Bergen Community College Spring 2011 Speech Competition on Contemporary Issues

Project Report

Summary of the Activity

The Spring 2011 Speech Competition on Contemporary Issues was held in two rounds. The first round was held on Thursday, April 14th, 2011, from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. Fifty-seven students participated. The speakers were judged by twenty-seven faculty members, administrators and staff representing seven college departments, the Library, Student Life, administrators and the Bergen Community College Foundation. Speakers' themes were drawn from the United Nations Millennial Development Goals and other contemporary issues.

There were several major changes to the competition this year. First, I changed the organization of the competition. This year the students and judges were not pre-assigned to rooms but were given their room assignments when they registered. Students were told to arrive between 12:00 and 12:15 p.m. Judges were told to arrive between 12:15 and 12:30. This worked out well – there was little waiting. Second, I moved the competition to the main classroom building (from West Hall), to classrooms clustered around the Welcome Center on the first floor. The close location of rooms made it easier to assign students and judges on the spot. There was sufficient time for them to sign in, receive their material and go to their rooms. We had the option of better communication between rooms if needed.

The top six speakers were invited to compete in the awards round on Thursday, April 21st from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. in front of a panel of five judges. An awards reception and ceremony followed immediately after this round. The BCC Foundation sponsored \$2000 in prizes to the top speakers.

The Awards Ceremony was attended by about 65 students and their guests. President G. Jeremiah Ryan presented the awards to the top speakers. Student Life Vice President Raymond Smith, Dean Amparo Codding of the School of Arts, Humanities and Wellness, and Elin Schikler, the Chair of the Department of Communication, addressed the group and commended them on their efforts. All participants received certificates of recognition. The BCC College Bookstore donated three \$20 gift cards.

This is the fourth in Bergen's recent series of speech competitions, and the fourth time the competition was funded by grants from the Center for the Study of Intercultural Understanding and the Center for Instructional Research and Development. The amount of student participation each year has far exceeded the initial goal, which was for 15 to 20 students to speak. This year's level of student participation was 46% higher than last year's, when 39 students participated. This is a sign of the increased notice and support the competition has in the college community.

Organization and Publicity

The competition was advertised to students on posters in the Student Center and on bulletin boards throughout the campus. The competition was advertised to all full-time and part-time faculty members in fliers and emails. An email was sent to all faculty members, asking that they nominate candidates. The Honors Faculty also was asked to nominate speakers. I attended the Honors Presentations and personally invited students to enter.

Results

Following is a review of the event and my recommendations for the next competition.

1. This is the first year I did not pre-assign students and faculty to competition rooms and was not sure how the new plan would work. Seventy-seven students had signed up to

participate, and 30 faculty members had confirmed their attendance. That meant that between 80 and 100 people would be converging in the lobby at the same time, all of whom needed to be signed in, and all of whom needed to be given material. Students were told to arrive between 12:00 and 12:15 p.m. Judges were told to arrive between 12:15 and 12:30. This worked out well – there was little waiting. When students gave their name, they were handed the judging ballots and told their room. They were to give the ballots to the judge. Next year we should write the rooms down for the students on their ballots. In the excitement of the moment, understandably, some of them forgot their room assignment between the Welcome Desk and the classroom around the corner.

- 2. This was the only way we could sign in the large number of students who had registered. 77 had registered and completed all the paperwork. We don't know in advance what the attrition will be; this year it was 26%; one year it was 30%. I am told it can go as high as 40% at events like this.
- 3. The competition was held in the main building. Most of the rooms were clustered around the Welcome Center on the first floor. The close location of rooms made it easier to assign students and judges on the spot; there was sufficient time for them to sign in, receive their material and go to their rooms. However, some rooms were on the second floor in the B wing. For next year, I have reserved a block of rooms on the corridors near the Welcome Desk, so that all of the rooms will be convenient. As students signed in, they were handed their judging ballots, which had been alphabetized and were ready. For next year, we should type labels that have students mailing addresses and the title of their speech, and ask students to verify the information. This would give us the most accurate information on students.
- 4. When students arrived, to keep things moving, we handed them their ballots but did not stop to write their names down on a list of rooms. They handed their ballots to the judges. That's how judges knew who was there. I created the list of participants based on the ballots that the judges returned.
- 5. When judges arrived, they were handed in their packets of judges information.
- 6. y had time to
- 7. honors students were well represented in the awards round. Honors faculty should be encouraged more directly to nominate students. I attended the honors presentations and sat next to a student. Told her about the event, which she had not known about. She went on to win 3rd place. Next year I will recruit actively at the honors presentations.
- 8. Student publicity: The gathering of students created a "buzz" of excitement; students were pleased to see so many other participating. After the competition several students told me how great it was. Should be more student publicity before the event, and after. I will again submit information to the Torch, by February. Present them with a packet of competition programs, so they can write about it. Have written to them several years in a row. Several torch members participated and told me it should be covered, but there would be a conflict of interest if they were involved. Paper could interview past winners;
- 9. We could publicize in new ways: put winners on posters; put their pictures on posters; create a campaigncoming soon! Coming next semester!.....
- 10. I recruited judges from all departments of the College. In fact, there were more faculty members who had volunteered to judge and were standing by, if needed. Many of the judges were evaluating speeches for the first time. While I paired experienced and novice judges, I am aware that for new judges, it is important that they receive the judging information in advance. Next year I will distribute that information to new judges, 1 week before the competition. Also, there is a lot of information to read. I will edit the judge's information and instructions.
- 11. Because we used classrooms that did not have computers, none of the speakers were able to use power points or other visuals. They had to use old-fashioned analog. The top 6 speakers did have technology available for the awards round. We need to remind the finalists to practice with technology!
- 12. As students registered, they were assigned rooms right then. As soon as 5 or 6 students were assigned to a room, judges were then assigned. There were 6 students in most rooms. Next year we should only assign 6 students to the first 4 or 5 rooms. Those

- rooms will begin the soonest, and will have the most time available. After that we should only assign 5 students to a room. .
- 13. I've reserved the Welcome Desk again for next year. There was concern that the competition sign-in procedure would interfere with the college tours that are scheduled for 1 p.m. I met with the tour coordinator and explained that we would only be at the desk from 11:45 to 12:30 p.m., and that we would only need one side of the desk. She still is concerned that we might be interfering. I told her that I would work with her on this so that we do not cause any confusion.
- 14. Biographies on the students, so we could give the President some notes. (he does not need any).
- 15. Coordinate with media faculty to produce video of the final round of competition, possibly to be edited as an honors project.
- 16. The Director of the Competition, Assistant Professor Jane Phelps, notes that this is the fourth in Bergen's recent series of speech competitions, and the fourth time the competition was funded by grants from the Center for the Study of Intercultural Understanding and the Center for Instructional Research and Development. The amount of student participation each year has far exceeded the initial goal, which was for 15 to 20 students to speak. This year the level of student participation was 46% higher than last year's, which indicates its growing notice and support in the college community.

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Jane Phelps, Director of the Competition	Date	
Assistant Professor, Department of Communication		