

Sacred Heart University

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Ono Ekeh



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Sacred Heart University's Ethics Bowl debate team recently put their skills to the test in the 20th Intercollegiate Ethics Bowl Competition in Virginia.

After placing in the top four in a regional bowl last fall, the team, led by professors Ono Ekeh and Gordon Purves, headed to the national competition in Reston, Va., just outside Washington, D.C. In Ethics Bowl debates, moderators question teams on various topics that pose ethical dilemmas. Judges then rate teams based on their responses. Sacred Heart's team practiced and prepared, but ultimately did not place in the national competition.

"Sacred Heart performed admirably," Ekeh said "Our students demonstrated a wonderful ability to remain composed under competitive pressure and present on complicated issues. Even though we didn't get the results we wanted, we are all very proud of the team's effort, and we hope we get this opportunity again."

Kristina Payne, a sophomore studying psychology, said the competition was extremely stressful and challenging. "You're going up against the top teams of the country, who have prepared just as much, if not more, than your team," she said. "However, it is a fun and rewarding experience at the same time, because you get to show off all the work you've put into everything and see how other teams also present their arguments."

This was the first time SHU students went to the national competition, where they faced teams from Taylor, Whitworth and Samford Universities. Ekeh said 250 schools participate at the regional level nationwide each year, but only the top 36 compete at the national competition. "We are well aware that it is not easy to get to this point and that we have to work hard if we want to be in this position again next year," he said.

Payne echoed Ekeh's comments, saying the competition taught her how much effort must be devoted to practice and preparation to win competitions. She also said she learned how to present arguments more clearly.

Junior Drew Winkler, a political science and philosophy major, said competing in the Ethics Bowl on the national level "was a surreal experience, and it put into perspective how hard we worked to get there. Also, the teams we faced displayed an impressive and admirable level of preparation. Now, with insight into our opponents and the tactics and styles of argumentation they employed, our team is ready to raise the bar and surpass the standards they set."

The competition was an all-day affair. The first three rounds took place between 9:30 a.m. and 2 p.m., followed by knockout rounds.

"It is so impressive to see all these young students from all over the country, who are very intelligent, articulate and sophisticated thinkers," Ekeh said. "The organizers did well to create a very collegial and warm atmosphere, so while you are competitors with the other schools, you can also be friends. Intellectually, it was very stimulating, and we haven't stopped talking about the experience, the presentations and the arguments.

"It was great to see how various schools approached different cases and what we can learn from them," he said. "It was also a great experience getting to travel as a group and learn about each other in ways that we wouldn't have in practice."