

EXAMINING ETHICS

TRANSCRIPT – SPECIAL: THE FUTURE OF THE ETHICS BOWL
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AR: I'm Alex Richardson, and this is Examining Ethics, a show designed to bring insights from the cutting edge of moral philosophy and ethics education to the rest of us. For the better part of the last thirty years, the ethics bowl competitive activity has been kind of a fixture in the world of ethics education ever since its founding at the collegiate level in 1993 and its founding at the high school level in 2012. My guests today are all leaders within the ethics bowl community. They've done perhaps more than many others to make sure that the activity is large diverse increasingly inclusive and ultimately successful. I'm very excited to talk to them about the nature and future of this extremely valuable extracurricular activity.

Rachel Robinson Greene, Michael Jordan, Leo Kirby, welcome to the show.

RRG: Thanks for having us.

MJ: Yeah. Thank you very much. Glad to be here.

LK: Yeah. This is a great opportunity. Thanks, Alex.

AR: I'd like to start by having you each give a brief introduction by telling listeners how and when you got involved with the ethics bowl activity. I know at least one of you has run the full cycle from competitor to leader. So I'm interested to hear a little bit about how you got into this and how and why you stayed involved in this community.

RRG: Sure. I started as an undergraduate student participant in the ethics bowl, and it was probably the most meaningful experience of my college career. And it really informed who it became and why I went into philosophy because I really enjoyed crafting arguments and the process of engaged listening and responding to reasons and things like that. And so I went off to graduate school, but stayed involved with the ethics bowl the whole time.

I've been a coach for a really long time, and I got involved at the national level in various capacities. I was a case writer. I was the diversity chair, diversity committee chair. I'm now the rules committee chair, and I've I I'm also the chair elect of IEB, so that after Michael Jordan finishes his term, I'll, take over. So, it's been a very impactful experience for me, and I believe in it strongly and the values that it imparts to students.

MJ: Actually, I'll just, like, add on a little bit really quickly to

Rachel. So I actually started being involved in the ethics bowl in around 2003, and I actually knew Rachel as a student because they would oftentimes come to the California region and absolutely, destroy all of the California teams. And so Rachel was a legend as a student. I actually started with the ethics bowl. Early in my career, I was working for a very small university called the National Hispanic University. It was only about 700 students. It was a very small, liberal arts, college. And I had a handful of students who were very interested in having a philosophy club. And so while I was trying to organize this philosophy club, I remembered about the ethics bowl that I had actually heard about in the mid nineties. So the two people in California that really brought the ethics bowl into play were doctor Becky White from Chico State as well as doctor Rita Manning from San Jose State. Both of them were mentor professors with me. And so I remember convincing these kids like, hey. There's this thing called the ethics bowl, and I really had no idea what I was getting them into. And I called Bob Ladenson. This is before we had regionals, and there was an opening spot. So my first team in 2003 had four weeks to prepare, and we jumped in. And since then, I've been, very, very much part of the ethics bowl. I was a California regional, representative for about fifteen years. I was the head of the rules committee. I've been lucky enough to not only have coached college teams, throughout that entire time, but I've also coached middle school teams for the last five years. I've also coached high school teams. So I am a very big believer in the pedagogical value of the ethics bowl. And, again, it's been almost little over twenty three years that I've been part of this, and I definitely look forward to being part of it for the rest of my career. I love the ethics bowl, and I think it is a wonderful opportunity for students. And I think that that as Rachel pointed out, a lot of the students that we have, it literally is one of the best things that they do in college. And I've heard that same sentiment many, many, many times over the years. So I I like I said, I I've now I'm the chair of the IAB, and so I've kind of you know, from 02/2003 to 02/2025, it's been a major part of my career.

LK: So compared to the three of you, I'm fairly new to the ethics bowl space. This is my first year as the director of the National High School Ethics Bowl. And, of course, that's the high school version of the ethics bowl program. And we're housed out of the Parr Center for Ethics, which is here at UNC Chapel Hill in North Carolina. And prior to me being, professionally involved with the NHS EB, I was a volunteer for many years. I got started probably in 2020 when I was an adult learner at UNC, and I had the opportunity to volunteer through the par center with the program. At that time, Alex was the director, and working with him was absolutely a fantastic experience. And pretty much immediately I saw how powerful of an educational tool, Ethics Bowl could be and I was blown away by the fantastic community of students that it attracts. They were all just so rigorous and intelligent and the conversations that they were having were unlike anything that I had experienced in any other student program. So now

that I get to do this as my job I just feel so lucky to be able to help facilitate those same conversations that really blew me away when I was a volunteer. And I'm excited to see how the program develops and where we're gonna take it.

AR: I don't wanna dig up too much ground that's already been tilled here, but for our listeners who may be less familiar with the activity and maybe in just a few sentences each, What's the ethics bowl good for? Why should we be interested in it?

LK: Yeah. Sure. So, I mean, ethics bowl, I think, at its core is really just a pedagogical tool. It's designed to help young people, like, learn the required skills to talk about, like, really incredibly challenging topics, in ways that are constructive. So for anyone who hasn't seen it, every match centers on different case studies that pose really challenging questions about how we ought to live our lives, and having opinions about these cases or or really just these types of, moral questions in general isn't something that's, like, reserved for philosophers by any means. Morality is universal. Everyone has opinions, and there's always gonna be disagreements about how we ought to act. So a program like this, I think, is really important because not only are the students learning philosophically how to reason through, their actual views, but they're also learning how to engage in conversations with people who won't necessarily agree with them, in a way that's constructive. Right? It's not just an argument. You're not trying to win. So socially and politically, things are really fractured right now, and it feels like deliberative discourse where parties are able to listen seems like a fantasy, kind of. But watching these students have constructive conversations, in an effective way, it gives me a lot of hope. So that's why I think it matters.

MJ: Yeah. And I actually agree with everything that Leo just said as well. And I'm a teacher at heart. I've been I've been teaching at the university level for twenty five years, and truly what my main focus is. And I think that the ethics bowl from again, kind of to piggyback on Leo is really from a pedagogical perspective. I haven't really found an activity that's better in terms of helping to foster critical thinking, to help foster, research skills, to help foster public speaking skills, and this idea of of civil discourse. I think one of the things that that I really focus on a lot with my ethics bowl teams is actually the art of listening. And so I agree. I think that that one of the things that ethics bowl really is about is about listening to what the other team is actually arguing and saying. And I would agree, like, you know, in that kind of our our political context right now, there's not a lot of listening going on. And I think it's such a valuable skill in order to be able to really civilly engage with, you know, opposing ideas, that are very difficult to grapple with. So every time I have new students come in, I always tell them, look, a big portion of this is learning how to listen and then how to respond,

right, in a manner that actually pushes the conversation forward and doesn't necessarily shut the conversation down. I think so often, you know, we hear, especially in public discourse, is the conversations being shut down. And that's really, I think, one of the beauties of the ethics bowl.

RRG: I would lead with what both Leo and Michael said, so I I won't, repeat what they've said. But I think those are kind of the most important things about the ethics bowl. I found that these case studies, are much more compelling ways for students to engage with ethics education. So you can teach them theory. You can have them read Kant or whatever, and that's wonderful. We should do that. But the students really come to life when you have them project themselves into these absent scenarios and think about circumstances that they're not in. Consider stakeholders that they may not have ever considered before. I I teach at Utah State, and the demographic is, you know, overwhelmingly white, in Utah, overwhelmingly Mormon. Right? There are a lot of circumstances that they haven't encountered, and the ethics bowl gives them this opportunity to, think about situations that they probably never be in. It it helps them to consider alternative points of view and develop the appropriate, I I would say, the apt moral emotions like empathy and compassion in in situations that they may not have thought those those, emotions were apt until they considered it. I also think I'll add to the, on top of the pedagogical value of all of this, it's also a great social activity. So my students work together closely to craft these arguments. They get nervous together. They get excited together. They win and they lose together, and they become such good friends. I know I'm still friends with some of my the my ethics team members from when I was a student. So I also think it's an it it's unparalleled in its potential to create fantastic mentoring relationships between faculty and students. So I'm I'm in a position to really get to know my students, and I'm in a position to write them good letters of recommendation because I I know well what their strengths are. So, yes, it's wonderful. From a a teaching point of view, I'm able to to really work with these students in such a hands on way that's a lot different from really the way that I'm able to deal with a classroom full of, let's say, 40 people, you know, or 50 people or 60 people.

MJ: Right? And so with that, I do think that the really long term relationships develop. Right? I still have students from my early two thousands teams, right, that contact me on a regular basis. In fact, you know, one of the main people that helped me, you know, organize this last year was a a woman named Tasneem who was one of my very first ethics bowlers. Right? And so she's still part of it. And so I love the fact that so many of my, you know, my former, teams are still really, really, really good friends. And I and I think those social bonds are really quite amazing. And I haven't seen a lot of other activities, like, at the in at at the collegiate level that really foster that type of of, you know, like, connectedness that that we see

with a lot of the ethics bowlers. And I get Christmas cards. I get, you know, emails from students, you know, from the last, like, twenty years that are just like, you know, professor Jordan, how are you? I miss you. Not only that, but as Rachel would also probably agree with, we have so many of them that come back and still wanna participate in some way, shape, or form. Right? And so from that, as a teacher, I love that.

RRG: Right? It really makes me think that, like, we're doing something worthwhile in that in, you know, in this environment. Every time it's time to get ready to go to the ethics school, I just think, yes. Time to see my favorite people in the world from all different generations of participating.

LK: Rachel mentioned this. I just wanna say it again because it's so true. But the other thing about ethics bowl that makes it really valuable is it's fun. Even beyond any of the social stuff, it's just a lot of fun. And, I I I find that at least at the high school level, I'm sure that at the college level too, the students learn a lot without realizing that they're doing it, because they're having a good time.

MJ: You know, and I'm actually really glad that that you said that. Teaching or coaching the last five years for my local high school team as well, it's amazing those students at the end are like, wow. We learned so much. We didn't realize it. And I love that reaction. Like, to me, it was like, okay. We just won. Like, that's amazing. Right? And so, yeah, I I really love that comment. I think that's so very, very, very true.

AR: So I wanna zoom in on this sort of pedagogical value. So what do you think is educationally distinctive about ethics bowl in comparison to other kinds of activities, either in the classroom, say, the kinds of things that might happen in philosophy courses, or outside the classroom, So a comparison to something like speech and debate or model UN.

RRG: I coached both mock trial and moot court for six years, and no shade on those programs, but it's gonna be hard not to cast shade on those programs as I'm about to say what I'm gonna say. There the climate is very aggressive in those activities. And maybe for good reason. I mean, maybe you learn better in that kind of a climate for those kinds of skills. But the ethics pool, I think, is very collaborative, and the students are interested in building one another up for the most part if you've coached them right. I think that when students have other attitudes, it's a coaching issue. And so they they're excited to have conversations with one another. They're excited to see the points of disagreement and to learn to respond to those in the kinds of ways we hope they'll respond, with grace and with engaged listening and, and and their reasons responsive, right,

rather than getting frustrated or upset.

MJ: I can jump in on that that question a little bit as well? I would agree. I think that that I use so so I teach mostly applied ethics. And I think that, obviously I mean, ethics bowl is, like, the ultimate of, you know, applied ethics activities. And one of the things that I really find the differences is so, like, in you know, let's say I'm teaching an applied ethics class, and it's great, and we have really good conversations in class. But I'm I I know that when those students leave, that conversation has probably ended. Right? Because they're going on to other classes, and they're going on to other things, and, you know, whatever social things that they're doing. I think one of the differences that I find with my ethics bowl teams is the conversation does not end. The conversation continues. Right? And so my favorite teams have always been those ones that become friends, and they talk about this over beers. They talk about it over, you know you know, Saturday evening. You know, they talk about it, you know, with each other over text messages. And so they get so involved, like, with the cases and the research and the arguments, right, that that they become obsessed. And I always tell my students, like, I I guarantee you, you're if you love this, you're gonna work on this more than you probably are some of your classes just because you want you're gonna want to. And I love to actually see that. Right? And I still have students that will contact me after years after graduating and be like, this is an ethics bowl case. And so, you know, get information to, like, you know you know, Michael, this is, like, this is a great case. I think you guys should consider this. And so I love that they're also engaged in the world around them as well, and they're thinking about these different really difficult ethical, very complex ethical dilemmas that we see in the real world. And that's why I love the cases because they are real world cases, and they do require students to really wrestle with and deal with, you know, real life. We all make ethical decisions. Like, probably the ethics is where the rubber hits the road. You know, we can talk about ethical theory all day long, but until we're really utilizing it in a real practical sense, right, I think that's really where it gives it its its value.

LK: Yeah. And, I mean, unlike, something like speech and debate or model UN and this is, I think, part of why the conversation continues because there's no assigned views and ethics bowl. Right? And speech and debate, maybe you're given the thing you have to defend and model you when you're representing the interests of a country, that you, in theory, should align with. But in ethics bowl, the viewpoints that you bring to the table are, are your own. And I think that that not only makes it more interesting to talk about in and out of those competition spaces, but I think also improves the at least, again, for high schoolers, improves their ability to engage with those same topics when they encounter them in the real world because they've engaged with them already in this sort of rigorous way as they're

preparing for competition. But something about, like, the responsible use of social media, there's almost they're guaranteed to run into someone at some point who's going to talk to them about that. And they've already taken the time to think about how they actually feel, and I think it's really valuable.

AR: So it's 2025. COVID is mostly in the rearview mirror for now. The activity seems to be thriving at all of its levels. The intercollegiate ethics bowl is larger than ever and still growing at a pretty steady clip, and it's getting really hard to find places in The United States that the National High School Ethics Bowl isn't. Spin off programming is being tested pretty often with various rates of success among middle school students and adults in professional, correctional, and even retirement community contexts. So given all these successes and kind of distinctions, what do you think are the biggest challenges that the activity and its community face?

MJ: So I can jump in and really talk about the college level ethics bowl. Yeah. As you pointed out, Alex, we are growing, and there is an immense amount of interest across the country. Not only that, but also now we're starting to see internationally. I think that one of the biggest challenges that we face or and I think that I faced really trying to organize the bowl this last year is really overall capacity. We incorporated a new region. So right now, we have 13 regions across the country, and that translates to this year, we had a 67 universities that fielded about 215 teams. So with that said, said, literally, that requires thousands of volunteers in order to make the ethics bowl competitions work. And so when one of the biggest challenges I think that that especially for the college level that we're that that we are facing and that we're gonna continue to face is how do we meet what that that that need is, and and how do we make sure that we have the capacity? As we all know, everybody in this room has organized events, and it's really hard to find, you know, judges and moderators that are willing to, you know, to volunteer that time. That there's consistency that we need to think about in terms of judging across the board, and moderating. So from that perspective, that's really from a national organizer perspective. That's really what I think about a lot is how do we increase the capacity, because I do want us to grow. I would like there to be a region in every state, and try to incorporate as many colleges and universities as we can. One of the beautiful things about the ethics bowl is we have two year schools. We have private schools. We have state schools. We have universities. We have private schools. And because we have so much interest, I would I we really need to figure out a way to be able to provide that, but it's tricky. It's very tricky, because of the fact that we are a volunteer organization. You know, we're all volunteering here, especially at the college level. So it's really about, you know, also, you know, trying to find that time where we can really spend all the time, like, building the ethics pool, but also still maintaining what our real professional jobs are at the same time. Right? And so

there's those types of issues. So I was really when I took over, the chair role from from the previous chair, John Garcia, I don't know if I was quite prepared for, you know, the the the enormity of of of how what the bowl has become, and so many different moving pieces. So so part of what what I'm really thinking about as we move forward is really capacity building, is is how do we incorporate more schools, how do we incorporate more judges, how do we incorporate more moderators, How do we consistently, you know, make it equitable across the board, right, as much as we possibly can? And so that's really kind of where my focus is at.

RRG: I'll chime in here because I my concerns are also typically related to the intercollegiate level. I agree with everything Michael just said, and I would add cost of travel. So if there are any funders out there that are, like, listening to this... It's increasingly the case that traveling to the national competition costs 7-10 thousand dollars depending on how many people you're bringing, and it used to be, less than half of that. And so that that's sort of the first piece, which gives rise to some equity issues. So there are some schools that are just gonna be much better equipped not only to travel to the national competition, but also to do things like compete as a non qualifier at various regions across the country. And I think we have come up with ways to deal with that because, of course, the availability of Zoom competitions, creates a possibility for invitationals and scrimmages. I know that my team did some scrimmaging online in the regionals during the regional season, and it really it really helped them. So I think in addition to costs, there are other kinds of equity issues. I I I think it would be great if we could find ways to make the bowl more diverse and find ways to do things like reaching out to HBCUs and and and things like that, making sure that the the cases themselves, are a diverse set of cases that represent a wide range of perspectives. In particular, I'd really like to see our cases be even more international because I'd like to see us maybe have an international bowl at some point. And we tend to our cases tend to focus pretty aggressively on issues that are occurring in The United States. And then I think, when it comes to bowls that are occurring that are not the intercollegiate bowl and not the high school bowl, like bowls in prisons and so forth, that's I think that it's just such a wonderful pedagogical tool. I've done some ethics bowls in prisons here in Utah. And again, there are equity issues. There are problems with, for example, state legislature legislatures recognizing value of the humanities and the value of ethics education in particular for incarcerated students. And so I I it would be great to continue to make programming and promotional materials that can really highlight why this is important for everyone and why it's a useful pedagogical tool for many populations.

LK: Yeah. I mean, I'll just quickly talk about high school level. But to be honest, there's not a whole lot to add. I think the issues that we face are very similar. Definitely, the travel cost thing is

challenging. And we don't do as good of a job as maybe we should about having online spaces for students to compete, and that's something that we're committed to hopefully resolving in the next few years. Though when it is a volunteer program, it's hard to coordinate something like an online space, for something like a scrimmage. Right? That's been our experience at least. So if we can find ways to reduce volunteer labor on, on scrimmage matches and things like that, then I think that it'll make it a lot easier for us to establish those. But, certainly, online competition spaces will help. In terms of access, the thing that I think that we come up against more than anything is, like, ESL students having a hard time not preparing for the events. Right? They are all coming just as prepared. But then in terms of how they are, like, traditionally, how successful they are, I think that it's a little bit demoralizing when you have a timed thing that you have to express a viewpoint in, and it takes you a little bit longer to find the right words. It makes it a lot harder. So I think it'd be cool for us to establish, an ESL bowl. That's something that we're gonna work on. And, but beyond that, I think there's, like, a cultural and I'm curious, actually, to hear if this is something that you at the collegiate level as well. But there's a little bit of a cultural barrier at the NHSEB where we've heard from some students who come from a more conservative background that, when they're in competition, even though the the space that we're trying to cultivate is one where people of different backgrounds and different viewpoints are all heard equally, there has been feedback that makes it seem as though the more conservative students are are finding that they're they're they're just not being heard as as well as they would like. And addressing that's a challenge. I mean, some of that does have to do with just where regionals are located. Some of our regions have volunteers that are, on average, far more left, than others. And so finding a way to balance that is hard and maybe not possible, but something to work on. But I I do wonder if it's just a a high school problem.

RRG: Maybe one way of dealing with that too, I it could be in organizing, making sure that you have judges from a wide range of backgrounds, community members, and so forth that, you know, you you're not just gonna expect they're gonna have a particular viewpoint.

LK: Definitely. Yeah. We certainly don't want exclusively philosophy professors or you know, we want people from all professional backgrounds. But, again, it's as Michael was saying, when you're relying on volunteers for your events, there comes a point where you only have whoever has volunteered. And that means that you don't always get to pick.

AR: So we've seen and everyone in this room has sort of contributed to experimentation with doing ethics bowl online and on screens. Each of the organizations that's been represented here has undertaken a kind of digital transformation with some successes, some backslides, and

plenty of instances of, "Hey. I can't hear you. You're muted." So given how the early years of this kind of digital transformation have gone, how do you think ethics bowl should function in an increasingly digital world?

MJ: I should take a stab at that. I think that one of the things that's been really great about, the online, version of the ethics pool, is that it I think that that it has enabled, more participation, I think, specifically in relation to the overall cost. Right? So one of the reasons why we have the online pool is for those teams that either are you know, can't get into a region because the region's already too full or because of cost issues because they just don't have have the funding to be able to do that. Right? And as Rachel pointed out, like, we have a huge, you know, variety in terms of of, you know, those schools that actually have that funding and and and those schools that don't have their funding. The other thing that I think is really interesting about the online the online, availability of the ethics bowl is to really start to increase as as was pointed out for scrimmages. I know that that, like, San Jose State, for example, where I teach, we scrimmage all the time. So we scrimmage all kinds of other teams in California as well as Utah, which has been, you know, wonderful. So that affords, like, that type of process. I also think that it's really gonna be good to start to open us up internationally. Like, to give you an example, the year before last, we had a team from Guam, right, that participated in, the the one of the the the first one of the first online regionals. We also have a few teams from The UK that have reached out, a few teams from Australia that have reached out. They're really interested in wanting to participate in this as well. And, really, the online version is, like, the way that we can do that. I will take a step back, though, and say that I do think that there's a qualitative difference between, doing the ethics bowl in person versus doing it online. And I know that a lot of my students really prefer the in person, feeling and excitement of, you know, actually sitting in front of that other team, you know, within that room with the three judges, you know, and the moderator. And it does seem to be a different type of experience. But I do think for a lot of schools, it might really behoove us to really think about increasing the online presence. There for example, there's a lot of, like like, you know, schools from, you know, Hawaii or Alaska, Montana, Wyoming, that, you know, have a hard time traveling, you know, long distance to where some of those closer regions are. And I do think that the online version of the ethics bowl is a good alternative to those. I do think that, you know, the early days, I was on the rules committee when we actually established kind of the process and the rules for the online, ethics pool, especially during during the COVID years. And I think we've learned a lot from that time in terms of mistakes that we made and ways to, you know, to really make the infrastructure much better. And so I think, like, you know, and so I think, like, you know, looking at that compared to, like, Alex, what you did in your, you know, online regional this year, I

think is definitely an elevated step up in terms of giving the students a really rich experience, with that. But it's tricky though because, you know, there's Internet connectivity issues. Right? And, you know, there's delayed sometimes, and sometimes teams get knocked off. Right? Then they gotta come back. And so it does change really kind of the overall dynamic of the event. And, you know, then there's questions about whether or not we want students in separate rooms or altogether, what kind of tech they're using. Right? Some schools don't have the same level of tech that they're using, you know, that maybe other schools do. And so, you know, I I do think that there's some a a lot of room, to really increase the capacity of the intercollegiate bowl, with the utilization of an online format. But I think from, like, the very base level of just being able to scrimmage is amazing. And the other thing that's really great, I think, about the online bowl is that we can our pool of judges increases dramatically. Right? They don't need to be from the local area. You know? They can be anywhere, and that and that fundamentally works. And so I do think that there's a lot of room to really increase capacity with the online, version of the ethics bowl.

RRG: I like the possibilities that the online format, holds for or presents for potentially debating internationally. I regularly, a few times a year, coach or train, really, students who are participating in a related program in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong. It's the Ethics Olympiad. And so that is happening. Right? The ethics bowl type activities are happening across the world, and it's just a matter of making these sorts of connections. And hopefully, eventually, we can regularly work together internationally. So I'm excited about that. I also thought I'd speak to a piece that isn't about virtual bowls, but about other forms of technology. My students will tell you that when AI first came out, I lost it. ChatGPT in particular. I come to class the first day of class. Well, I don't know if I can even have you guys write papers anymore. Right? And I just yeah, I lost my cool. But I came to terms with it. And through ethics bowl, really came to see some of the advantages of using it as a learning tool. So with my students, well, at first, we often have two teams. So there are two sets of students that are scrimmaging against one another. And then at some point, we have started to thoroughly engage in group think, and we can't think of other questions that might come up or our our rebuttals have gotten stale, our counter arguments have gotten stale. And so my students will plug into ChatGPT. You know, what question might be asked about this case or what are some other counter arguments that we haven't considered or whatever. And it really helps them better prepare in a way that I think, you know, is not negative. Some applications of chat GPT are negative. Some are real learning opportunities.

LK: I have the sense, actually. The question is framed such that it implies that that our participants are expecting digital world when they come to our events. My experience is quite frequently that that

they are very happy with an analog space in competition, at least when it comes to, volunteers. Like, the students, you know, they're younger, and so I think that it's all clicking there. But when you have volunteers, it can be hard to find the right balance between, like, a tool in a digital world, and something that they feel comfortable with. But outside of competition, there's so many places that we can increase our repertoire of digital resources for, like, classroom learning and pedagogy. I think it's like you know, AI, of course, is a big one. But even just, like, creating new ways to engage with case sets through you know, there's gamification processes that we can take to to make them just more accessible as an individual and versus, like, having to discuss them in classroom. And so then when you bring them to those classroom discussions, you're more prepared. That kind of thing, I think, is is a really fun way of imagining what the future might look like as well.

AR: Given, an increasingly fraught and fractured political climate in The United States and and really around the world, how can Ethics Bowl maintain its educational commitment to fostering open, respectful dialogue about issues that tend to be pretty controversial? So how do you navigate potential pushback on this while preserving the activities kind of core values?

LK: I think it's all a matter of framing, for the cases, at least. At a high school level, there's already a a a real task of writing these cases and developing them in a way that's developmentally appropriate for high schoolers, period, before we get to any sort of political conversation. And so in some ways, as things get more fraught, it's feels a little bit like an extension of what we're already doing. Obviously, like, there's real value to talking about cases that are grounded in the real world. So, like, for example, for a long time in our case dashboard, that's where we take all of our community case submissions and pull from them for our case sets. There's this, case that discusses drag story hour, which is a program where drag artists read stories of children. And so we have regions in our national structure where if they were to discuss a case like this about drag, it could get their teachers or the host schools in trouble. So we we've never included it. And we could include a different case that gets into questions about parental authority or freedom of expression or age appropriate art, bigotry, blah blah blah. But if we did, we might lose some of what makes the original version of the case interesting. But that's not to say that the cases wouldn't be interesting in themselves, and they're still getting it really valuable moral issues that people will disagree on. And then, you know, I think that, of course, the value is that disagreement and working through that disagreement. So in some ways, I don't know that it matters so much if you're not talking about, in this example, drag specifically, if if you can get to the point where, you're able to talk about drag if it were to come up in your day to day life outside of an educational institution. Because, of course, like, you know, we

exist within the framework of schools. So we have to adhere to those rules. I think it's important.

RRG: I think Leo faces some particular issues given that it's, an activity for minors. At the intercollegiate level, and I'm expressing these views as a private citizen here. I think it's really important that we have a backbone and that we don't, in in the coming years, we don't normalize things that aren't normal and that we don't become one of these institutions that, like, capitulates in advance. And, we're not that we're not an institution that creates false equivalencies or acts like, human rights or the kinds of things that should be whose existence should be debated. And I think that one way we can make sure that we're, doing the right thing here is to make sure that, our the the decisions we make involve the input of a diverse range of people on committees and, that that we're getting input by the the people who are impacted by the case studies that we craft and by the policies that we make.

MJ: I would just add really quickly that I think now is the time that ethics bowl is incredibly important. You know, within the kind of what where the discourse is at if we're gonna think about it from a political perspective. Because the really what we're we're we are training the future leaders of of our country, and I think that, you know, the skills that they're developing in the ethics bowl, you know, about having you know, being able to listen, have empathy, be able to engage with people, you know, that have ideas other than their own is so fundamentally important. And I would not want to take a step back from that at all. I think right now, it's more important than ever. Right? And so we need to keep these conversations going, and ethics is sticky. It's difficult. It deals with very difficult personal issues for people, and I think that we have to have, this activity in order to enable students to be able to engage in those. Right? If we try to tone it down and, you know, kind of you know you know, let's say that that let's get rid of the controversial stuff. I think that's really problematic. Right? I think the I I love those cases that that students are like, yeah. Okay. Let's talk about this. Like, we're gonna really have a disagreement, and we are gonna talk to each other. And we're gonna move this conversation forward in a respectful way, and hopefully, we'll be able to come to some new conclusions. And I think that's the beautiful thing about the ethics school. I think the ethics will play an important role right now in students' overall development.

AR: So I'm sort of dying to ask this question. But between the four of us, we've likely shaped the lives of thousands of ethics bowl students at various levels over the years. Many of them are now out there building careers, starting families, and sort of making their own mark on the world. So here's your chance in a big public forum. What's your message to those former students who've taken and carried this experience with them?

MJ: I would say paid forward. That's really where I would begin with and say, like, become involved. Right? Participate with, you know, a local high school team. Participate with a local middle school team. Participate in, you know, being a judge or a moderator in a regional competition. You know, we have, like, literally between the four of us... Absolutely, Alex. Like, thousands of students. And I think that that so many of those students have loved this activity that it's really about paying it forward as much as possible. Become part of the community. Right? Be active in the ethics of community. And that's really what I'd like to see, and that's how I think that we could even build more capacity. We've literally had tens of thousands of students that have participated in this.? And they become amazing individuals. They become amazing judges. They become amazing, amazing mentors. Right? And so I I would say that if you've been involved in the ethics bowl in college or in high school and you loved it, keep participating.

RRG: I think I probably speak for most of us when I say, to my to my students, that I still care about you a lot and think about you all the time. And I'm really happy about the role you've played in my life. And I hope that the skills that you've developed in the ethics bowls are skills you continue to use. I'm sure they are. I'm sure you have found them useful.

LK: Yeah. I mean, of all of the programs and extracurriculars that our students could have joined and participated in, they chose ethics bowl. And I they're all the most impressive students I've ever encountered. I mean, it's I'm always blown away. So I wanna say thank you to them, I suppose. It's interesting. I actually I ran into, this is a tangent. I'm sorry. I ran into, like, days ago, an f a high school ethics school graduate in the wild from, like, 2013, '20 '14, way at the beginning of the high school level. And they were really cool. They were super cool. And, it reaffirmed my, 100% confidence that the graduates of the Ethics Bowl are cool people...

AR: This has been a conversation with Rachel Robison Greene, Michael Jordan, and Leo Kirby, all leaders in the Ethics Bowl community and true believers in the activities mission and methods. I thank them for this conversation and, of course, for their work to make these extraordinary opportunities available for young people. To learn more about the APPE Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl, you can visit appeieb.org. And to learn more about the National High School Ethics Bowl, you can visit nhseb.org. If you're interested in supporting truly innovative and potentially transformative ethics education, I encourage you to get involved in the Ethics Bowl community in your area today.

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You can learn more about today's episode and check out supplementary resources at examiningethics.org. As always, you can contact us directly at examiningethics@depauw.edu. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you next time.

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