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The Effectiveness Of The University Interscholastic League One-Act Play Competition As An Extracurricular Activity

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC
LEAGUE ONE-ACT PLAY COMPETITION AS AN
EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITY

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By

David C. Rout

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LEAGUE ONE-ACT PLAY COMPETITION AS AN
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by

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THESIS

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

In the evolution of public education in the United States, the academic defers to the political and the political defers to the economic. Economist and Nobel laureate Milton Friedman stated "...how much of the community's limited resources should be spent on them (schools) are questions to be decided by the judgment of the community expressed through its accepted political channels." (Friedman, 1955 p. 89). In essence, economic and political forces have significantly shaped public education policy. The priorities of policymakers and elected officials often overshadow the needs of educators.

The performing arts in many school districts have suffered under increasing demands made by budget necessities and unfunded educational mandates (Posner, 1998). This has resulted in the slashing of performing arts from some school districts or the under-funding of such programs. However, in Texas, performing arts at the secondary level have been largely protected by the demands and requirements of the University Interscholastic League (Bedichek, 1956).

As a newcomer to Texas since 1995, I had heard about the University Interscholastic League and I did not understand its importance until I entered the education field in 2002. As a middle school and then high school teacher, I met many theatre educators who felt their UIL contribution was not appreciated. UIL One-Act Play coaches often complained about the lack of resources offered by their respective campuses. With this, I considered the loss of theatre arts & drama programs across the nation. If the One-Act Play competition was considered to be of little worth to some administrators, could I prove the contrary? Could it be proven that UIL One-Act Play was an advantage and not a nuisance?

The importance of One-Act Play, basketball, soccer, debate, and other events is enforced by the conventional wisdom that extracurricular activities (ECA) will keep students in school and motivated to perform positively in the classroom. Nearly all public schools in the United States have extra-curricular activities. A 1995 survey of public schools determined that 99.8% of all public schools offer some kind of extracurricular activity (O'Brien). There are many definitions for extracurricular activities but they all tend to share the same language.

Extracurricular activities are any activities that are:

1. Not a part of the school curriculum
2. Not mandatory for students
3. Usually outside of the regular school day
4. Are not graded and do not earn credits
5. May be operated or funded by the school or district, or by local or regional private organizations.

The goals of such extracurricular activities are to provide young people with social skills, develop talents and/or to improve physical acumen. School based ECAs built around a sport are designed to improve the body and mind and provide the social skill set that demands cooperation in high stress situations.

Considerable resources are funneled into extracurricular activities. In Texas, a 2009 survey concluded that 2.65% of the mean costs per student are spent on ECAs. This percentage constituted a total amount of 713 million dollars out of a statewide budget of 35.2 billion dollars. (TEA "Financial Data") This same study also determined that Texas high schools spend less on ECAs than on administration (3.75%) or counseling services (3.37%).

The goals of ECAs are just as varied as they are diverse. Some ECAs, like JROTC, Explorer Scouts, and mock trial teams, are designed to promote interest in a particular career field (i.e., military, law enforcement, and litigation). Other ECAs built around athletics are designed to promote school unity and fitness. Ecclesiastical ECAs support a religious faith or belief system. Some ECAs, like choir, art clubs & dance teams, provide an outlet for artistic creation and the practice of skills needed for proficiency. A variety of ECAs are offered and each organization requires significant time from the sponsor as well as financial resources.

The cost is justified by proven advantages of ECAs. In January 1995, the journal *Sociology of Education* published findings that ECA participation by high school students leads to fewer dropouts (McNeal Jr.). O'Brian's 1995 study also demonstrated that 30% of high school seniors who participated in ECAs have a grade point average of over 3.0 and over 50% of these same students did not have any unexcused absences during the first semester of their senior year. ECAs have been proven as a key tool to help "at-risk" students remain in school. ECAs have long been a staple in public education and their presence is valued on almost all campuses. In Texas, the One-Act Play contest and theatre/dramatics ECAs are closely aligned.

When compared with other UIL events, the One-Act Play competition is a true competition in one sense. One-Act Plays are performed on days established by the UIL as are other UIL team sports. Its student performers must also follow the same obligations of academic eligibility (UIL, 2009). However, from another perspective, One-Act Play participants are a world apart from student athletes. There are no UIL regulations as to how much or how little rehearsal is involved with UIL participation. In 2008, I attended the UIL conference in Austin and was informed that the ten-minute minimum requirement for plays was designed for schools that would have a student stand on stage for a minute and then end the "performance". Since

failure to participate in the UIL One-Act Play results in a penalty for active schools, this type of technical participation occasionally occurred (UIL, 2009).

It could be argued that One-Act Play is very different from “team” based UIL events. UIL One-Act Play is built on a very truncated season. In UIL athletic events, those schools that win the most victories in their district are permitted to participate in the statewide tournament (UIL, 2009). However, in One-Act Play (OAP) all schools enter the annual OAP festival at the zone level and advance through district, regional and the state level. A winning state One-Act Play production may have officially been performed four or five times. Consideration must also be given to the fact that One-Act Play is judged, and with any judged event, there is an element of subjectivity not found in team sports.

If One-Act Play is a proven extracurricular activity, it should have a pronounced benefit on student performance. The political rubric for modern public education since The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) is test scores and graduation rates. This document will explore the latter. What are the graduation rates for students who participated in One-Act Play? Moreover, are these graduation rates higher than the state average for Texas?

1.2 Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine if the UIL One Act Play competition significantly enhances the graduation rate of students who participate in One-Act Play as opposed to those students who do not participate in this particular ECA. If it is determined that One Act Play participation has little impact on graduation rates, it would prove that the event is not an effective extracurricular activity and that further research as to why this is the case will be required.

1.3 Methodology

This will be predominantly a scientific thesis, focusing on the mathematical sciences of statistical sampling and the ability to draw conclusions about a population based on a sample. The primary goal of this document will be to analyze a sample of students who participated in One-Act Play Competition and then determine if they met the requirements for graduation as established by the State of Texas.

To achieve this goal, a list of students who participated in One-Act Play must be assembled and then each student's graduation status must be determined. Students who have transferred and students currently enrolled must also be factored into the research. The graduation rates for all students outside the sample must also be determined to allow comparison.

On a secondary level, a critical methodology will be utilized to examine the effect of educational interventions such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the "No Pass, No Play" rule. A short history of the University Interscholastic League and the One-Act Play contest will be offered as a historical methodology.

1.4 Limitations

Why a student succeeds, or suffers failure, in public education can be attributed to many different factors. A series of unqualified or ineffective teachers may lead to a student dropping out. The academic challenge of poor self-esteem and an unsupportive home environment may also play an important factor in academic performance. This document cannot offer any direct evidence as to why a student who participated in One-Act Play did not graduate. This document cannot determine precisely what factors about preparing a theatrical performance would lead a student to academic success in the classroom. In addition, no general trends (race, guardian education level, average home income) about the sample will be offered. The document will only

draw a single conclusion about whether or not a student who participated in One-Act Play graduated from high school.

Another limitation is that the sample will be drawn from schools predominately within El Paso County. El Paso County has a higher dropout rate than the rest of Texas and Texas graduation rates are only slightly lower than national graduation rates (NCES). How this dropout rate might alter the sample will be explored. A larger exploration of this sample will be considered and the restrictions of inferential statistics will be explored. Private, parochial and charter schools are also not a part of this sample.

1.5 Implications

As was stated in the introduction, Texas and national educational policy are determined by political and economic circumstances. Many educators will insist that funding extra-curricular activities are an important part of keeping students in school. Anecdotal evidence from educators who serve as OAP Directors concerning graduation rates does not constitute sufficient evidence to prove or disprove the impact of OAP on student graduation rates. Statistics are more persuasive than anecdotes for educators, principals and superintendents.

If it can be proven that OAP participation does lead to a higher chance of graduation, it could open the field to enhanced study. How would OAP participation compare to athletic ECAs? How would OAP participation compare to academic UIL events (math or science events) that require no public performance? Does OAP tend to interest students who are likely to graduate from high school regardless of extracurricular participation? Finally, if a link to enhanced graduation rates can be established, it might provide parents and teachers greater success in fighting to keep fine arts and performing arts programs in local schools.

1.6 Organization

This thesis will be divided into five chapters. This first chapter is the Introduction. A background chapter on the University Interscholastic League will be offered next. The third chapter will explain the process of obtaining the information for the research sample and the guidelines established for the sample. The fourth chapter will explain how federal student privacy laws limited the sample and how other researchers deal with those laws. The fifth chapter will present the research statistics and the methodology used in analyzing the data obtained. The final chapter will offer suggestions about which directions expanded research might proceed.

Chapter 2 The University Interscholastic League: Historical Background

The University Interscholastic League is an outgrowth of the Debating League of Texas. Formed in 1909, the Debating League organized a collection of public and private schools for inter-school competitions. A year later, the Interscholastic Athletic Association was created to administer athletic extracurricular activities. In 1913, the two organizations merged to create the University Interscholastic League and the governing rules of the organization remain unchanged to this day. The organization has undergone reforms with the creation of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) in 1949 and the incorporation of formerly segregated public schools in the late 1960s (UIL, 2009).

Currently the Texas Education Agency grants the UIL primacy in governing public school athletic contests and other extracurricular activities in the state of Texas. A Legislative Committee, elected by Texas School Superintendents, ratifies changes, and each of the twenty District Committees handle all challenges utilizing interpretation of the UIL constitution.

In 1984, one of the most important reforms occurred and became known as “No Pass, No Play” (Mathis, 1989). This rule requires that any student participating in any UIL governed contest must not have a failing grade during each of the three grading periods that make up a semester in Texas public schools. This increased importance of UIL eligibility made grade verification a vital concern. Any team sport with an ineligible competitor under “No Pass, No Play” could see any victory annulled and the coach could face sanctions ranging from a suspension to being banned from coaching. This constituted “excommunication” from all mainstream extracurricular activities and currently motivates coaches to follow the rules laid down by the UIL.

Funding for the University Interscholastic League is provided by the Texas Education Agency whose budget is mostly funded by entrance fees and membership dues. University Interscholastic League is governed by two oversight committees: a Legislative Committee of twenty-eight school superintendents selected by vote from all Texas school superintendents and a State Executive Committee with seven members. These seven members are Texas school superintendents and are appointed by the Commissioner of the Texas Education Agency (TEA, 2009).

A UIL foundation grant helps provide roughly 30% of the operating budget (West, 2009). Most day to day operations involve promoting school involvement and organizing competitions for various major sports and academic events. Presently the organization is housed on the campus of the University of Texas at Austin. An auxiliary of the UIL is the Texas Interscholastic League Foundation (TILF), which is committed to developing scholarships for students who compete in UIL events. As it stands now, only students who compete on the statewide level are eligible for TILF scholarships. Many public colleges and universities within the Texas university system offer specific scholarships to UIL competitors through the Texas Interscholastic League Foundation (TILF, 2009).

In 1927, the UIL expanded its academic extracurricular role to create a drama competition. This evolved into the One-Act Play (OAP) competition, as it is known today. The purpose of the contest is as follows:

- 1) to satisfy the competitive, artistic spirit with friendly rivalry among schools, emphasizing high quality performance in this creative art;
- (2) to foster appreciation of good acting, good directing and good drama;

- (3) to promote interest in that art form most readily usable in leisure time during adult life;
- (4) to learn to lose or win graciously, accepting in good sportsmanship the judge's decision and criticism with a view to improve future productions; and
- (5) to increase the number of schools which have adopted theatre arts as an academic subject in school curricula (UIL, 2009).

Scripts for OAP must be chosen from a list of approved plays, or the State OAP Director must approve the script. With respect to the authority of local administrators, all scripts must be approved by the principal of the campus of each entrant. The UIL rules cap the cast at 15 players with a maximum of 4 stage hands. The current running time of each show must not exceed 40 minutes or be fewer than 18 minutes. An approved collection of set pieces can be purchased or built by each entering school. Using set pieces beyond those which are authorized must be approved by the UIL Theatre committee with proper justifications. The Director of each UIL entry (usually a teacher from the entering campus) is not permitted in the light booth or off-stage during the performance. This requires that the students actually run the lighting cues and stage manage the performance without help from the Director (the adult sponsor) of the entry. These rules are in place to help keep a level, competitive playing field and not let a school with extra resources (money or talent) have an advantage. In competition, one winner is chosen from each District to advance to a regional competition and then, from there, one show advances to the statewide competition (UIL, 2009).

Judging for the contest is not directly administered by the UIL. The Texas Educational Theatre Association Adjudicators Organization (TETAAO) is a subcommittee of the Texas

Educational Theatre Association (TETA) and has basic rules for being a OAP judge. This involves experience, education or training in theatre arts, attendance at a TETA/O workshop, familiarity with UIL OAP rules and a membership fee (TETA, 2010).

With its long history within the state of Texas, the OAP competition has been credited with preserving local theatre in many communities (Bedichek, 1956.) A school district that competes in UIL sporting events will not consider cutting drama within the school district due to the penalties and reprimands laid down by the UIL. If a school fails to participate in the One-Act Play competition, it can lead to that school being barred from competition in other events. Student performers who reach the state contest are also eligible for scholarships offered through the UIL Foundation (TILF, 2009).

Chapter 3 Research Sample and Guidelines

For this project, it was necessary to focus on a sample that might help determine if One-Act Play participation constituted as an effective extracurricular activity. The size needed to be significant enough for a statistical analysis to be made. Practical limitations on the sample needed to be determined, as well as what division of the One-Act Play competition would best represent the typical Texas high school.

Small sample statistical analysis was invented by William Sealy Gosset for use in the Guinness brewery in Dublin and he published his research in 1908 with Karl Pearson (Gosset 476-477). This model of statistics uses what Gosset called his *t*-distribution. For nearly a century, Gosset's work has been used in business, science and government to make large sample analysis from a sample of less than thirty (Gosset 476-477). However, such use of small samples increases the likelihood of sampling error and reduces the chances of finding statistical significance. Using a *t*-distribution will result in a larger confidence interval for any conclusions drawn from the sample. This confidence interval, commonly called the "margin of error", can skew results and lead to problems. The small sample process should only be utilized if necessary. In this case, an effort was made to avoid the small sample analysis, to no avail.

The purpose of this project was to determine if One-Act Play participation could lead to an increased rate of graduation. Schools and school districts compute graduation rates annually according to Texas Education Agency regulations (Texas Education Code 39.051). These percentages are determined with all data from all students and statistics are not used. If a small sample method were to be utilized, any slight advantage or disadvantage in graduation rates might be statistically significant since it might fall within the confidence interval. Therefore, it

was determined that the largest reasonable sample possible would produce the most accurate results.

The University Interscholastic League, in an attempt to create fairness between large and small schools, created a school classification system. The logic was reasonable for such a system; a large school with two thousand students is more likely to have better talent for an athletic contest than a school with five hundred students. So a school conference system was developed from size A (a school with less than 200 students) to AAAAA (a school with over 2085 students) (UT Austin, 2009). In El Paso County, there are more size AAAA (4A) high schools than size AAAAA (5A). Also, if an analysis was made using schools of similar size, the statistics wouldn't be skewed by lumping numbers from a large campus within a pool of schools of similar size. For this reason, it was determined that the samples would be taken from schools that were in the 4A conference.

To expand the sample, it seemed appropriate that the names of One Act Play participants would be used from a series of years. Furthermore, the samples from each school over a series of years would be used to help expand the pool and increase the statistical accuracy. It was decided that the samples would be drawn from the years 2005, 2006, 2007. By focusing on recent years, it was hoped that the results of this project would be relevant to educators and researchers. Naturally the graduation rates for 2005, 2006 and 2007 would have to be pooled together to create graduation trends based on the years selected. This pooled graduation rate would then be compared with the graduation rate of students who participated in UIL One Act Play.

Finally, it was decided that El Paso County schools would be studied for this project. To analyze OAP participation on a state level would be very difficult with 243 4A Conferences throughout the state (UT Austin,2009). Even choosing a sample from within this pool of 243

would be difficult, and the logistics of collaborating with researchers from across the state would prove unworkable. Also, if the research was kept local, the information gleaned would be more relevant to local educators and scholars. For this reason, it was determined that the samples should, and would be, constructed from local El Paso County data.

Obtaining the data proved to be both difficult and easy and it was surprising how differently each governing body dealt with the research requests. In the Fall of 2008, a series of letters were sent to school districts requesting the names of students who participated in UIL One-Act Play in the years 2007, 2006 and 2005. The Ysleta Independent School District responded quickly with the requested data. Upon inquiry, it was learned that YISD keeps track of all student UIL participation as a part of keeping ineligible contestants from being a part of UIL events (See Ch.1). The Socorro Independent School District kept no such database and they politely stated that the FERPA Act prevented them from assisting (see Ch. 4). The El Paso Independent School District did not respond to repeated letters and telephone calls.

To overcome the challenge of obtaining the information, a new tack was taken in November of 2008. For each One-Act Play contest, a program is created for the audience. The names of all participants (on and off stage) from each school are printed and it was from these documents that the first steps in the project were completed. The UIL OAP regional contest director was contacted and it was agreed that these programs were “public documents” and available for research. Full details of this process are documented in Chapter Five.

From this list of names, the research was compiled into the following four data fields:

1. Did the student graduate?
2. Did the student dropout? The definition of “dropout” is determined by the Dept. of Education through the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2006).

3. Is the student currently enrolled?
4. Did the student transfer out of the school district? It is important that last field is considered in order to keep any variables from interfering with the sample.

With the data fields compiled, the research could then be analyzed, and a conclusion drawn. All the samples would come from schools with the same approximate size. The schools were all local, and each school's One Act Play participation would be examined from the years 2005 to 2007. A large sample statistical analysis would be used to keep the data accurate and relevant. With accurate statistics, the value of One-Act Play as an extracurricular activity could be studied.

For the sake of this research, the artistic efficacy of One-Act could not be evaluated. One-Act Play is considered an extracurricular activity and this research can only examine its worth in terms of student graduation.

Chapter 4 Student Privacy Issues

During the course of this study, multiple school districts were contacted in an effort to obtain information about student participation in UIL One-Act Play. Efforts were made to explain the purpose behind the research and marginal co-operation was granted. Many independent school districts were reluctant to assist due to concerns about student privacy. These concerns may have been genuine, but these school districts and the University of Texas at Austin were concerned about violating the Family Education Right and Privacy Act of 1974. This chapter will suggest that the schools' refusal to participate is the result of a flawed or intentional misreading of the law, in conjunction with a culture of non-compliance, has made research much more difficult for many.

The Family Education Right and Privacy Act (FERPA) was one part of a series of reforms of public education in the post-Watergate period. It was written by retired Connecticut Senator James L Buckley and is sometimes referred to as the "Buckley Amendment" (Ripenhoff, 2009). The intention was to protect student records and prevent release of student records without the permission of the student or their parent/guardian. It was not uncommon for universities, employers, or even draft boards to ask and receive student records straight from the educational institution without permission of the student. This law was originally enacted in response to thousands of letters sent by angry parents that were concerned about schools giving their children's records to third parties (Ripenhoff, 2009).

FERPA defines a student record as "as an education record which is comprised of those records which are directly related to a student and maintained by the university or an agent acting for the university." (US Dept of Education). This also includes Social Security numbers, student ID numbers or any other personal identifier. Any recorded transfer to an education institution or

where any student records were forwarded must also be held as confidential under FERPA. In addition, a student has complete rights to see their educational records under the Family Education Right and Privacy Act and contest any errors (US Dept of Education, 2009).

The authors of FERPA did understand the complexities of running an educational institution. Faculty members and other legitimate persons employed by the school who have a relevant educational interest may access a student's records. A school can also release certain information that is considered "directory information." Directory Information includes student's name; local, permanent, and email addresses; telephone listing; date and place of birth; major fields of study; dates of attendance; enrollment status; degrees, awards, and honors received, including selection criteria; most recently attended previous educational institution; expected graduation date; participation in officially-recognized activities and sports; weight and height; and/or if the student was a member of an athletic team (UT Austin Registrar, 2009). A student must notify, in writing, the educational institution if they wish to keep directory information confidential since directory information can be released without violation of the law (US Dept of Education).

Despite the clarity of the law, it proved to be difficult to obtain information from some educational institutions. The Socorro Independent School District (SISD) was requested to share which students participated in UIL One-Act Play contest. In the request, I contacted SISD Fine Arts Director Nellie Ponikvar, and noted that OAP is an "officially-recognized activity" and that such information was available for release. A few weeks later, SISD refused the request by citing FERPA. (Rout, "Journal May 09") When SISD UIL participants were identified, the district considered their graduation status to also be a "student record" and refused to share that information (Rout, "Journal Sept 09").

During the course of preparing this project, it was discovered that the University of Texas at Austin was assisting the University Interscholastic League in creating an online system for entering students into UIL events. After confirming the existence of a backup database of student names, school affiliation, and UIL events entered, a Texas open records request was filed. Such a database could prove to be a beneficial tool to researchers and scholars (See Ch. 6). However, in January of 2008, the Office of the Vice President of Financial Services denied the record request citing FERPA. After protracted correspondence, it was clear that the provisions for “directory information” were being ignored (Rout, “Letter Iwanski Jan 7, Jan 28”). In a subsequent phone call, an appeal to have the request reviewed by UT Austin’s Legal Advocate was refused (Rout, “Fax Lopez, Feb 9”).

Other researchers have had to deal with the restrictions of the FERPA Act. They are frustrated since, despite the clarity of the law or lack of it, the provisions of the law have been abused. In the spring of 1983 as a part of two random surveys to high school guidance counselors and principals, it was found that both groups were conservative even with the information that they could legally share. Directory information which can be publicly disclosed (34 C.F.R. Sec. 99.3, 1982) is not routinely offered to researchers. This either represents a considered policy judgment or an overly cautious approach to compliance (Sorenson & Chapman, 1985).

The American Educational Research Association has also acknowledged that “researchers have struggled, particularly in recent years, to obtain access to education records even with strict confidentiality protections in place.” (Levine, pp. 302-306). FERPA has also been a political issue as well. In March of 2009, Jason Wren died in an off campus fraternity house near the University of Kansas where he was attending college. Jason Wren told his family he had been wrongly convicted of having alcohol in his dorm and was evicted from campus

housing. When the family asked to find out more details about his death, the University of Kansas refused citing FERPA. A six-month investigation by *The Columbus Dispatch* confirmed what has been stated previously. FERPA is so “ill-defined” that there is little consensus about what is considered to be an educational record (Ripenhoff, 2009). *The Columbus Dispatch* has also suggested that FERPA has been used by universities and colleges to keep embarrassing statistics secret, including numbers of sexual assaults and criminal activity by student athletes. The investigation asserts that some universities use FERPA to “shield” all student records (Ripenhoff, 2009).

Student journalists and local newspapers often find abuse of FERPA in circumstances that seem to have little to do with students in the following circumstances as documented by Frank LoMonte. In Wisconsin a college newspaper was required to surrender audiotapes of a public meeting involving student committees. Only after the student’s voices were removed were the audiotapes returned. An Ohio newspaper was told that a list of passengers flying on a college-owned airplane transporting athletes was a student record. A Virginia college’s Judicial Affairs Office refused to release the number of sexual assaults on campus to the college’s own newspaper citing FERPA (LoMonte, 2009).

As the Executive Director of the Student Press Law Center, Frank LoMonte has seen the increase in FERPA’s power to protect educational institutions more than protect the students. In a recent Student Press Law Center press release he states, "While some FERPA-based denials are good-faith misinterpretations of the law, too often colleges abuse FERPA to withhold information they consider embarrassing. Unfortunately, Congress failed to provide penalties for the bad-faith misuse of FERPA to conceal information in which there is no legitimate privacy interest," (LoMonte, 2009). In May of 2009, former Senator Buckley publicly spoke out on the

bill he helped author. The 86-year-old former senator commented that many educational institutions are using FERPA to block public information requests. Senator Buckley commented on these practices by saying “That’s not what we intended” and “The law needs to be revamped.” Buckley went on to say that “Institutions are putting their own meaning into the law.” (Ripenhoff & Jones, 2009).

Analyzing student graduation rates in conjunction with UIL One Act Play participation required the cooperation of school districts and the University of Texas at Austin. Many schools declined to cooperate, citing FERPA as their chief reason. However, some did assist, agreeing that the research being conducted was relevant to their mission as an educational institution.

Chapter 5 Research

Using data derived from my research requests, a statistical evaluation of the data was compiled from the El Paso Independent School District and Ysleta Independent School District sources. As previously stated in Chapter Four, it was very difficult to find the names of students who participated in One-Act Play. Despite One-Act Play being a public event, the desire to comply with their own district's interpretation of FERPA proved to be a hindrance to this study.

In July of 2009 it seemed unlikely that the research could continue until a solution was found. If the districts were unwilling to share the names of students participating in a public event, they might be willing to share a document that would provide the information in a roundabout manner. The UIL One-Act Play Zone/District contest director Gail Manago was contacted. In her capacity as UIL Contest Director Ms. Manago was responsible for producing the programs used for the Zone/District tournament. These programs/playbills would prove essential for this document. It was now possible to have a list of students participating, on and off stage; the schools they were affiliated with; and the year they were enrolled. However, before archived copies of these programs were offered, the opinion of EPISD Fine Arts Director, Charles T. Angerstein, was consulted. Mr. Angerstein confirmed that the programs were a "public document" and the next phase of documentation began. There were no archived programs for the 2005 UIL One-Act Play Festival but a program from 2002 was offered. This changed the order of my research but it was reasoned that the 2002 data would improve my sample size and create a more accurate analysis.

The next step was to determine the graduation status of students from the respective years. Ysleta Independent School District (YISD) had already offered a list of student participants in UIL One Act Play and the data programs matched, save for the year 2002, which

was outside the initial request. Laura Enriquez-Guerra with the YISD Records and Data Department was contacted and the list of student One-Act Play participants was confirmed.

Considering that the El Paso Independent School District failed to respond to the initial information request it became necessary to contact the campuses directly. Campus Registrars at Bowie and El Paso High responded by the last week of July. Schools like Austin and Burges considered the information “student records” and would not release the data. By August 21 2009 data from YISD 4A schools and from four of six schools within EPISD were obtained. These EPISD schools were Bowie, El Paso High, Jefferson/Silva, and Austin.

Using data provided for the years 2002, 2006, and 2007, the following raw data was sorted according to the following variables: 1. Did the student graduate? 2. Did the student drop out? 3. Is the student currently enrolled? 4. Did the student transfer to another school, or transfer outside the district? Using this approach the following information was obtained:

Table 1. One Act Play Participants 2002, 2006 & 2007- EPISD High Schools*

Graduated	Dropped Out	Transferred	Presently Enrolled
46	2	0	26

* One student’s name was returned with no data.

This relevant information was combined with information obtained through the cooperation of the Department of Records & Research at the Ysleta Independent School District. The student participants in UIL One-Act Play were submitted and cross referenced as to graduation status as of August, 2009. Currently enrolled students were excluded. Students who participated in One Act Play over several years were only counted once. The information breaks down as follows:

Table 2. One Act Play Participants 2002, 2006 & 2007 - YISD High Schools

School	Year	Cast/Crew Size	Number Graduated
Eastwood High School	2002	13	13
Del Valle High School	2002	15	15
Bel Air High School	2002	11	10
Hanks High School	2002	23	21 (2 transfers)
Riverside High School	2006/2007	25	24
Eastwood High School	2006/2007	24	24
Bel Air High School	2006/2007	8	8
Del Valle High School	2006/2007	14	14
Hanks High School	2006/2007	15	15
Parkland High School	2006/2007	26	26
Totals		174	170

Excluding those students who transferred, there was a total of 172 participants from YISD schools and 170 students who met the requirements for graduation. Two students were classified as dropped out. This establishes a 98.8% graduation rate with this data set. When you factor the EPISD schools that responded and factor the graduates by those who dropped out, you get a percentage of 95.6%. If the averages from YISD and EPISD are pooled together a combined average of 97.6% can be determined. Among a sampled population of recent El Paso UIL One-Act Play participants, 97.6% or roughly 98% of these students graduated.

To identify statistical relevance of this research it is important to take a 98% graduation rate and make a probability estimate based on a sample of all high school students in El Paso.

The statistical software that was used to create this analysis was called “Statistica” Version 9.0. “Statistica” uses the same principals of statistics founded by Gosset. To create the analysis, the following information was obtained. The United States Census Bureau offers the number of students enrolled in high school in El Paso County to be 52,802 (NCES, 2006). By using a 95% confidence level a confidence interval frequently referred to as a “Margin of Error” can be simply computed. The size of the interval is determined by the size of my sample of 220 students surveyed. By using basic statistical methods a confidence interval of 1.85% can be calculated at a 95% confidence level. The confidence level suggests that if the survey of 220 students (who participated at least one year in One Act Play) were taken again there would be a 95% chance that number of students graduating would be between 96.15% and 99.85%.

A Texas Congressional Report created in 2008 states that Texas has an annual dropout rate of 2.7% (Scott, 2008). However, since my research includes students of many grade levels within secondary education, the annual statistic isn’t sufficient. This 2.7% represents those students who drop out within the course of one school year. When the public talks about “high school dropouts” they are referring to students who leave during the four year period of secondary education. This makes the 2.7% statistic misleading.

The combined four year rate is called the longitudinal graduation rate. In 2006, the longitudinal graduation rate was 80.4% and 78% in 2007. (Scott, 2008) The pooled graduation rate from 2006 and 2007 is 79.2%. This data also corresponds with the 1995 study on extracurricular activity which used National Center for Educational Statistics obtained in 1980. This study involved 735 high schools and examined ECA including fine arts and determined that fine arts participation (including theatre) leads to greater graduation rates (McNeal, Jr., 1995).

From these samples it can be concluded that those students who participated in the UIL One-Act Play Competition had an increased rate of high school graduation when compared with the statewide average. The relevance and importance of this data will be explored in the final chapter.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

Administrators and academics have studied student academic success in the classroom for years and, in turn, they have studied the dropout phenomenon. This document only explores one part of the dynamic of student academic success. On the surface, with a combined graduation rate of 98%, one might strongly encourage all students to participate in theatrical events. Yet, when considering some of the following arguments, this proposed call to action could seem flawed.

UIL One-Act Play (OAP) is a voluntary extra-curricular activity. Only those students who wish to participate do so. A teacher or guardian might encourage such participation, but as an extra-curricular activity it, by definition, cannot be mandatory. In addition, there is a cap in OAP (UT at Austin) which limits a backstage crew. A limit on cast size is also in place. With these limitations, UIL OAP alone cannot be the only tool to compel all students to graduate from high school.

The “Don’t Pass, Don’t Play” rule should also be considered. For a student to participate in UIL One Act Play, they must have passing grades in all their scheduled classes. It is impossible to know how many students consider not participating because they are struggling academically. Every UIL performance season there is a significant percent of students unable to participate due to the “Don’t Pass” rule, regardless of their talent or potential. The effectiveness of the “Don’t Pass, Don’t Play” rule as a motivational tool for graduation is still a debatable subject by some in public education (Mathis, 1989).

Also UIL OAP is an artistic production assembled by educator directors assigned to particular high schools (usually Theatre or English teachers). All the subjective elements of casting come into play and, in many schools, it is almost certain that some talented students are

unable to participate. As with most plays, the number of female roles are limited even in professional theatre (Cohen, 2003) and in many OAP productions the companies are disproportionately male. A short survey of names and roles from the respective UIL OAP Festivals suggests that over 50% of the casting was male (Manago, 2002, 2006, 2007). This further suggests that OAP, on the basis of gender parity, is not a tool for enhanced academic success.

The nature of theatre as a purported “elitist institution” can also be cited as a disclaimer of this document’s findings. The wide spread survey of ECA done by Prof. Ralph McNeal Jr. cites a study by DiMaggio that suggests fine-arts activities, like theatre, are “one mode of obtaining cultural capital... and gain access to the more ‘elite’ stratum of the population.” McNeal then suggests that fine arts ECA guide students toward peers who already have positive attitudes about school (McNeal, 1995, p75). This suggests that since theatre is an activity embraced by those families who practice “high culture,” their children’s academic success is less in doubt. If theatre is an activity that already attracts academically- minded people, the “high culture” argument may be valid.

The conclusions drawn from this research are relevant particularly when considering what avenues of further study could reveal. This research was limited to the region and only examines students’ participation and graduation rates in the last five years. Demographics of a community can change over time so the most recent information was consulted for the sake of relevancy. Looking at ECA rates in a recently economically disadvantaged school district or region might also yield intriguing findings.

The El Paso region varies statistically with Texas as a whole. El Paso County is 81% Hispanic when compared with 36% statewide. In the county 25.2% of the residents live under

the federal poverty line while a little over 15% of all Texans fall under the poverty line statewide. In this region 34% of the residents have less than a high school education. If OAP has such a positive impact on graduation, when considering the socioeconomic challenges this region's students face, the value of OAP is important (NCES, 2006). What might a statewide sample prove? What if graduation rates prior to the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" rule were examined? Also, how does UIL One-Act Play compare to other extracurricular activities? What is the graduation rate for students involved in UIL Basketball, or Football, Choir, or Debate? As mentioned in Chapter 4, there is a UIL database that could be the first step toward answering many of these questions. Apart from graduation, which ECAs tend to promote academic success in the classroom and to what degree?

If theatre, as an ECA, tends to attract students who already have strong academic skills, a possible focus of research could be OAP participants themselves. What is the socioeconomic profile of the typical OAP participant? What are the average grades and work habits of OAP participants? What is the educational level of the family/guardians of these students? Then a researcher could create a profile of the typical OAP participant from El Paso County and compare the similarities and differences.

Many secondary educators are familiar with the theory of multiple intelligences. This theory suggests that students learn in more than one way and at different levels. Some students may be visual learners, verbal linguistic learners, or interpersonal learners, or a combination of all three (Gardner, 1993). Educators are encouraged to try to build their lesson plans around this theory by combining learning strategies that appeal to the different learning capabilities promoted by the theory. Upon closer examination of the theatre process, many multiple intelligences (MI) are used in the creation of a theatrical performance.

Linguistic Intelligence involves the ability to generate spoken or written language, communicate effectively through language, and be sensitive to the subtle nature of language (Gardner, 1993). The process of reading a play, interpreting the text and applying elements of dramaturgy adhere to the theory of Linguistic Intelligence. Logical Mathematical Intelligence does relate the skills of numerical reasoning but it also connects to the mental process of logical problem solving (Gardner, 1993). Certainly, designers must be aware of the mathematical reality of civil and architectural engineering which demands numerical precision. In addition, anyone who directs or works with actors must utilize a problem solving approach when dealing with blocking and helping the players work through motivations by helping the actor understand the relationships between characters.

Musical Intelligence applies to the skills of understanding and deconstructing music along with the ability to hear patterns and recognize them. Spatial Intelligence is the ability to represent the world from the mind's eye and see one's self in relation to it. Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence is the capacity to use the body to solve a problem, make something, or perform using the body. Interpersonal Intelligence is the ability to understand other people and show empathy (Gardner, 1993).

If the theory of Multiple Intelligences is valid, it is easy to see how a student actor could use Interpersonal Intelligence to enhance a performance and/or help another actor improve theirs. Students who dance, sing, or play an instrument, use the relevant intelligences to build their skill and proficiency. The theatre process demands us, sometimes, to imagine where actors are on stage and the design of a set using the skills related to Spatial Intelligence.

It may be easy to assume that any student interested in high school theatre already has the skills and abilities to, at least, fulfill the requirements for graduation. This conclusion may be

simplistic. If the educational theory of multiple intelligences is valid then perhaps students who engage in theatrical arts are having their minds and consciousnesses stimulated in ways beyond the conventional classroom. These student artists are being intellectually stimulated and the advantages are being noticed outside the theater. All ECAs use one or more of the Multiple Intelligences indentified but few ECAs utilize as many as are needed to perform in theatre arts.

A statewide research project utilizing a more experimental methodology could follow a select group of high schools and track the academic performance of those students who participate in UIL OAP their freshman or sophomore years. This study would only follow students who participated in OAP once. The proposed study could also follow student athletes and students who participate in UIL Academic events if only for one season. This could provide a truly enhanced stream of data that might answer some of the previous questions. All participants' GPAs could be tracked along with their courses of study. Personal interviews during the students' scheduled senior year could yield some insights about the extracurricular activity student participated in and its impact on their success. A year of tracking the students after their graduation from high school could possibly provide some surprising data in regards to their level of success, whether it is in continued education, job placement, or familial status.

Despite these lines of inquiry, it is clear that those students, whatever their motivation, who participate in UIL One Act Play, have higher rates of graduation than those who do not. Understanding why would be the purpose of further investigation.

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Appendix A

January 7th, 2008

Kim Rogers
Director of Public Information
University Interscholastic League
1701 Manor Road
Austin, TX 78722

David Rout
5124 Kodlak
El Paso, TX 79924-3349
(915) 355-6126

Ms. Rogers,

I am a graduate student at University of Texas at El Paso. I am attempting to develop a thesis around UIL One Act Play. I am attempting to compare OAP with other extracurricular activities. My thesis is very simple and involves proving or disproving that UIL One Act Play participation leads to increased graduation rates. To facilitate my research I have approached several local school districts, two districts told me that they did not have any records pertaining to UIL OAP participation apart from the names of the schools and their respective shows.

In November I began an email correspondence inquiring if the UIL online registration system has records that would help me in my research. After several inquiries and consultation with the University of Texas programmer familiar with the registration system I was informed that the data I needed was available. I was told by Kelly McCollum that registrations were backed up and stored and that information I need (names of students and school affiliated) were available.

Although I will be using this data for research purposes I am making a public records request. I want you to know that only I and my graduate advisor will have access to the data I need. I will maintain full confidentiality and will destroy all personal information after completion. I will only use the names provided by submitting the names to each school's registrar to determine graduation status.

Your help in this matter is greatly appreciated. Feel free to contact me at (915) 355-6126 or at dcrou@episd.org if you have any questions.

With Regards,

David Rout

January 28th, 2009

Office of the President and Chief Financial Officer
Margo Iwanski, Executive Assistant to the Vice President
C/O Ms. Annachi Lopez
The University of Texas at Austin
P.O. Box 8179
Austin, Texas 78713-8179

RE: OPEN RECORDS REQUEST

Dear Ms. Iwanski,

As per your letter of January 21st you cited the Family & Educational Right Act of 1974 (FERPA) and Texas Attorney Generals' Decision No. 634 (1995) for denial of my Open Records Request. Upon evaluation of your citations provided I do believe that your rationale is mistaken. On 1/21 I sent a reply to Ms. Lopez citing how the UIL and other Texas Public Schools offered the information I required freely to professional and amateur media and frequently posts, information similar to my request, on the UIL website.

Upon further evaluation I looked at both the FERPA Act and applicable amendments along with Texas Attorney Generals' Decision No. 634. The FERPA Act makes provisions for what is deemed "directory information" §99.37 and further defines and lists as directory information " student's name; address; telephone number; email address; photograph; date and place of birth; enrollment status; and major field of study." Such "directory information" can be legally released without violating the FERPA Act.

Decision No. 634 analyzes FERPA and also notes "directory information" and expands the definition to include "student's name, address, telephone listing, date and place of birth, major field of study, participation in officially recognized activities and sports, weight and height of members of athletic teams, dates of attendance, degrees and awards received, and the most recent previous educational agency or institution attended by the student", Footnote 2 emphasis added.

I believe this is why names of public school students affiliated with UIL activities are listed on the UIL website. This is why such information is deemed not to violate FERPA or Decision No. 634. The ruling made in Texas Attorney Generals' Decision No. 634 states, "No funds shall be made available under any applicable program to any educational agency or institution which has a policy or practice of permitting the release of education records or personally identifiable information contained therein other than directory information" emphasis added.

My request is for names, schools and participation in a officially recognized UIL activity, which is considered "directory information". Since none of this information is legally considered a "student record" such release would not violate the law.

Enclosed is a copy of your letter sent Jan 21st if you have any questions regarding my Open Records Request feel free to contact me at (915) 355-6126. I thank you for your time and I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

David Rout

February 9, 2009

Office of the President and Chief Financial Officer
Margo Iwanski, Executive Assistant to the Vice President
C/O Ms. Annela Lopez
The University of Texas at Austin
P.O. Box 8179
Austin, Texas 78713-8179

RE: Letter dated January 28th, OPEN RECORDS REQUEST

Dear Ms. Iwanski,

I am sending you this facsimile to request the status on reconsideration of open record request sent in January. In my reply I acknowledged the importance of public educational institutions to comply with the FERPA Act. I then pointed out that perhaps the denial was in error. I believe there was confusion with what information I requested.

I was requesting names of students, school affiliation and if the named student participated in a officially recognized activity (UIL One-Act Play).

By definition stated by the FERPA act and by Texas Attorney Generals' Decision No. 634 such data is considered "directory information" and can be released. Such information is routinely released to the media for officially recognized activities and sports.

Please consult with your legal affairs office and inquire if the information I requested is considered "directory information" and that such information can be authorized for release according to state and federal regulations in compliance with Texas open records laws.

Attached you will find a copy of your response to my open records request and a copy of my letter dated January 28th.

Your help in this matter is greatly appreciated.

With Regards,

David Rout
5124 Kodiak
El Paso, TX 79924
(915) 355-6126
(915) 566-7360 Fax

Appendix B

Research Timeline

Aug-Oct 2008	This period involved basic research into High School Theatre and what topic and emphasis could be practical based on my background as an educator.
Oct-Nov 2008	The rules and scope of the project were formalized. Limits to research and emphasis were put into place. Initial requests for data (student participants in UIL) were submitted to School Districts and the UIL.
Dec 2008-March 2009	During this time the first and second waves of denied research requests forced reevaluation of the thesis question.
April – May 2009	After repeated consultation research was suspended until a practical way of dealing with FERPA could be addressed. Thesis topic was nearly terminated
April 2009	Nathan Hugh Rout was born. Research suspended for family leave.
July 2009	UIL One-Act Play Programs were considered by EPISD to be public documents. This provided the data (when combined with YISD names) for an adequate sample for analysis
August – November 2009	Graduation status was determined from sampled names. Statistical analysis completed. Thesis writing begins.
May 2010	Thesis completed and submitted to Committee

Curriculum Vita

David Rout was born in Bloomington, Indiana. The first son of Nancy Louise Rout and Hugh Wayne Rout, he graduated from Princeton Community High School. In 2001, he graduated from Brigham Young University with a bachelor's degree in film studies. While working at KTSM-TV he wrote film reviews for the El Paso Times and the web portal Stantonstreet.com. In 2001, he began writing comedy satires and faux interviews for the KLAQ Morning Show, morning radio personality Mancow, and other stations in the Midwest. In 2003, he worked at the nonprofit Border Health Institute before entering graduate school at the University of Texas El Paso. He has been an English, Speech and Film teacher at Austin High School since the fall of 2004.

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