Rachel Robison Greene: Community Engaged Philosophy

Alyssa Worthington

03/31/2020

Community Engaged Philosophy

Feature Story on Dr. Rachel Robison-Greene

Dr. Rachel Robison-Greene knew after her first philosophy class that she loved the subject and wanted to further her education in that field. Unfortunately, at the time, Weber State University did not have an undergraduate degree in philosophy. Not long after she took her first philosophy class, Weber State created a bachelor’s degree in Philosophy, and Dr. Robison-Greene became the first graduate. Since then, she has finished her Ph.D. and will finish her postdoc in August. She will start as an Assistant Professor of Philosophy at USU in the fall.

One thing Dr. Robison-Greene wants students to know is that she loves to meet one-on-one with students. She wants any student wanting or seeking a mentor to know her door is always open. She loves it when students come to meet with her. Dr. Robison-Greene is a professor who is passionate about her work and about the people and students she works with. One way she mentors students is through her role as the Ethics Bowl Coach.

As the coach of the Ethics Bowl Team, Dr. Robison-Greene took three teams to Regionals, one of which is headed to the National Ethics Bowl in Atlanta later this year. Each team is composed of three to seven students. Five students can compete in a round and members can be switched out depending on the round. The students are given 15 topics to learn about and develop arguments for. They may choose whether to develop a positive or negative case for their argument. They are expected to formulate a credible and logical argument. During each round the five students competing will give a ten-minute presentation building a strong argument for the side they have chosen. Their opposing team will then be given time for a rebuttal. Following that, the initial team has the opportunity to present their counter rebuttal. Both teams will be asked questions by the judge.

Ethics Bowl Teams can be composed of students in any major during any year of their college studies. USU can take any interested student on a team to Regionals during the fall semester. While at Regionals the teams are competing to qualify for the National Ethics Bowl. The teams that qualify for Nationals start rigorous practice soon after Regionals. Students are also able to get PHIL 4910 course credit for being part of the Ethics Bowl Team.

Not only is Dr. Robison-Greene dedicated to the academic world and her students, she is also a very active researcher. Her main research focus is meta-ethics, which is mainly focused on ethical language. Another part of her research is focused on applied ethics which includes topics like technology, in-vitro meats, and robots. On top of her research interest, Dr. Robison-Greene is also an author and contributor to many books. One book she recently finished was *The Handmaid's Tale and Philosophy*. She also coedited the book *Conspiracy Theories*.

On top of her career in academics, her involvement with the Ethics Bowl team, and her writing, she is an active participant in the community. One of the many ways she is involved with the community is through Ethics Slams that she and her husband put on. An Ethics Slam is an opportunity for members of the community to come together to talk about important and pressing issues. These events are venues where individuals can come to advocate for a side or argue another while maintaining their composure. They are not intended for community members to come to fight with others. If the person speaking starts to become unruly their opportunity to speak is finished and the microphone is taken away. Ethics Slams are a good way for community members to have experience new opinions and viewpoints. It is a safe place for individuals to come and learn about current and often pressing issues. Dr. Robison-Greene and her husband orchestrate Ethics Slams in both the Ogden and Logan areas. Their first Ethics Slam in Logan was hosted at Lucky Slice Pizza. Their 2020 Ethics Slam will be at the Logan Lucky Slice Pizza on October 6th at 6:00pm. They may be looking for a bigger venue in the future if they continue to have a large turnout.

In an effort to help facilitate a community that is more involved and concerned about ethics, Dr. Robison-
Greene and her husband have started teaching ethics in the Utah State Prison in Draper. They are planning to have an Ethics Bowl in prison later this year. The inmates will compete against USU students. She said that she is currently working on getting judges for the Ethics Bowl, which will include some of her colleagues at the universities close to Draper. Getting this program started has taken quite some time and effort on Dr. Robison-Greene’s part. She first cold—contacted the Utah Department of Corrections to see if this program was a possibility. When that did not lead to the program coming to fruition, she connected with a colleague who was able to get her in contact with individuals who were able to help get this Ethics Program up and running. She is hoping to continue to spread this program to more of the prisons in Utah. Until that time, she will continue to build the program at this prison.

A personal project that Dr. Robison-Greene and her husband have created and are continuing to work on is their podcast called, “I Think, Therefore I Fan.” In the podcast, they discuss all things philosophy regarding mainstream media such as books, television shows, movies, comics, and so forth. They often bring guests on their podcast to talk about the philosophical issues present in the media they are discussing during that show. Finding and talking with fellow philosophers is what Dr. Robison-Greene said her pet project is. With her pet project, she is trying to connect with others to create a community of the many philosophers in Utah and make a space where they can come together. She feels that by creating a community of philosophers, it will help make involving the public in philosophical discussions more of an attainable and wide-reaching possibility.

Dr. Robison-Greene is a professor that has great concern for her students and a desire to help motivate the community to become open-minded and more involved in public issues of importance. She is willing to help students and has many connections and incredible experiences that make her a prime mentor for students from their freshman year to when they graduate and beyond.

###

_By Alyssa Worthington_