

# Students Tackle "Wicked Problems" in Case Competition Final Round

A "wicked problem," according to social theorists, is one which defies easy or obvious resolution. It's the sort of problem that hinders societal development, crosses academic disciplines, and perplexes experts. It was in hopes of tackling these sorts of problems that The Edge of Chaos was created by the School of Public Health at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, so it's appropriate that the finals of the Wicked Problem Case Competition for National Public Health Week were held at The Edge of Chaos.

Each year, students at UAB are challenged to tackle a wicked problem that confronts college campuses. 2014's issue was sexual violence on college campuses. Estimates place the percentage of women who will be sexually assaulted while attending college at between 20% and 25% - much higher than the population at large. The 4-6 member teams were to generate a 7-minute presentation which proposed a solution to the problem of sexual violence on college campuses, and to be prepared to answer several minutes of questions on their presentation.

Three teams out of a total of 16 reached the final round of competition, which was held at The Edge of Chaos on April 10. Each team of students proposed a multi-faceted and thoughtful approach to addressing sexual violence. One team proposed that a broad-based educational campaign, together with partnerships between campus organizations and non-profits, could raise awareness of the issue of sexual violence sufficiently to make it "everyone's issue." Free self-defense classes for women on campus were discussed. The necessity of targeting the closed culture of male athletic teams and Greek organizations was interrogated.

Team "Our Voice" was ultimately victorious, netting the \$1500 prize. Their proposed approach to sexual violence targeted educating and intervening with campus males. "Sexual violence is a male problem," said one presenter, "as males are the perpetrators." They suggested that peer education programs, together with signature events and advertising campaigns, would be effective in making male college students aware of the necessity of consent in sexual encounters and what types of behaviors constituted assault.

Sexual assault on college campuses is a hot-button topic nationwide right now, as President Obama just announced a White House task force to address the issue this year. In 2013, he signed the Campus SAVE Act, which increases the responsibility of universities in protecting students from assault.

In 2012, a three-year grant of \$500,000 was awarded to the 5 institutions in the Birmingham Area Consortium for Higher Education (BACHE)--UAB, Samford, Birmingham-Southern College, the University of Montevallo and Miles College to provide information and resources for sexual assault survivors. The grant is funded by the Department of Justice through the Office of Violence Against Women and is coordinated by the Crisis Center of Birmingham.

As part of the grant, UAB formed a Coordinated Community Response Team (CCRT) which aims to create a public awareness of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking in addition to educating victims on how and who to alert if the crime takes place. Many of the CCRT members are participating in the competition as mentors or judges.

Any of these proposals could potentially be implemented at UAB.



First Place Winners: "Our Voice"



Second Place Winners: Gladiators



Third Place Winners: SHAPE