“The Center for Leadership Ethics is getting the message of what we do, and what we’re all about at Ethisphere, to the next generation of business leaders,” said Doug Allen, Managing Director with Ethisphere’s Data & Advisory Services group. “It’s a natural way for us to be engaged.”

Although these days the case competition has an international footprint, it began with humble roots. When Dr. Paul Melendez was developing the first business ethics course at the University of Arizona in 2003, he was breaking new ground. Looking for a way to make the principles and ideas his students were studying feel more tangible, he decided to put his class through a case competition, where they would be presented with thorny ethical situations that might confront a business leader. The teams were given some time to study the case and perform an analysis of it, before presenting their findings and recommended solutions to the class. The winning team would receive a $500 prize.

In a unique twist, Melendez based the competition format on the NCAA basketball tournament, with an “Ethical Four” advancing the format was an instant hit, as Melendez recalls. “They said, ‘We love this, we’ve never done anything like it. Can we do it again?’ And when our Board Chair Ron Sable found out, he wanted something more impactful too.”

Board Chair Ron Sable, “Dr. Melendez’s vision for ethical issues to be debated in international competition makes for a wonderful partnership with Ethisphere.”

In just a few years, the collegiate competition exploded from half a dozen teams in a single class, into a statewide event, and eventually drew schools from all across the western half of the country. At its peak, the competition had 36 schools. Since that time, Melendez has pared down the numbers a bit (this year’s competition had 25 teams) while going international, developing relationships with several universities in Mexico and Canada. While similar competitions have popped up across the country, the CECC stands out by remaining purely for undergraduates and not touching on the business benefits from investing in ethics. As many have noted, younger workers increasingly expect their workplaces to align with their ethical standards, and our winners are no exception. “Being proud of the company I work for has always been important to me,” said Dee. “Having an ethical culture plays the main role in that...no one wants to work somewhere they do not feel comfortable.”

Ethisphere congratulates last year’s winners and is looking forward to supporting the Collegiate Ethics Case Competition in the future. Although Melendez won’t say what this year’s case topic would be, he promises that it will be as relevant as ever. Ethisphere is proud to help expose the next generation of business leaders to the clear, verifiable benefits of a commitment to ethics for businesses and society as a whole.