

WASHINGTON STATE HIGH SCHOOL ETHICS BOWL 2020-2021

GENERAL INFORMATION

General Introduction

Modeled after the Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl, the High School Ethics Bowl involves teams of students analyzing a series of wide-ranging ethical dilemmas. The program utilizes case studies relevant to youth, such as questions about plagiarism, peer pressure, abuse of social media, free speech, gun control, cloning, parental consent, and stem cell research.

The Ethics Bowl is about giving an insightful perspective on each case, one that an intelligent layperson should be able to follow. The program values students' reasoning abilities, and the emphasis is more on the broader ethical implications of the cases and less on a rule-oriented approach. It's not about memorizing ethical theories or the names of philosophers, and teams should not focus on citing philosophers or moral theories.

We want to know why students believe something is morally right or wrong and what reasons/evidence they give to support this view. It's harder to build up a case than to tear one down, and so a good objection to another team's analysis may be to agree with their view but point out a complication or worry and then respond constructively to that complication or worry.

This program is designed to promote thoughtful, civil dialogue about difficult questions. Teams should score highly when they demonstrate good ethical reasoning, clarity about and consistency in their views, and a willingness to engage thoughtfully with points made by the other team. Mock-trial and debate-team style presentations, in which students press a particular point of view without consideration for furthering a dialogue, are not favored.

Program Structure

For 2020—2021, the Washington State High School Ethics Bowl will be a more flexible program and will not include a competitive event. Schools can register and begin practices at any point in the year. There is no fee to register this year.

Once a school is registered and has begun practices, if you are interested in a scrimmage with another team (see below), you are free to reach out to other schools on your own or to contact us to arrange a scrimmage for you. In either case, please let us know by emailing Kate Goldyn at kgoldyn@uw.edu and the Center can arrange an online forum, judges, and a moderator. The Center will arrange up to 3 scrimmages for each team, to be held on 3 different days between January and June 2021.

Scrimmages

Scrimmages will comprise two teams (3-5 students per team can enter a scrimmage), three judges, and a moderator (other students from the schools, family, and friends are welcome to observe). Scrimmages will consist of two cases and will not be scored. Judges will provide feedback to the teams at the end of the scrimmage.

The scrimmage will begin with the moderator flipping a coin. The team that wins the toss decides if it wants to go or second. The moderator will then read the first case aloud. All judges and team members will have all of the cases with them, so they will be able to follow along.

1. **Presentation.** Team A will have up to 2 minutes to confer, after which any member(s) of Team A may speak for up to 6 minutes. The presentation should begin with a statement of the question or questions the team thinks are most important in considering the case, and the remainder of the presentation should address that question or questions.

Please note: Although in their preparation of the cases, teams may have done some factual research, facts external to the case may not be relied upon in the presentation (as there is no way for the judges to determine the accuracy of outside factual claims).

2. **Commentary.** Team B will have up to 1 minute to confer, and then the team comments on Team A's presentation for up to 3 minutes.

Note: During this portion of the round, Team B should not present its analysis of the case under discussion, but rather should comment upon Team A's presentation with the goal of helping to strengthen it by commenting on the presentation's strengths, noting its flaws, and pointing out what has been omitted or needs further development.

3. **Open dialogue.** In this part of the competition, the teams will engage in a self-moderated open dialogue for ten minutes. The idea is for both teams to think together about the issues that emerge in the presentation, commentary, and response to commentary. Teams will be evaluated on the extent to which they listen to and take into account the other team's analysis and questions and on the civility and depth with which the teams discuss the case.

4. **Judges' questions.** Before asking questions, judges may confer briefly. Each judge may ask members of the presenting team a question related to the case, for up to 10 minutes total for all questions and answers. If time remains, judges may ask additional questions. Team members are not expected to confer for more than 30 seconds after a question has been asked. Judges' questions should be short and succinct (usually 30 seconds or less) and should be designed to help probe the team's understanding of the case. Judges should direct questions to a team as a whole and not an individual or a subset of the team. It is inappropriate to ask questions based on the immutable characteristics of team members, such as race, religion, gender, gender identity, ethnicity, disability, national origin, sexual orientation, appearance, etc. (e.g.: addressing a question about immigration to a student because of a perceived background).

After the question period for the first case, there can be a short (5-10 minutes) break if the teams and judges would like one. Then the moderator will read aloud the second case. The scrimmage will

proceed in the same way as the first case, with Team B presenting, Team A offering commentary, a 10-minute open dialogue, and then judges' questions for Team B.

At the end of the scrimmage, the judges should give each team feedback on their performances based on the following:

- The main criterion for judging is to evaluate teams based on the quality of their thinking about a difficult ethical situation and their contribution to a reasoned and civil conversation. That means they should have addressed opposing or different viewpoints and explained why they reached the conclusion they did. Judges should not engage a team in an argument based on a personal viewpoint nor provide feedback to a team that is based on whether the judge agrees or disagrees with the team's position.
- Team members may discover that they want to modify an aspect of the team's initial position as a result of the second team's commentary or a judge's question. Because the Ethics Bowl is about ethical inquiry and changing one's mind can be considered a sign of fluid intelligence, changing or modifying a position isn't necessarily negative. Judges should consider whether teams' initial positions and/or revised positions are well-founded and thoughtfully considered.
- It is unnecessary for a team to present a united front. Team members are free to disagree with one another as long as what they say is consistent and they are not contradicting themselves.
- Judges should not base their feedback on whether one person, several people, or all team members speak. Each team decides how to divide up speaking time during each round. Some teams choose to have an individual "own" a certain case. Other teams prefer to have each person on the team speak.

Moderator's Role

The moderator controls the scrimmage, including being responsible for keeping time and ensuring that there is no unacceptable behavior. All teams will get time notifications from the moderator at their request. When judges are asking questions, the moderator will notify them when there are 2 minutes remaining. Only the moderator keeps official time. However, team members are permitted to keep time on personal devices, but students may not time opposing teams.