

So You Want to Organize a High School Ethics Bowl...

by Matt Deaton

Why?

Before we get into the nuts and bolts of actually organizing and executing an ethics bowl, you need to understand what's driving you. Explicitly knowing why you want to do this will make you a more convincing advocate—sharing your reasons with others can help bring them on board. And if you're consciously aware of the why behind your vision, you can more carefully mold it to suit your goals.

Some of *my* reasons were:

The dire state of public discourse. Watch a town hall “discussion” lately? Pretty disheartening (and scary!) stuff. Spreading ethics into the local community should help change the combative political culture for the better, eventually leading to more thoughtful, engaged citizens and better public policy. Not only will an ethics bowl directly impact the character of the students and teachers involved, it will bleed over into their families, onto their peers, and with a little media attention, into the broader community.

I wish I'd been exposed to philosophy prior to college. It's a shame that most kids don't get their first taste of philosophy until college, and that most who don't go to college never experience it at all. With tons of creative energy and several pivotal decisions to make, high school students can immensely benefit from the critical thinking skills doing philosophy fosters. I certainly could have used a more discerning mind when I was 17!

Just to make the world a better place. No society can sustain too many Socrates clones, meddling in government affairs and corrupting the youth. But the world would definitely be a better place if more of us had the ability and the inclination to

appreciate life's big questions, and to think through them in a careful, reason-based way. A high school ethics bowl is one way to spread the fruits of philosophy beyond the academy, and hopefully leave the world a little better than we found it.

What's in it for Them?

It's the principal who will throw your invitation in the trash *or* tap a faculty member to round up a team. Unfortunately, principals are very busy people with very limited resources, and they may not share your personal vision of the benefits of a bowl. They're going to need convincing as to why your bowl is worthy of their school's time and money.

Below are some selling points—I'm sure you can think of more. Whatever benefits you think a bowl will bring a school, share them early and often with administrators.

- **Benefits for schools**
 - Positive publicity
 - Win or lose, simply competing in an ethics bowl shows that your school is serious about academics (and ethics)
 - Great practice for other events
 - Preparing for and participating in an ethics bowl can improve your students' public speaking and reasoning skills—valuable in lots of other venues (scholars bowls, oratory competitions)
 - Having more ethically aware and thoughtful students can have positive benefits for your school's culture
- **Benefits for students**
 - Improves critical thinking skills
 - Should make them more ethically aware and responsible
 - Competitive academic outlet
 - Improves confidence in front of an audience

Understand the Event

Before you recruit coaches, teams, judges and begin searching for a venue, familiarize yourself with the actual event. Knowing a thing or two about how a bowl actually runs will make you a much more credible advocate, and therefore much more likely to receive outside support.

Rules and Procedures: Take a good look at the rules and procedures. Don't have any? Google and borrow someone else's (with credit). Or model your bowl on Tennessee's.

2009 East TN High School Ethics Bowl

Procedures and Rules

1. General Procedures
 - a. Two teams will compete at a time. After the target case is read aloud, the first team will be given a question. They will have 3 minutes to formulate a response, which when delivered, should last no more than 3 minutes. Once the first team has submitted an initial answer, the second team will have 2 minutes to formulate comments on the first team's answer, which when delivered should take no more than 2 minutes. Then a new question will be given to the second team and the above process will repeat. Once each team has answered one direct question and commented once on their opposing team's answer the teams will be given 2 minutes to formulate and then 2 minutes to deliver their final comments (at which time they may revise or reiterate previous answers).
2. Comments
 - a. Teams can earn points during their commentary by reaffirming, adding to or correcting the first team's answer. Comments *can* be critical, but need not. Though competitions, ethics bowls are not debates. Therefore, teams should strive to arrive at the correct answer and not simply discredit their opponents for the sake of winning. (See 8.c.v below.)
3. Presenting
 - a. At least three different students on each team must present over the course of the competition. More participation isn't required, but the judges will look favorably on teams with more active presenters.
 - b. More than one team member may present during the delivery of any given answer, reply or final comment. (Students may assign different portions of a presentation to different team members.)
4. Coaches
 - a. Coaches are not allowed to assist actively competing teams, though they may discreetly converse before, between and after rounds.
5. Notes
 - a. The discreet use of notes is allowed.

6. Cases
 - a. Teams will be given a pool of fifteen candidate case studies one month prior to the competition. The cases examined on the day of competition will be selected from this pool.
7. Questions
 - a. Though teams will have prior access to the actual cases, they will not have access to the actual questions. However, teams should be prepared to accurately and thoroughly analyze the cases and/or recommend action from the perspectives of Kantianism, Consequentialism/Utilitarianism, Virtue Ethics and Feminist Care Ethics, to deliver an all-things-considered judgment that takes all four ethical theories into account, and to draw on analogies in everyday morality. Religious reasoning may be used in teams' answers, but should only play a minor role and be supplemented with reasons accessible to all. (This is because the competition is intended to encourage good citizenship within a multicultural democracy, where all citizens deserve justifications they can accept or reject independent of religious affiliation or the lack thereof.)
8. Scoring
 - a. Students' answers to direct questions will be judged on a scale of 0-10, with 10 being the best possible answer, and 1st digit decimal scores given when appropriate (8.3/10). Similarly, comments on competing teams' answers will be judged on a scale of 0-5. And final comments will be judged on a scale of 0-5.
 - b. The reasoning process behind teams' answers should in all cases be made as explicit as possible.
 - i. Preface your answers by explaining the mandates of the relevant ethical theories when applicable.
 - ii. Be sure to explain which specific details of the case have bearing on your answer and why.
 - c. Responses will be judged according to
 - i. How well teams convey understanding of and apply the 4 dominant ethical theories
 - ii. How carefully teams attend to the morally relevant nuances of the cases
 - iii. How well teams avoid issues of minor ethical significance
 - iv. The effectiveness of the teams' presentations
 - v. How well teams embody the spirit of the philosophical pursuit of the truth, as opposed to a combative disposition bent on "winning"
 - vi. How well teams follow the procedures, rules, recommendations and advice found elsewhere in this document
9. Awards
 - a. At the end of the bowl, scores will be compiled and the team with the most points will be awarded 1st place, second most 2nd place, and third most 3rd place. In the event of a tie, the judges will make a principled decision as to which team delivered the best overall performance according to the scoring criteria in 8.c.

The above isn't set in stone. If you can think of a way to achieve your vision, by all means—alter away! Also, be willing to work with coaches, judges and administrators if they have ideas. Ensure everyone's on the same page months before a competition, but don't be afraid to tweak things that need tweaking. Whatever rules and procedures you use, make sure you understand the basics from the outset. If you're the organizer, participants will look to you for clarification and guidance.

When and Where: Secure a venue and settle on a date prior to mailing invitations. A half-baked plan may be better than no plan at all, but it can scare away schools who might be reluctant to participate already.

When's a good day? Pick a week day that doesn't conflict with sports, holidays, other special events or church. How do you know if a candidate day is good? Many school districts post their calendars online. If you can't find one via google, call or email the superintendent.

Where's a good venue? Your first time out, the best venue might just be the one that's free and available! All you need is a stage area for the teams, a prominent view for the judges, some space for a moderator, and seats for the crowd. We held our first bowl in medium-sized room with stadium seating in UT's University Center. It was very nice, which really bolstered the bowl's prestige and importance. So look for a place that's respectable, neutral, and big enough to handle the event.

Particular questions potential sponsors and participants will ask:

- When/where will the bowl be?
- How will teams be graded?
- Who will do the judging?
- Can our team get some practice cases and questions?
- How long should the bowl last?
- How many students are required/allowed on a team?
- Does everyone have to speak?
- What about religious reasoning?

Know a Thing or Two about Ethical Theory

Just like you don't need to be a Major League Baseball hall-of famer to oversee a softball league, you don't need a PhD in philosophy to organize an ethics bowl. But you do need to know the basics. The basics include what philosophy is, how ethics works, and the four dominant ethical theories.

Academic **philosophy** (distinguished from "Phil Fulmer's coaching *philosophy*" or "Fred's *philosophy* on dealing with car salespeople") is simply the reason-based attempt to answer life's big non-empirical questions. In other words, philosophers grapple with questions they can't answer with experiments or tools, using only their minds. And they do so in conversation with one another. They author, critique and revise "arguments" (premises used to logically support a conclusion) in an effort to answer questions like, *What is knowledge? What is the highest human good? What is justice? What are the fundamental rules of logic?*

Ethics is a sub-discipline of philosophy that deals with questions of moral right and wrong. What distinguishes the philosophical approach to morality from other approaches is that philosophers demand arguments *why* an action is or isn't morally acceptable, and they demand that those arguments be good. While some turn to religious authority to answer moral questions, and others look to their culture's values, the law or their intuitions, philosophers take the cerebral route. They apply *reason* to questions of right and wrong, and only declare an action morally permissible or impermissible when convinced to do so with logical argument.

I don't have space to do the four dominant ethical theories justice, but in a paragraph, **Kantianism** mandates two things: a) that we only do things we could endorse everyone else doing too, and b) that we treat persons with respect and never as mere tools.

Consequentialism/Utilitarianism requires that we make decisions that bring about the best consequences or maximize net happiness. **Virtue Ethics** recommends that we behave according to recognized virtues (honesty, bravery, loyalty) and avoid recognized vices (dishonesty, cowardice, treacherousness). And **Feminist Care Ethics** emphasizes the importance of our relationships when making moral decisions. An ethics bowl entails applying these theories to real cases, sometimes one at a time, sometimes all together. For a more complete (but still brief) introduction to ethics, see my "Ethics in a Nutshell." Stanford's online encyclopedia of philosophy is also a good source: <http://plato.stanford.edu>. Whatever you use, definitely investigate these theories further. You needn't understand them as well as the judges, but you do need to have the basics down pat.

Getting Your Materials Together

All of the above ideally needs to be ironed out before contacting a school. One last thing you need is to gather an info pack for potential coaches. You may luck out and find a high school teacher with a philosophy degree, but chances are you'll be working with capable, motivated and outgoing faculty, who appreciate your vision, but aren't trained ethicists.

At minimum, you should be ready to send interested coaches (electronically or in hard copy):

- The official rules and procedures
- A primer on ethics
- Optional in-depth ethics resources
- Practice cases
- Practice questions

First Contact

Finding judges and a sponsor: Before (finally) approaching schools, you need commitments from judges. Where do you find ethics bowl judges? Any nearby university or community college should have a philosophy department, or at least philosophy instructors (sometimes under a "general studies" department in small schools). Assuming they've taught or studied ethics, they'll understand the ethical theories far better than you need to, and are best qualified to judge how well teams apply them to actual cases.

Universities and community colleges are actually excellent candidates to sponsor the bowl too. That means they'll provide a location, stamp the event with their credentials, and perhaps even pay for trophies. What's in it for them?

- Positive attention within the school (to impress the dean)
- Positive attention in the community (to impress taxpayers and donors)
- Better incoming freshmen
 - Assuming most of their students come from the local area, and that at least some of those competing go on to take a philosophy class, the department will enjoy better prepared students with a philosophical background on the front end

Once you've rounded up some judges and found a place to hold the bowl, it's time to contact the high schools. Ideally you should do this several months in advance to give the teams time to prepare. But as little as three months is sufficient.

Here's the letter I sent every high school principal in Knox County.

Dear Principal **NAME**,

I'm writing to invite **YOUR SCHOOL** to participate in the first annual East Tennessee High School Ethics Bowl. An opportunity for your students to showcase their critical thinking skills, teams from the surrounding area will analyze case studies featuring moral dilemmas and submit recommendations as to what the protagonists ethically ought to do. A panel of volunteer applied ethicists from UT's Philosophy Department will then judge each team's answers and supporting reasoning, and winners will advance until a champion is crowned.

Ideally you'll find a faculty member interested in organizing and coaching a team, who either myself or another volunteer from the philosophy department will meet with and train. Beyond preparing for the bowl, if students and a faculty sponsor are interested, I would be more than happy to facilitate the formation of a Philosophy Club, though forming a club is not necessary to compete. Why would anyone do philosophy for fun? Apart from the intrinsic pleasure of thinking through life's big questions, the logical reasoning skills developed in philosophy are beneficial in almost every area of life (philosophy majors score higher on law school entrance exams than any other major).

This first ever bowl will tentatively be held on Thursday, November 19th on the UT campus. If you or others have questions, please don't hesitate to give me a call on my cell phone at (865) 323-9773 or shoot me an email at jdeaton1@utk.edu. I sincerely hope that you'll chose to pass the word along to your faculty, that a teacher will be interested in coaching a team, and that your school will be represented in the first ever East TN Ethics Bowl come November.


Hoping to hear from **SCHOOL** soon,


Matt Deaton, MA
Graduate Teaching Associate (PhD, ABD)
Philosophy Department
University of Tennessee
801 McClung Tower, Knoxville 37996-0480

Your letter will of course reflect the specifics of your bowl and your vision. The main thing to remember is to clearly explain what the bowl is all about and to emphasize what's in it for them—how competing will benefit their school and their students, specifically.

Whatever you write, do what you can to impress. I printed the letters on official UT Philosophy Department letterhead, used official department envelopes, and enclosed the flyer below.

1st Annual East TN High School Ethics Bowl





Sponsored by the
University of
Tennessee
Philosophy
Department

An excellent opportunity to hone your critical thinking skills, tackle challenging ethical issues with logical clarity, and make contacts at UT. Competition to be held at UT November 19th.

**For more information contact Matt at
(865) 323-9773 or jdeaton1@utk.edu.
<http://web.utk.edu/~philosop/>**

If a school shows interest, don't sit on it—follow up promptly. Send the message with your actions that you're serious, that you will help them get their team ready, and that it will be a welcoming, rewarding experience for everyone involved.

Also, an initial response isn't a commitment. Once you get a bite, that's when the real selling begins. Treat every respondent with enthusiasm and respect—they may turn out to be one of only a handful competing!

Helping the Teams Get Ready

Once questions turn into commitment, you need to help the coaches get their teams ready. Now's when you send out the materials you prepared above—ethical theory readings, sample cases, rules, etc.

Also, stay in touch with your coaches to make sure the teams are preparing. Doing so doesn't take much. Just touch base every so often and send resources when you can. In any case, keep the lines of communication open—ensure that the coaches know that they can ask you for help should they need it.

Here's an email I sent my teams' coaches a couple months before the bowl.

Emily, Dave, Anne, Sister Anna and David,

I thought I'd take a sec to introduce everyone. Emily Headrick and Dave Kyser are the coaches at TSD, Anne Jackson is taking care of South Doyle, Sister Anna is handling the young scholars at CAK, and David Goff is rounding up a team at Austin East. Everyone, meet everyone else!

Thus far, your four schools represent the competitors in the upcoming Ethics Bowl. I think I've sent all of you similar resources (links to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy online, my "Ethics in a Nutshell", and a handful of other links/readings), but I thought you might find it useful to have one another's contact info--in case you'd like to collaborate on how to best organize and coach a team.

So there ya go. You've now been officially E-introduced, and you'll find the relevant email addresses in the "to" field above. Feel free to "reply to all" with comments or questions. Even though this is technically a competition, cooperation, especially this first year, is encouraged and very much appreciated.

Attached you'll find some cases to start working through. Once you and your students get clear on the ethical theories, that should be the next step--applying them to real situations. Be sure and press them on the reasons they give for their recommendations, and that they're able to accurately and thoroughly apply those four dominant ethical theories, rather than simply elaborating on their feelings or opinions ("I feel that..." or "In my opinion...") and the like. Feelings and opinions make ethicists cringe, and the judges will be two seasoned applied ethicists--professors John Hardwig and Glenn Graber. A good strategy might be to analyze each case through the lens of Kantianism, then consequentialism/utilitarianism, then virtue ethics, then feminist care ethics. And once they've mastered that, take a shot at determining an all-things-considered judgment. Just keep in mind that philosophical ethics is about identifying and carefully attending to all the morally relevant factors, accurately applying theory, and giving good reasons for the conclusions reached.

And last, be sure to have fun with it! Doing ethics takes a little noodle stretching, but it should rarely be a chore. From my experience with young college students, once they get over the "Argh--these theories are awkward and hard!" hump, they'll relish the ability to unpack and analyze ethical dilemmas with objective sobriety. Plus, this may be one of the few occasions where the answer to an important question is up for debate, and somebody actually cares what they think!

Hope you're all well,
Matt
(865) 323-9773

P.S. [Here's](#) a video of a collegiate ethics bowl focusing on journalistic ethics, just to give everyone an idea of how the bowl will run.

That's just an example, and it's written according to my personality and expertise. The important thing is to build a relationship so they're comfortable asking you for help. Remember that they may be learning the ethical theories right along with their students! (Imagine the anxiety of a basketball coach who'd just been introduced to the game!) So make sure they know that you're there to help, even if all you can do is put them in contact with an ethics instructor.

Courting the Media

Our strategy at Tennessee was to encourage media coverage of the event after the fact. Since we weren't quite sure how things would go (the bowl went fabulously well, by the way), we figured it would be best to use the media to help expand the bowl for next year, and not to draw in a bigger crowd than necessary.

Below is a press release I sent three newspapers and five television stations four days prior to our first bowl. It won us a spot on one station's 11 o'clock news, an article in Knoxville's newspaper of record, and consequently an interest email from a high school teacher who just happened across the coverage. Lucking across that teacher was a unexpected perk, but the real benefits will come when we organize our second bowl—when include reprints of that very flattering article in our mailers. Instant credibility.

Dear [MEDIA OUTLET EDITOR, WRITER, PRODUCER, ETC],

Sponsored by the Philosophy Department and organized by yours truly, I'm writing to let you know about Thursday's 1st Annual East TN High School Ethics Bowl.

Two teams are slated to compete--one from Catholic High School and a second from Tennessee School for the Deaf. The bowl is an effort to spread the fruits of applied ethics into the local community, encourage the love of wisdom in pre-college students, and inspire the formation of high school philosophy clubs--eventually producing a more thoughtful citizenry.

The teams from TSD and Catholic will be presented with three ethical case studies (perhaps on drug use, abortion, pollution, end of life issues, etc), asked questions involving application of the four dominant ethical theories (Kantianism, Utilitarianism/Consequentialism, Virtue Ethics and Feminist Care Ethics), and judged by Professors John Hardwig (Philosophy Dept Head) and Glenn Graber (renowned bio ethicist) according to their accurate application of the theories, attention to moral relevancies, and how well they embody the philosophical pursuit of truth.

I hope that someone from your office will cover the event, a) to reward these wonderful students and coaches for their hard work, and b) to set an example for Knoxville on how to reason through controversial ethical issues with sobriety, care and impartiality.

Event: 1st Annual East TN High School Ethics Bowl

Teams: Catholic High School, coached by Sister Anna Wray, O.P.; Tennessee School for the Deaf, coached by Emily Headrick and Dave Kyser

Location: Shiloh Room, University Center, UT

Date: Thursday, November 19th

Time: 6:30-8:30 pm

Cost: free

Contact: Matt Deaton at 865-323-9773 or matt@mattdeaton.net

Sincerely,

Matt Deaton, MA

Graduate Teaching Associate

Philosophy Department

University of Tennessee

865-323-9773

<http://mattdeaton.net/>

I used to be a newspaper reporter. They're even busier than principals! The easier you make the assignment, the more likely they're going to do it. And the assignment is going to be extra easy if all the info they need for the story is right there in the press release.

Notice that I supplied key names (judges, sponsor, schools competing), explained the bowl process, included the bare facts in easily readable bullet form near the bottom, gave them

three different ways to contact me with questions, and even appealed to their sense of civic responsibility—*reward these kids by holding them up as an example for community.*

Do the same with your press release. Make it as telling and simple as possible. Go ahead and write that story for them!

Approaching the Bowl

As the bowl draws near, confirm all the important details.

- Ensure the venue is still available and will be ready (PA equipment, seating, etc)
- Touch base with the coaches—see if they have any last-minute questions
- Ensure the judges are attending and understand the rules and procedures
- Ensure everyone has directions to the event and knows where to park
- If you've ordered trophies (and you should have done so about a month prior), verify the spelling and pick them up

If changes arise, keep everyone in the loop. A week prior to our bowl the University Center inexplicably switched rooms. Luckily it was to an even better room, but I had to do some quick maneuvering to ensure the coaches, interpreters, teams, audience and press knew where to go.

The Night of the Bowl

If you've never hosted an event like this (and I hadn't), it can frazzle your nerves a bit. I suggest printing a personalized "game plan" that will lead you from the opening introductions all the way through the award presentations. With a detailed schedule in hand, your chances of pulling it off as host go way up. My game plan looked like this:

1st Annual East Tennessee High School Ethics Bowl Gameplan

Welcome to the 1st Annual East TN High School Ethics Bowl

- Thank the audience for coming
- Introduce self
- What is ethics? What is philosophy?

- Why a high school ethics bowl?
- Overview of the process

Catholic Academy of Knoxville

[students' and coaches' names]

Tennessee School for the Deaf

[students' and coaches' names]

Judges: Professor John Hardwig and Professor Glenn Graber of the Philosophy Department (thank both for their financial and intellectual support).

Assign Teams – coin flip [flipped coin to decide which team would go first]

Team 1:

Team2:

CAMERAS WATCHING STUDENTS

[Questions were original, but all three cases were borrowed from *Morality Play: Case Studies in Ethics* by Jessica Pierce of the University of Colorado at Boulder, McGraw-Hill Companies Inc, NY, copyright 2005.]

After the deadly shooting at Columbine High School in the spring of 1999... [case on security cameras in schools]

Team 1: Analyze the school's policy from the perspective of Kantianism.

Response

Team 2: Analyze the school's policy from the perspective of Virtue Ethics.

Response

Final Thoughts: 1 then 2

ORGAN TRANSPLANT FOR DEATH ROW INMATE

Horacio Alberto Reyes-Camarena was sentenced to death in 1996 for stabbing to death an 18-year-old girl and nearly killing her older sister... [case on convicted killer receiving an organ transplant]

Team 2: Answer the following question from the perspective of Utilitarianism--Should death row inmates be eligible to receive organ transplants?

Response

Team 1: Answer the following 3-part question from the perspective of Utilitarianism--Should death row inmates be able to *donate* their organs once they're executed? If they were allowed to do so, would that make a difference in your judgment of whether they should be eligible to *receive* organ transplants? And if they were allowed to do so, what downsides do you foresee?

Response

Final thoughts: 2 then 1

DANCESAFE: MAKING ECSTASY SAFER FOR PARTYERS

The drug Ecstasy, or MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine), has become a wildly popular club drug... [case on Dancesafe—an organization that tests and then returns drugs to minors]

Team 1: Judge Dancesafe's practice of testing and returning drugs to minors from the perspective of Feminist Care Ethics.

Response

Team2: This is a 3-part question. Your team has just been awarded a grant by Dancesafe to rewrite their drug testing policies. The organization is considering expanding its service to test a wider range of substances, including marijuana, crack cocaine and heroin. Should Dancesafe continue to test and return substances no matter how dangerous they are, or should they confiscate harder drugs like crack and heroine? Should they ID customers to ensure they're over a certain age? What other suggestions can you offer? Base your policy suggestions on at least two ethical theories of your choice.

Response

Final thoughts: 1, then 2

Closing Procedures:

1. While the judges tally their final scores and decide on a winner, I'd like to take this opportunity to engage you, the audience. Without commenting on the teams' performances, so as not to sway the judges' scores, **what are your thoughts on the cases we've considered?**

2. And now for the awarding of the trophies. **With a score of blank, the team winning first place in the 1st Annual East Tennessee High School Ethics Bowl is blank.** (Give them bowl, take picture for paper.)
3. **Second place**, with an admirable showing, and a very nice trophy to boot, is blank. (Award, picture.)
4. We'll now give the **judges** an opportunity to address the teams.
5. **Thank you** ladies and gentlemen for attending this first ethics bowl. Many thanks again to Professors Hardwig and Graber, to Jacob Bentham for running our video equipment, to the University Center staff for providing such a nice venue, to the coaches for volunteering their time to get their teams ready, to their principals for supporting the activity, and especially to these fantastic young scholars. Please give them both a healthy round of applause.

Notice that the game plan was sequentially ordered (no flipping back and forth between introductions, cases and questions), that it included very minute details (*thank judges for their financial and intellectual support*), and that even the ordering of the teams' questions and responses was included (question to team 2, response team 1, question to team 1, response team 2, final comments team 2, then team 1). Of course I didn't need to look at this to remember to thank the audience for attending, but knowing that I could if I needed to made me all that much more confident and consequently a better host.

One thing I didn't make explicit on my game plan was a reminder to shake the students', coaches' and judges' hands and thank them for all their hard work. After all the work organizing, that just came naturally. I expect it will come naturally for you too, but feel free to include that and any other key details on your game plan—it can only help.

Following Up

The week following the bowl is the best time to solicit feedback. Online and in person conversations with coaches and judges helped me realize that

- A bell or buzzer would have been helpful in regulating teams' timed responses (had to just cut them off orally—*"Catholic, your time is up..."*—which was a little awkward)
- With an add number of cases, it's harder on the team that goes first (they have to answer questions on a fresh case twice, while the other team only does so once)
- Two cases would have probably been enough (and it would have eliminated the problem above)

Those are all things we can and will fix for next year—things I wouldn't have thought of if I hadn't asked for feedback.

Also, before you think about expanding, secure your base. At the very least, send the teams and coaches a note thanking them for their hard work. And if you're really appreciative (as I was), do something a little extra. For around \$25 I printed, framed and delivered 8x10s of each team with their awards for their school's trophy case. That plus a group 4x6 for each team member was a small token, but will hopefully encourage them to participate again next year. Thank those media outlets too. In a thankless business, your appreciation will stand out, and hopefully bring their favorable coverage back.

Dealing with Setbacks

One last piece of advice. Setbacks are just that—not death blows. If you're serious about organizing an ethics bowl, don't inflate mere challenges into insurmountable obstacles. Dwelling on difficulties doesn't do anything to move you closer to successfully organizing a bowl—focus on the solution, not the problem.

Luckily, I had the support of UT's department head, John Hardwig, from the very beginning. I was inspired to organize a bowl at an applied ethics conference by Roberta Israeloff of the Squire Foundation, John happened to be attending the conference with me, and when I pitched the idea to him in the hotel room he pledged the department's financial and intellectual support. So I had at least one judge, an official sponsor and a venue from the start. May you be so lucky!

However, I had trouble finding schools to compete. Out of dozens of high schools in Knox County, despite letters and meetings with principals, only four expressed interest. I secured tentative commitments from all four, but about a month and a half before the bowl, one dropped out. *That's fine—three will be enough for this first competition—we'll expand next year.* And then the Friday before the bowl, another team backed out! So we were down to only two teams, the minimum number necessary for a competition, less than a week before the competition. Rather than panicking or cancelling, I adjusted the procedures, conferred with the judges, and let the remaining teams know that it was up to them to make the bowl a success. I also emphasized that if they'd only show up, the worst they do was second place!

Everything of course turned out fine. Although two teams don't make for much of a bowl, it was a rewarding experience for all involved. Plus, it was enough to get our first event in the books, which should give us extra credibility when expanding for next year.

So regardless of your troubles, stay focused on the reasons why you want to organize an ethics bowl. And keep in mind that your goal for the first year should just be to get it done. The only essentials are at least two teams and one judge. That's it. Worry about holding your bowl in a banquet hall and inviting the president at your ten year anniversary.

The best of luck to you, and if you have any questions, don't hesitate to email me at matt@mattdeaton.net.