

# ETHICS BOWL

## overview



Established in 2010, the Tennessee High School Ethics Bowl (THSEB) is an educational outreach program sponsored by the Department of Philosophy and the UT Humanities Center. The goal of the program is to encourage students to develop the qualities of mind that enable them to be not only successful individuals, but also the type of civic leaders our democracy needs.

One of the hallmarks of modern democratic society is the existence of disagreement on a variety of issues. In order to function well, such a society needs citizens capable of engaging in respectful deliberation and dialogue about a vast array of controversial and complex issues, with emphasis on reasoning, not rhetoric. This requires not just critical thinking, but also a respect for others' values and perspectives, and an understanding that the world is not one in which everything is black and white.

## how it works

Teams analyze a series of wide-ranging ethical issues and then present their ideas to judges and other teams in a fun and friendly atmosphere. Topics range from those of particular interest to high school students, such as bullying, social media, and cheating, to more general topics, such as free speech, gun control, and stem cell research.

The THSEB is a discussion, not a debate. Teams are not required to choose opposing sides, nor is the goal to "win" the argument by belittling the other team or its position. The focus is on reasoning, rather than rhetoric, and has many benefits for student learning.

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TENNESSEE HIGH SCHOOL

# ETHICS BOWL



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
TENNESSEE  
KNOXVILLE

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

# why participate?

## Participation in the THSEB

- >Promotes ethical awareness and responsibility.
- >Encourages reflective and civil public discourse.
- >Hones reading comprehension and critical reasoning skills, which are proven to boost ACT and SAT scores and that are explicitly targeted by TNCore standards.
- >Brings students face-to-face with new perspectives on complex issues, which nurtures empathy.
- >Offers students a unique, non-adversarial opportunity to compete while collaborating with other students.
- >Strengthens skills essential for success in debate teams and Scholars Bowl teams.
- >Introduces students to philosophy and the humanities in a way not taught in schools prior to college.

## Participants can learn:

- >To appreciate the different sides of controversial topics.
- >How to argue respectfully.
- >The difference between ethical and legal arguments.
- >That not all issues are black and white.
- >To consider ethical issues that apply to everyday life which they may have never thought about before.
- >To view everyday problems from the perspective of different people who are affected by them.



# event format

**Cases:** Each year the National High School Ethics Bowl (NHSEB) releases a series of cases that will be used in regional events such as the THSEB. These cases cover a wide-ranging array of ethical, political, and social issues. Teams have access to these cases in advance of the event, allowing them to study each one and develop how they might engage with the issues presented.

**Teams:** Each team consists of three to seven members who can work together in advance of the event to prepare their responses to the various cases. During the competition, each team is allowed to have up to five members competing in any given match. Team members for each match must be selected and seated prior to the announcement of which cases and questions are being used.

**Competition Format:** The THSEB consists of preliminary seeding rounds, followed by a championship round. In each round, teams will compete against each other by engaging in a discussion about a case drawn from the previously supplied pool. A moderator will read the case, and then pose a particular question or prompt related to that case. The teams then take turns responding to the case and commenting on each other's responses. Additionally, teams will be asked to respond to questions from the judges. Teams will be scored to determine who competes in the championship round, and the winning team will travel to the national bowl to compete against other regional champions.

**Judging:** During each round, the panel of judges will individually score each team's response in terms of the following criteria:

- **Clarity and Intelligibility**  
Regardless of whether you agree with the conclusion, did the team give a coherent argument in a clear and succinct manner?
- **Identification and Discussion of Central Ethical Dimensions**  
Did the team's presentation clearly identify and thoroughly discuss the central ethical dimensions of the case while avoiding irrelevancies?
- **Deliberative Thoughtfulness**  
Did the team's presentation indicate both awareness and thoughtful consideration of different viewpoints, including those that would loom large in the reasoning of individuals who disagree with the team's position?
- **Respectful Dialogue**  
Did the team's presentation engage the other team's response in a particularly productive discussion that can be seen as part of a mutual deliberation?

While aimed at promoting collaborative, respectful discussion, the THSEB is still a competitive event with monetary prizes awarded to winning teams with the intent to help subsidize participation costs.

## Interested in forming a team?

Visit the THSEB website  
[philosophy.utk.edu/ethics](http://philosophy.utk.edu/ethics)  
or call  
**865-974-3255**