality of any activity is shown through the willingness of its participants to adapt to changing conditions and change to fit the times. The greatest success of the Northwest Forensic Conference comes from the ability of highly diverse forensic programs to compromise their individual interests in deference to the common good of their neighbors. Northwest forensic programs

each reap something different from their participation in the association, preserving the uniqueness and individuality of these programs.”

These NFC founders joined with other coaches to draft the original NFC “statement of ethics” published in 1985. That document was signed by Northwest six forensics educators: Larry Richardson of Western Washington University; Dave Sterns of Oregon State University; Don Swanson of Willamette University; Kevin Twohy of Carroll College; Dennis Waller of Northwest College; and Bob Withycombe of Whitman College.

The preamble to that 1985 ethics code established guiding moral principles that the NFC still affirms in 2017.

“Recognizing the important role played by communication in society, the forensics community of the Pacific Northwest should strive to promote ethical rhetorical behavior. Members of the community should be guided by a moral vision which highlights educational benefits that are to be gained through forensics. This vision should reflect the community’s highest standards regarding what is good, proper and ideal.

Since all people in society are ultimately affected by the form and content of communication transactions, all members of the forensics community bear responsibility of maintaining a consistent and coherent ethical system. They should consider the moral consequences of their behavior and reflect upon why and how they communicate in a particular way. For forensic to promote educational goals, the vitality of human interaction and socially responsible actions, communication should be guided by a robust moral vision. Such a vision includes not only minimum standards of conduct, but also higher goals to which people should aspire. Our moral standards should be rigorous, exemplary and far sighted.”

Now 32 years later, the forensics educators of the NFC have joined together to build upon the vision of the founders of the NFC to reaffirm moral standards that are “rigorous, exemplary and far sighted.”

All NFC members – including institutions, educators and students - are both individually and collectively committed to ethical standards that foster a rich educational experience in an environment of inclusion, equity, justice, opportunity, and fairness.

Consistent with the intent and purpose of higher education, we in the forensics community seek to teach students the spirit, art and science of scholarship.

The conference has two missions, service and competition. The founders of the NFC saw both missions as co-equal and simultaneously developed a set of Designated Tournaments to promote exceptional competitive opportunities while simultaneously writing a “statement of ethics” to ensure that the competitors and coaches were guided by moral principles.

The benefits of competition are many, but there is always a corresponding need to build and establish the ethical foundations and boundaries within which the student competes and educators instruct.

We celebrate diverse pedagogical goals in our community even as we are united by a desire for student enrichment within a safe and inviting learning environment.

Purpose of the Code of Ethics:

The educational landscape is changing as colleges and universities are called upon to address historical inequities within higher education. No longer can these inequities within the academy, as well as within our activity, be ignored.

The NFC should reinvigorate our tradition of leadership within the national forensics community and this document is an important milestone. As a product of significant and substantive discussions in our community from 2014-2016, this document codifies important aspirations and identifies steps our community will take to address attitudes and behaviors that serve as barriers to forensics participation. While this document codifies a baseline for expectations and action, we see it also serving as a springboard for ongoing discussions and initiatives building upon the principles outlined herein.

This document presents aspirational goals for the NFC related to issues of education, equity, tournaments, and adherence. This code is intended to be used in conjunction with “toolkits” that will provide resources to achieve these goals.

This document establishes expectations for all participants from NFC member schools during forensics activities. This document also establishes expectations for students and educators from other schools attending tournaments hosted by NFC member schools.

1. Equity

What does equity mean?

All students and educators should be able to fully benefit from their participation in forensics. The NFC recognizes not all participants enter the activity with the same access to forensics opportunities.

The NFC is committed to addressing these inequities and to creating a forensics community in which every student and educator has the opportunity to realize their full potential regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, sex, ability, age, institutional affiliation, religion, immigration status, socioeconomic status, language status, veteran status, political affiliation, forensics activity format or forensics experience.

What are our aspirations on equity?

Access to competitive experience- Empowerment

We should respect participants with different talents, goals, and perspectives, and conduct ourselves in a manner that fosters respect for other individuals and encourages their participation. An activity such as forensics that is designed to empower individuals must take progressive steps to achieve equity and justice for all participants.

This can be achieved through activities including but not limited to: Recruiting individuals from a variety of backgrounds; ensuring diverse perspectives are represented among students, coaches, and judges; sponsoring mentorship programs; remaining committed to novice and JV debate; and engaging in community-building educational activities.

Access to inclusive and safe environment- Accountability

Competitive equity is important, but cannot be achieved if participants in our community do not feel safe or supported. In order for this to happen, an organization must raise awareness about equity and take steps to ensure equity for all its members – students, coaches, judges.

The NFC is committed to raising awareness and encouraging education on issues of inclusivity.

Members schools, educators and students should hold each other accountable when individuals, programs or tournaments are not equitable or inclusive.

People are not often intentionally unethical, but ethical people must be willing to acknowledge the impact of their actions, even if unintended, and alter such behaviors.

Participants should recognize and reflect upon the ways privilege and power inform access and outcomes in the community.

NFC member teams should provide, and individuals should seek, training on equity. The NFC should provide resources to prevent actions that may make participants feel excluded or unsafe. All of us in the NFC should support those who feel excluded and unsafe by listening to their concerns and taking action to address those concerns.

When any one of us is not safe, none of us is safe.

To maintain a safe and inclusive environment, the NFC must hold individuals accountable for discrimination, harassment, violence, sexual violence or any other abusive behavior in order to maintain and strengthen an inclusive environment.

Fair play and collegiality:

The NFC believes that equity also involves fair play and collegiality which, at its simplest level, means winning humbly and losing graciously.

2. Education

The NFC believes education is the cornerstone of forensics participation.

Faculty, coaches, judges, tournament staff, and students have both individual and shared roles to play in the forensics education process.

Competitive outcomes must always be secondary to learning and personal development.

Forensics education exists to promote the growth and transformation of students. Competition is only a means towards the end of educating students, not an end in itself.

Educator obligations to learners:

Coaches and judges are first and foremost, educators, and all interactions with students should reflect this role.

Educators should recognize and respect the differences between students and provide equitable opportunities for all.

Educators should make certain that student spaces are free from conditions detrimental to learning, health, or safety.

Educators should not restrain or limit the independence of students in their performance choices in the pursuit of learning. While the influence of educators in helping students construct argument or performances is exceptionally valuable, coaches should encourage students to cultivate their own original ideas rather than to rely on ideas, strategies or materials produced by others.

Educators have a special obligation to ensure an environment conducive to learning. They should offer constructive evaluations of both good performances and poor performances with the goal of improving students' abilities.

Educators should refrain from disparaging comments or harsh criticism of students, while remaining transparent and honest in their evaluations of student performances.

Educators have responsibility for monitoring and promoting the academic good standing of their students related to classes in which the student is enrolled.

Educators have a responsibility to ensure that forensics competition and practice does not imperil academic progress.

Educators should avoid participating in romantic or sexual relationships with students and should recognize and respect the power dynamics inherent within the activity.

Educator obligations to the activity:

The obligation of educators goes beyond their relationship with students, and extends to the activity at large. Educators should treat colleagues as fellow professionals and maintain civility when differences arise. They should also collaborate to promote the best interests of students.

Educators have an obligation to continue their ongoing professional development and growth. More experienced educators should help newer colleagues by sharing knowledge and information. Experienced educators should be willing to mentor new colleagues as they begin their careers in forensics education.

Students obligation to education:

Students should respect their fellow students' desires to learn, and engage in behaviors that are encouraging to others' intellectual abilities.

Students should mentor beginning students to help them learn the rules and expectations of the activity, along with collaborating and providing opportunities to learn together.

Students should commit themselves to academics and demonstrate this by ensuring that they stay in good standing within the guidelines of their institution. Forensics students should continue to make progress toward a degree.

3. Tournaments

Forensics tournaments play a pivotal role in our activity. The NFC believes that having a positive tournament experience is a vital and constructive part of students' forensics education.

Tournaments are multi-faceted, taking a lot of time and effort to coordinate and host.

Tournaments and participants alike must jointly assume responsibility for creating an environment conducive to wellness for everyone.

Tournaments must do their best to ensure the best possible experience for all those who attend: students, coaches, judges and observers.

Guiding principles for tournament administration

Tournament directors have a responsibility to provide participants with reasonable accommodation in response to requests related to equity and ability. Tournament directors should also identify tournament administrators who will be designated to handle equity issues and complaints. Tournament directors should share this information about how issues of equity will be handled with all participants so that they know who to contact, if need be.

Tournament directors have a responsibility to be transparent. Tournament invitations should specify and the manner in which topic selection and tabulation will be conducted, and to the greatest extent possible the tournament should not violate those expectations.

Tournament directors should recognize that different forensics events have disparate expectations and practices. Tournaments should be cognizant of these differences when preparing for the event, honoring the traditions and rules of each forensics culture as much as is possible.

Tournament directors should also provide training and materials to judges to ensure their competency.

Guiding Principles for tournament wellness

The health and wellness of participants at tournaments is of paramount importance.

Tournaments should be structured and conducted in order to maintain the health and well-being of all participants. Competitive environments can sometimes create incentives to overlook important wellness factors such as adequate food and sleep. Tournaments should develop a schedule that takes wellness into account including opportunities to eat and time to rest. Tournaments should be aware of distances traveled and attempt, when feasible, to create schedules that accommodate such travel.

Tournament directors should take affirmative steps to help students and educators maintain health and wellness.

Tournaments should aim to provide safe and healthy socializing options outside competition. In an era of private prep rooms and private team meeting rooms, tournaments should seek to find ways to foster a sense of community among competing schools.

Alcohol and drugs:

Ultimately, state laws and host school policies will govern alcohol and drug use during tournaments.

While acknowledging the right of schools to establish their own policies regarding drugs and alcohol, the NFC believes that the misuse of drugs or alcohol during a tournament weekend neither promotes wellness nor contributes to improving the tournament experience. The NFC also believes that excessive consumption of alcohol and drugs could harm individuals and could erode our commitment to equity.

The NFC believes in wellness, and we believe that, in the spirit of wellness, that the misuse of drugs and alcohol should be discouraged during tournaments

Guiding principles for ethical participation at tournaments

Participants should uphold standards of integrity and honesty, in and out of debate rounds while at tournaments.

Judges are responsible for making fair decisions based on argumentative or performative content presented by students. As educators, judges have a special obligation to interact with competitors in a respectful manner at all times, and deliver feedback in a way that fosters inclusion and participation in the activity.

The primary role of a judge is to serve as an educator while recognizing their position of power and encouraging the continued participation of students. Additionally, the judge should serve as a role model of respectful communication and work to ensure that all participants treat each other with respect and dignity.

Students should know and follow the guidelines of the event they are participating in regarding intellectual integrity and honesty. Students are not discouraged from disagreement, but are called upon to show respect and understanding of intellectual differences. Students should respect the efforts of coaches and judges to evaluate and provide feedback, even if the student does not agree with the judge decision.

Students should address their concerns about the actions of coaches, judges, or other competitors, in ways provided by the tournament. Students should share such concerns in such a way that protects themselves while initiating a process to resolve their concerns.

4. Adherence

The NFC is committed to achieving the goals outlined in this document by encouraging both social and institutional accountability amongst NFC participants that prioritizes support for those marginalized in forensics.

The 1985 NFC Statement of Ethics described important ethical aspirations for the community but explicitly declined to create formal enforcement provisions.

While the purpose of the code of ethics is not to prescribe specific enforcement, we believe the NFC should adopt appropriate measures to ensure that students,

coaches and judges are guaranteed a safe, healthy and ethical tournament environment.

The NFC is fully committed to helping participants achieve greater awareness of the consequences of their actions, and encouraging them to make ethical choices while participating in forensics

The NFC is committed to developing a set of “best practices” assembled in an “ethics toolkit” that outlines ways in which ethical behaviors can be encouraged. This toolkit will be an ongoing “living” document filled with diverse suggestions on ways in which schools, coaches, students and administrators might encourage ethical behaviors in all forensics-related activities.

This code of ethics will not prescribe the ways in which the NFC community might promote ethical behavior, nor will the code suggest possible punishments for violations. Such policies must be part of the NFC bylaws, not part of the ethics code itself.

The NFC endorses the following principles for ethical behavior by all people connected to forensics in the Northwest:

1. We believe students should read and discuss this code of ethics.
2. We believe the NFC should develop resources and training to promote ethics in forensics.
3. Finally, we believe all coaches and administrators should reaffirm that the Northwest Forensics Conference’s most fundamental mission is an ethical one, as stated in the preamble to this code:

“All NFC members – including institutions, educators and students - are both individually and collectively committed to ethical standards that foster a rich educational experience in an environment of inclusion, equity, justice, opportunity, and fairness.”

The NFC is built upon this ethical foundation.