

In- Class Ethics Bowl

Description of Exercise:

Holding an in-class ethics bowl is an excellent way to help students think about controversial ethical issues that come up in a course, whether it is in a social studies class, a history class, an English class or a philosophy class. In an ethics bowl, teams of 5-6 students are asked questions about a set of case studies they have read and discussed earlier as a team. Set up as a competition, the team going first has four minutes to state and justify their answer to the question. Then, the second team has a chance to confer and has two minutes to present a response to the first team's answer. The first team then has an opportunity to respond to the opposing teams comments. After this, a panel of judges (judges can either be instructors or another team of students) has the opportunity to ask the teams brief follow-up questions to elicit a team's viewpoint on ethically important aspects of the case. The judges then score team one on its presentation and the second half of the match begins, with team two answering a new question on a different case.

While the ethics bowl format in some ways resembles a debate, a number of differences do exist. First, teams are not assigned a perspective on a case. Instead, the two teams can agree on their answer to the question, but will almost always differ on the reasons they use to justify this answer. The goal is not to convince the judges to agree with a team's arguments; rather, the team earns points based on how well their response focused on the ethically relevant factors of the case, how well they showed awareness and thoughtful consideration of different viewpoints, and the clarity and intelligibility of their arguments.

The format for an in-class ethics bowl is based on a nation-wide undergraduate competition, the [APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl](#), which was originally started at the Illinois Institute of Technology and is now supported by the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics. This national competition has teams from over 120 different universities competing each year in 10 different regional competitions and the final national competition. The Ethics Bowl has been used in a variety of settings for both undergraduate and high school students, and the rest of this document lists some tips and resources for using it as a teaching tool in your own classroom. In general, an in-class ethics bowl consists of one entire round of ethics bowl, with both teams having the chance to answer questions about two different case studies.

Finding Case Studies

Case studies for use in an ethics bowl can come from just about anywhere, including recent news articles, works of fiction, or other sources. New case studies are developed every year by the Case Writing Committee of the APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl, and you can browse through a collection of past cases by visiting <http://www.indiana.edu/~appe/ethicsbowl.html>, and scrolling down the bottom of the page. You can also find a large number of cases, by visiting the [Ethics Education Library](#). You should feel free to write you own cases or rewrite existing cases to fit your needs. The goal of developing any case is to make sure it is complex enough for a spirited discussion to ensue. You may wish to read some

of the [case studies developed by the APPE Ethics Case Writing Committee](#) and use these as a model for writing cases of your own.

In general, two cases are used for each round of ethics bowl. Some teachers like to challenge their students by giving them more than two cases to review and prepare for, to add in an element of surprise as to which ones will be used in the competition. You will also want to develop a question based on each case for the students to answer. These questions should lead to the ethical issue or question at heart of the case.

For example, for a case about the administration of a high school censoring what students can publish in their school newspaper....

“Do schools have the right to restrict what students discuss in school newspapers? If so, why? If not, why not? Be sure to justify your answer.”

Questions can also ask what advice you would give to a character in the case (“As a friend of Lydia’s, what would you advise her to do?”), ask the students to take on a role in the case, (“As the head engineer in this project, how would you advise your company to proceed?”), or ask a question about a different, but related set of circumstances.

Before the Competition

Students usually benefit from having a class period or so to read over the cases and discuss them as a team (usually made up of 3-6 students). A recorder should be nominated to keep track of what is talked about in the team, as these notes can be useful for the actual day of the competition. At this time, students (and judges) should NOT know what question is going to be asked about the case. Their discussion should focus on articulating the overall problem or conflict in the case, identifying the relevant ethical issues and facts that need to be considered, and discussing their proposed solution for resolving the main conflict in the case. If students’ discussions become unfocused, the [Seven Step Method for Ethical Decision Making](#) can be a useful tool to help guide them as they analyze the cases.

The panel of judges who will be scoring the teams during the competition can be composed of the instructor for the course and two to three invited guests, or a panel of students. In the APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl, judges often come not only from academe but also from different professional backgrounds such as business, engineering, psychology, law, etc. These judges often bring interesting perspectives into the classroom, and inviting individuals to be judges can also lead to collaborations and opportunities for students in the future. The main points to consider when deciding who you would like to invite to be a judge is if they have the ability to listen, score the teams fairly, and give educational feedback to your students. Nothing ruins an ethics bowl quicker than when a judge belittles a students’ opinion or is unable to appreciate the arguments a student puts forward because he or she does not agree with the position that a student is advocating.

You can find a copy of model rules for an ethics bowl, and model score sheets at <http://ethics.iit.edu/teaching/high-school-ethics-bowl>

Students should get the chance to see a copy of the score sheet so they know the criteria on which they are being judged.

The Ethics Bowl Competition

During the actual day of the competition each team will answer one question about one of the cases. Someone, usually the instructor, should serve as the moderator who reads the question about the case and then keeps time as the teams confer and respond. The moderator can use a coin toss to decide which team is going first. The team going first, (team one) will have the question read to them and have two minutes to confer as a team. During this time, team two should be quiet, so as not to disturb team one. Team one will then have four minutes to present their answer to the question, and then team two will have two minutes to confer, and two minutes to respond to the first team's initial answer to the question. Team one will then have two minutes to confer and two minutes to respond to team two's commentary. There will then be a 10 minute period where the judges will have a chance to confer and to ask questions about team one's response. These questions will usually be aimed at getting team one to expand or clarify their analysis of the case. After the first round is complete, the teams switch, with team two answering a new question about a new case study, and team one providing commentary.

The above procedures of an ethics bowl match are designed to mirror the best approaches to discussing a complex, difficult to resolve, and highly viewpoint dependent ethical issue – careful analysis of each others' arguments, and back-and-forth discussion to help clarify the main ethical issues in a case. The time constraints given are what have been used in other high-school level competitions. Feel free to change them as needed.

The judges will then evaluate the teams' responses according to the following criteria:

- **Clarity and Intelligibility:** Has the team stated and defended its position in a way that is logically consistent and which allows the Judges to understand clearly the team's line of reasoning?
- **Focus on Ethically Relevant Factors:** Has the team identified and discussed the factors the judges consider ethically relevant in connection with the case?
- **Avoidance of Ethical Irrelevance:** Has the team stayed on track by avoiding preoccupation with issues that the Judges do not regard as ethically relevant, or as only having minor ethical relevance, in connection with a case?
- **Deliberative Thoughtfulness:** Does the Team's presentation of its position on a question indicate both awareness and thoughtful consideration of different viewpoints, including especially those that could loom large in the reasoning of individuals who might disagree with the team's position?

Time Commitment

One class period discussing the cases as an ethics bowl team, this could also be assigned to be done

outside of class as a group project.

45 minutes – 1 hour for holding the in-class ethics bowl.

Materials

A timer for the moderator

Copies of score sheets for team one and team two.

3 copies of questions, to be handed out by moderator after the question is read, one copy to each of the teams and the judges.

Copies of case studies for students and judges to refer to.

Scrap paper (no notes should be used during the competition)

Resources

High School Ethics Bowl Resources (<http://ethics.iit.edu/teaching/high-school-ethics-bowl>)

A list of resources on developing in in-class or school-wide ethics bowl, including model rules, score sheets, and sources for finding case studies developed by the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions at the Illinois Institute of Technology

Ethics Education Library (<http://ethics.iit.edu/eelibrary/>)

A collection of case studies, as well as other relevant material in the areas of science, engineering, as well as all case studies used in the APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl Competition.

APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl (<http://www.indiana.edu/~appe/ethicsbowl.html>)

The official website of the APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl Competition

If you are interested in learning more, or getting in contact with other instructors with experience organizing high school ethics bowl competitions, please contact Kelly Laas at the Center for the Study of Ethics in the Professions at the Illinois Institute of Technology, laas@iit.edu, telephone 312.567.6913.