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# Vogel '68 Discusses Journalism Credibility with Ethics Bowl Team

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— The best defense against so-called fake news and Gonzo journalism is an educated media consumer, according to longtime journalist and Illinois Wesleyan alum Steve Vogel '68.

Vogel, who spent 22 years in the news department at WJBC Radio followed by 19 years in communications at State Farm, returned to his alma mater to speak with members of the [Ethics Bowl](#) about the credibility of journalism in today's society during a special practice session last month.

Members of the Ethics Bowl team discuss current national and global ethical dilemmas and compete in tournaments against other universities. They most recently participated in the Upper Midwest Regional Ethics Bowl and are preparing for the National Bioethics Bowl this spring.

Associate Professor of Philosophy and Ethics Bowl Coach Emily Kelahan was prompted to invite Vogel – the first guest to analyze an ethical issue with students – after noticing an increase in Ethics Bowl cases focused on journalism credibility.

"It became obvious to me that there is a huge generational divide in our understanding of journalism," Kelahan said. "Because of the quantity of journalism cases I had, I thought students could really get a lot of value out of having a guest speaker come and talk about this."

Kelahan said she hopes to continue bringing in speakers because it is important for students to hear the opinions of professionals working in various fields.

"We're very fortunate that our institution is located in a place where we have a lot of really talented professionals to draw upon. That's not true of every liberal arts college location," Kelahan said, noting that she plans to invite professionals to also discuss medical, agricultural and environmental ethics.

Kayley Rettberg '20, a member of the Ethics Bowl, agreed.

"I always think it's really important to hear what people who are in the profession think about the current state of different professions," said Rettberg, a political science major and economics minor. "I think that can really help us build our case, because we see their perspective."



Steve Vogel '68 spoke with members of the Ethics Bowl about the credibility of journalism in today's society.



Rettberg said that after seeing the current state of journalism from Vogel's perspective, she realized there are many issues concerning credibility, especially with the rise of Gonzo journalism (a style of reporting that lacks objectivity and often features the reporter as part of the story via first-person narrative).

"It's the idea that basically anybody with a phone and a blog can be a journalist," Rettberg said. "In my opinion, journalism is supposed to be objective. Gonzo journalism is the opposite."

Vogel said issues like Gonzo journalism and questions of "whether or not the journalist has a duty to not become part of a story" leads to debates concerning the idea of accreditation.

Should a professional organization offer accreditation to journalists who agree to adhere to a specific code of ethics?

"I'm certainly not suggesting you'd need accreditation to be a journalist," Vogel said. "But the idea of some non-government organization accrediting journalists might be an idea worth exploring as we search for ways to help citizens identify credible news organizations and journalists in this new world of information distribution."

Ultimately, Vogel said it would be the job of media consumers to either accept or reject accreditation when determining whether or not they should believe a news report. The judgment call could be likened to evaluating the value of a weather report given by a certified meteorologist versus a weather forecaster.

Throughout Vogel's 40-plus year media career – which included a time when only ABC, CBS and NBC delivered television news – he said it became more challenging than ever before to consume accurate, unbiased news in a world of 24-hour cable news channels, blogs and social media.

"I really do worry about the nature of journalism today and how people are prone to seek out information that tends to verify their belief," Vogel said. "In a fast-changing world, I think that's dangerous and unfortunate."

According to Vogel, the best method to combat biased, unethical journalism may be grounded in a liberal arts education, which encourages students to consider a variety of views and opinions.

"I think a liberal arts college encourages people to take a wide view of things, and to be inviting of opposing views. In the broader world, if we can figure out a way to convince people that they're better served by not just sticking to one TV channel, we'd be better off for sure."