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Natalya Grabavoy '13
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Ethics Bowl Team to Compete at Nationals

Dec. 4, 2012

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – In the group's second year on campus, the Illinois Wesleyan University Ethics Bowl Team has already achieved tremendous success. After succeeding past the regional qualifying tournament, the team will enter into the National Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl Tournament in San Antonio, Texas on February 28, 2013.

The team's coach and Illinois Wesleyan assistant professor of philosophy Emily Kelahan formed the team in the fall of 2011, with support from the Office of the Provost.

Assistant professor of philosophy Andrew Engen has since joined Kelahan as an assistant coach for the team, which includes: Geena Barry '15 (acting major from Elmhurst, Ill.), Jonathan Bates '14 (economics and political science double major from Champaign, Ill.), Eric Hyla '16 (undecided major from Lake Villa, Ill.), Jaret Kanarek '14 (economics and philosophy double major from Glenview, Ill.), Kent Larson '14 (mathematics and economics double major from Huntley, Ill.), William Lawrence III '13 (economics and philosophy double major from Great Falls, Va.), Anna Rossi '13 (philosophy and sociology double major from Elburn, Ill.) and Karen Silverman '16 (biology major from Skokie, Ill.).

Kelahan's decision to form the team was motivated by witnessing the success of an ethics bowl team during her graduate studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She describes the ethics bowl as an "intercollegiate activity in which students debate current ethical issues and that combines the excitement of a competitive tournament with applied ethics and ethical theory."

Though the ethics bowl is closely affiliated with philosophical studies, the IWU team draws students from all different majors, said Kelahan, involving students from a variety of majors and class years. She notes that this diversity contributes to the success of the team.

"Having a team comprised of such a unique set of people adds so many different opinions and viewpoints to our discussion," she said.

To qualify to compete nationally, the team must first successfully compete at the Central States Regional Ethics Bowl Tournament, this year hosted by Marian University in Indianapolis on Nov. 3.

In preparation for each tournament, the team receives 15 cases on various, current ethical issues, distributed by the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics (APPE). The team described these cases as "torn from the headlines," dealing with issues varying from animal testing to gay rights, racial justice, and taxation, to name a few. At the tournament, a handful of these cases will be selected for debate.

Along with meeting for regular weekly practices, the members said that they frequently meet independently, practicing for as much as an additional 8-10 hours per week. The members said they value the opportunity to build upon the academic skills they have developed in the classroom in an extra-curricular activity.



Ethics Bowl Team

Front Row, front to back, Karen Silverman '16, Jaret Kanarek '14, Anna Rossi '13, Advisor Emily Kelahan.

Second Row, Geena Barry '15, Kent Larson '14, Will Lawrence '13, Eric Hyla '16.

Not pictured: Jonathan Bates '14.

“Joining the team has really improved my ability to create in-depth arguments. I’ve learned to delve much deeper into whatever topic I am considering and consider all layers of importance rather than simply analyzing the surface,” said Barry.

The refined analytical skills these students have developed have also affected their views on politics and world issues, specifically in this year’s presidential election, several members said. According to Kelahan, what is most notable is the students’ willingness to consider seriously other points of view.

“When our country is so divided and intolerant of others’ points of view, it is refreshing to see how genuinely considerate these college students are of different points of view,” she said.

As the team prepares for Nationals, the members said they are confident to be competing after having gained a year of experience.

“We’ve now competed against universities of all sizes from around the country. We’re looking forward to representing IWU at Nationals, and we’re eager to win.”

Contact: Natalya Grabavoy, '13 (309) 556-3181, univcomm@iwu.edu