

The Canadian Ethics Bowl

Why, What, Where, and What's Next?

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November 14, 2019



United States

USA 1993: EB starts as an intercollegiate competition
Now involves hundreds of teams
Many topical variants: business ethics, bioethics, engineering ethics, etc.
2012: High School version launched by UNC Chapel Hill
Now involves 4000+ students from 500 teams in 28 states.

Canada

Winnipeg 2015: launch of the Canadian High School Ethics Bowl (CHSEB)
Now involves more than 20 teams in English and French
2019: SFU Regional brings the Ethics Bowl to BC; first Canadian National at CMHR in Winnipeg
2020: Regionals to be held in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario

The 2019 Ethics Bowl

Five teams took part in the first BC Regional at SFU:

- Ideal Mini School
- Prince of Wales
- Princess Margaret
- Sands
- Van Tech

This year, we expect between 10 and 20 teams.

Check out the [Event Report](#) for more details!
Some photos are on the next slides...



Round 1: Sands vs Princess Margaret



Round 1: Ideal Mini vs Van Tech



Van Tech preparing for the next round, guided by their coach

What is an Ethics Bowl?
How the Ethics Bowl competition works
The Ethics Bowl in practice

A bit of history...
The 2019 BC Ethics Bowl
The Ethics Bowl vs traditional debate competitions



Pizza lunch!



Gathering of two BC finalists (Sands & Ideal)
at the National in Winnipeg

The Ethics Bowl is an **alternative to traditional debates**.

Discussion question:

What are the **benefits** and **shortcomings** of traditional debates?
See Ellis & Hovagimian (2019), "Are School Debate Competitions bad for our political discourse?", *New York Times*.



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- Develops oratory skills
- Develops self-confidence
- No choice of position
- Develops persuasion skills



- Purely adversarial
- May lead to overconfidence
- Strengthens biases reasoning
- Limited critical thinking

etc.

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An Ethics Bowl is both a **collaborative and competitive event**, where teams of students **analyze and discuss ethical dilemmas**.

They imagine, criticize, and compare bold strategies, and may even **amend** their original positions when faced with convincing arguments. Students have opportunities to **pose and respond to probing questions**, which results in a deepening awareness of the stakes and principles that animate the discussion.



- The CHSEB website: www.ethicsbowl.ca
- The SFU Ethics Bowl page:
<https://www.sfu.ca/philosophy/bcethicsbowl.html>

Check out this 2m45s video introduction:
<https://vimeo.com/269011774>

Some of the main differences

Ethics Bowl	Traditional debate
<p>Collaborative dimension Starts with a question Solution-driven argumentation Appreciates complexity of issues Based on months-long inquiries</p> <p>Fair-minded deliberation Amenable to rational persuasion Opens new perspectives Rewards active listening & positive attitudes</p>	<p>Purely oppositional Starts with a conclusion Partisan argumentation Oversimplification of issues Rhetorical strategy developed in minutes</p> <p>Defend a preconception at all cost Rhetorics trumps critical thinking Leads to entrenched views Doesn't penalize negative attitudes</p>

An example of how Ethics Bowl participants should interact with each other, as well as with the judges and moderator:

Goodman, *Straight A's for Facilitating Discussions about Diversity and Social Justice*

As a summary, the straight As are the following:

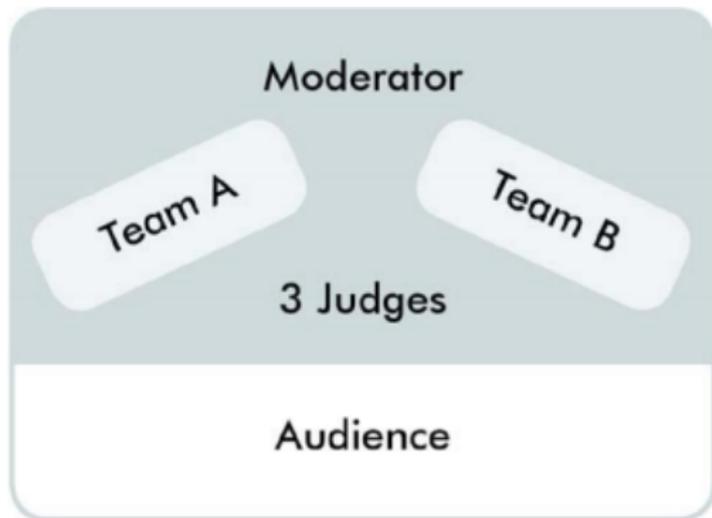
- **A**ffirm and **a**ppreciate people's comments and questions.
- **A**cknowledge what people are saying.
- **A**sk questions to better understand individuals' behaviours and perspectives to help them reflect on their views.
- **A**dd more information, historical/social/political context, or alternative explanations.
- **A**ssess individual and group dynamics and your own responses and decide how to **a**ddress it.

Let's now turn to the **concrete details** of how Ethics Bowls work.

Composition of teams:

- Each team is composed of **3 to 5 students**, with up to **2 alternates** (for a total of 7), from Grades 9 to 12.
- If a team has alternates, changes can be made in the competition, but not during a round.
- **Only one team per school** is allowed to participate in the Regional.
Mini-tournaments or other activities can be used within a school to determine the members of the participating team.
- Only teams from **public schools** are allowed to participate.

The setup of the room for a round is as follows:



Observe that teams are facing the judges and audience, instead of each other, to make it less confrontational.

Each round will follow this procedure:

- 1 The moderator flips a coin. The winning team is asked whether they want to lead or pass on the first case (if they pass, they will lead on the second case in that round). Following this decision, the moderator asks the question for the case.
- 2 The leading team has 2 minutes to confer, and 5 minutes to present their position.
- 3 The responding team has 1 minute to confer, and 3 minutes to respond and ask questions to the leading team.
- 4 The leading team has 1 minute to confer, and 3 minutes to respond.
- 5 Judges have 2 minutes to confer, and 10 minutes to ask questions (this includes the time for answers).
- 6 Judges score both teams, and write feedback for both teams.
- 7 The leading team and responding team change roles, and the same procedure is followed for the second case of the round.
- 8 In the BC Ethics Bowl, the winning team is announced (here, different organizers have different practices).

Some other rules (there are more, check out the 8-page guide *How to Organize and Ethics Bowl*).

- No prepared written notes are allowed.
- No downloading device is allowed.
- Team coaches are not allowed to interact with the team during a round.
- During a round, students can exchange written notes but must remain silent, unless it's their time to confer.
- Students must introduce themselves at the beginning of the round.
- Winners of a round are determined by the number of judges voting for a team.

Here is a sample case used a few years ago:

Sample
Case 1

Freedom of Speech or Protection against Hate Speech?

In the past few years, many radical speakers on both the far left and the far right have been prevented from speaking on university campuses due to protests from opposing viewpoints. For example, Ann Coulter (author of *In Trump We Trust*) was initially banned from speaking at University of California, Berkeley, which was ironically the stronghold of the Free Speech Movement that took place in the 1960s. The reason for the ban was stated as "active security threats," although many far-right supporters of Ms. Coulter suggest it was an infringement of her right to free speech (BBC News). Protesters often cite hate speech as their rationale for preventing people who speak hateful rhetoric from entering their campus. This was the case for students at Middlebury College who peacefully protested social scientist Charles Murray by standing up during his speech with signs reading: "Your message is hatred, we cannot tolerate it" (CBC). Should campuses be a haven for free speech regardless of what is said? Or are campuses meant to be a haven for students who feel threatened by speakers' hateful speech? What are we losing if we do not allow dissenting voices to meet?

References

- BBC. "Berkeley reverses decision to ban Ann Coulter from speaking." *BBC News* 22 Apr. 2017. www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-39657088. (18 Sept. 2017).
- CBC. "Why a campus protest has the right and left calling for more civilized discourse." *The Current*. 20 Mar. 2017. www.cbc.ca/radio/thecurrent/the-current-for-march-20-2017-1.4032269/why-a-campus-protest-has-the-right-and-left-calling-for-more-civilized-discourse-1.4032535 (18 Sept. 2017).

Notice that the **cases are known ahead of time**, but the specific **questions** are not.

On the day of the event, students could be asked this question for the case we've looked at:

After being declined accreditation for their representatives to cover the federal election debate, the right-wing outlet Rebel Media turned to the courts, which granted them access. Some federal party leaders attempted to shut down questions from this organization, and one leader simply declined to answer. Should federal party leaders be excused for shutting down questions from media outlets they consider objectionable? If so, in what circumstances?

A typical competition has **5 rounds**.

Each round addresses 2 cases, for a total of **10 cases**.

Participants will know which case will be discussed in each round.

This can be used to decide who participates in that round, and who sits out as alternates.

In a team of 7 students, not everybody needs to study every case.

The cases are selected and vetted by the National organization.

Check out **the cases for this year's Regional** at the end of the separate document.

Now, let's turn to the **criteria of evaluation**.

As opposed to traditional debates, we want participants to display skills in the following areas:

- mutual respect
- open-mindedness
- meaningful dialogue
- critical conversation
- active listening
- flexibility, adaptability

Note that those have to do with **positive attitudes associated with critical thinking**.

If a team adopts a **brash attitude** as is common in traditional debates, they will be **penalized** for it.

Check out the document [Rubric & Scoresheets](#) for the details.

Below, we discuss the **main questions that the judges will ask themselves** in assigning scores to

- Team A (the lead team)
- Team B (the responding team)

Does Team A (as lead team)

- focus on what is ethically important about the case and related issues?
- address the complexities of the issue?
- articulate why the issue is polarizing? why it may be difficult to find agreement?
- identify alternate perspectives that animate the issue?
- demonstrate flexibility and adaptability in their thinking?
- weigh possibilities and take a stance on the issue(s)?
- use evidence and research to support their position?
- demonstrate active listening?
- after hearing ideas raised by Team B, just reiterate their original position, or synthesize new ideas to reach clarity and deep understanding?
- demonstrate respect for Team B and the judges?
- answer the question posed by the moderator?

Does Team B (as responding team)

- demonstrate active listening?
- show respect for Team A? understand Team A's position, or ask for clarification?
- acknowledge perspectives raised by Team A, which they support?
- use evidence and research to support their position?
- challenge Team A's assumptions? correct factual errors or misperceptions?
- simply agree with, or argue with Team A? or, present new perspectives to help take the dialogue to a deeper level?
- simply restate what they understood Team A to mean? or, ask probing questions that help Team A expand their thinking?
- help Team A strengthen or change their position?

What about this year's regional?

Check out the [flyer](#) for this year's Regional.

**It will be held in late February, 2020,
at SFU, Burnaby Campus.**

An [invitation](#) to participate and a [registration form](#) is provided.

For more information on the event,
contact Nic Fillion at nfillion@sfu.ca.

There is a [mailing list](#) for the event to get regular updates.

In BC, in light of the new curriculum, there is an additional reason to be involved in the Ethics Bowl:

It is the perfect way to **develop each of the six core competencies in an integrated manner.**

In the first issue of the BCSSTA's journal *Detours* (detoursjournal.org), the following paper explains the value of the Ethics Bowl for the new BC curriculum:

Fillion, "Developing core competencies with the Ethics Bowl: Perspectives from British Columbia," *Detours: Social Science Education Research Journal*.

Core Competencies and the Ethics Bowl

C

Communication

1. Connect and engage with others
2. Acquire, interpret, and present information
3. Collaborate to plan, carry out, and review constructions and activities
4. Explain/recount and reflect on experiences and accomplishments

- Active listening
- Critical conversation
- Developing oratory skills

T

Creative Thinking

1. Novelty and value
2. Generating ideas
3. Developing ideas

- Intellectual improvisation
- Adaptability & flexibility
- Self-directed inquiry

T

Critical Thinking

1. Analyze and critique
2. Question and investigate
3. Develop and design

- Using and evaluating evidence
- Challenging assumptions
- Risk assessment

PS

Positive Personal & Cultural Identity

1. Relationship and cultural contexts
2. Personal values and choice
3. Personal strengths and abilities

- Political awareness
- Cultural sensitivity
- Appreciating complexity

PS

Personal Awareness & Responsibility

1. Self-determination
2. Self-regulation
3. Well-being

- Ethical reasoning
- Evaluating consequences of actions
- Moral growth

PS

Social Responsibility

1. Contributing to community and caring for the environment
2. Solving problems in peaceful ways
3. Valuing diversity
4. Building Relationships

- Mutual respect
- Open-mindedness
- Developing considerate attitudes

The Ethics Bowl style of debate **can be used more broadly in the classroom**, not just to discuss ethical issues.

We use the phrase **collaborative learning challenge (CLC)** to more broadly describe this activity.

This activity allows students to engage in **structured self-directed inquiry** focused on exerting **critical thinking skills** in a **collaborative** way.

It can be used in **most Social Studies** courses.

Let's **simulate a round** to see how it goes!

- Let's pick two teams of three, and two judges (otherwise it'll take too much time!)
- We'll address the question mentioned above for the free speech/hate speech case:

After being declined accreditation for their representatives to cover the federal election debate, the right-wing outlet Rebel Media turned to the courts, which granted them access. Some federal party leaders attempted to shut down questions from this organization, and one leader simply declined to answer. Should federal party leaders be excused for shutting down questions from media outlets they consider objectionable? If so, in what circumstances?



Feedback and discussion

**Thank you
for taking part in this workshop!**