UM ETHICS SOCIETY

MEETING MAR 19, 2014

WELCOME BACK!!

SIGN IN SHEET

Anyone have any good Spring Break stories?

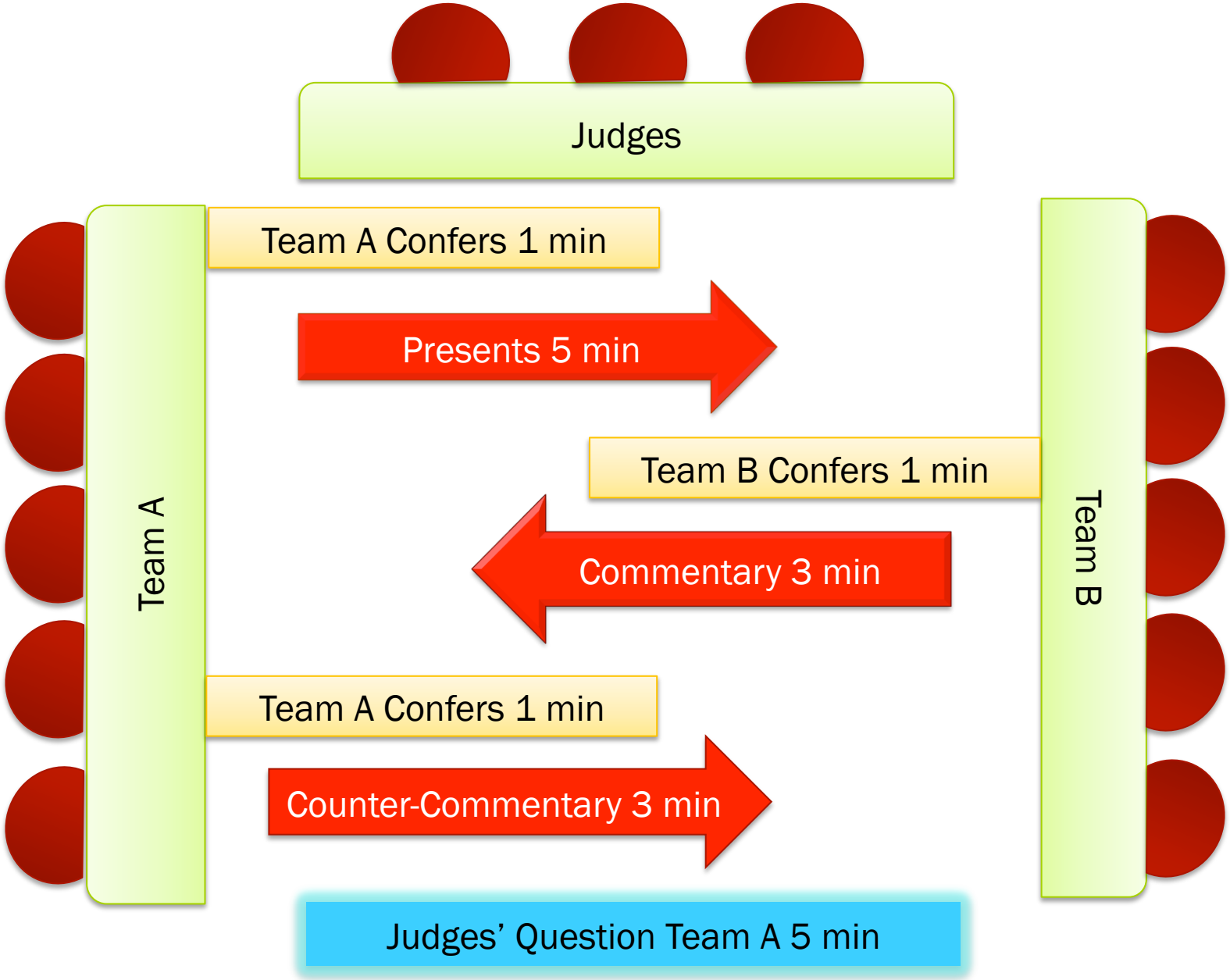
AGENDA

1. Meet your team!
2. UMBB Info/Overview
3. Case Discussions
4. Meet with your team leader and plan prep

DIVIDE UP INTO TEAMS

- Introduce yourself: Name, major
- Why you signed up for UMBB
- What your main interest is in (ex- medicine, law, environmental, business, etc)

WHAT IS A ROUND OF ETHICS DEBATE?



EPIDEMICS AND DRUG TESTING

CASE 3

ABC Pharmaceuticals produces Antibe, an antibiotic approved for use in the US, but only for those who are severely ill, because it causes liver and joint damage in 5% of those who take it. Like most medications, it has never been tested on children. (It is difficult to do an ethical trial involving children, and the drug companies fear lawsuits if children are injured.)

When a meningitis epidemic broke out in Africa, the company used the opportunity to test Antibe on children there. Meningitis kills about 10% of its victims, and leaves about 15% with neurological damage (hearing loss, paralysis, mental disability). Since the epidemic struck a very poor area, most of the children would go untreated. ABC saw a chance to provide humanitarian relief, reap some good publicity, and determine whether Antibe was safe and useful for children.

The research design had two arms. In one, children received Antibe. In the other, they received the standard treatment. Children were assigned randomly to one arm or the other. As is the case with many “standard treatments,” the evidence supporting this one was only moderately persuasive.

Desperate parents brought in their sick children. Doctors and nurses speaking the patients’ native languages explained the study, and got written or spoken consent.

Question: Was ABC justified in taking advantage of this epidemic to test its drug on children?

CHEMICAL CORRIDOR

CASE 5

There is an 85-mile stretch of the Mississippi River extending from Baton Rouge to New Orleans in Louisiana unofficially known as “Chemical Corridor.” The area is heavily industrialized, hosting numerous oil refineries, petrochemical plants and factories.

The construction of Standard Oil’s Baton Rouge refinery in 1908 signaled the beginning of development in the lower Mississippi River chemical corridor; its flood-proof site, on high terraces near the head of navigation for ocean-going ships, offered ready access to crude oil and natural gas, ample water for industrial processes, and a giant sink for wastes, in addition to the favorable winter climate. Other refiners and chemical manufacturers quickly followed Standard Oil's lead, and there was an accelerated program of federal investment during World War II

By 1947 there were 177 refineries and chemical plants in Louisiana, and their numbers continued to grow: 211 in 1962, 284 in 1981, and 320 in 2002. Along the lower Mississippi River, the number of oil-refining and chemical-processing plants rose from 126 in 1962 to 196 in 2002. A landscape once dominated by sugarcane fields had been thoroughly transformed (1).

The EPA's Toxic Release Inventory cites literally tons of chemicals released into the environment along this stretch of the river. Whereas on average 7 pounds of pollutants per person are released into the air in the United States, for the mostly poor and black people living along this part of the river, there are 2,277 pounds of pollutants per person. The state of Louisiana averages 21 pounds per person, and two-thirds of all of Louisiana's toxic substances released into the environment are released here.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the incidence of several diseases, including cancer and asthma, is inordinately high among the human communities in this area. As John McQuaid notes, it's hard to get a clear answer on the question because it butts up against the limits of epidemiology and environmental science. That uncertainty touches on deep public anxieties, as well as broader issues, including public access to health data, government regulation, legal liability and the efficacy of applying results of animal tests to humans (2).

Recently a manufacturer of polyvinyl chloride (PVC), a common plastic used mostly for pipes, was considering installing a plant here that would be a significant polluter but, under threat of legal protest, decided instead to build it in a less poor community, removing a potential source of more contamination but taking much-needed jobs with it.

Question: Should private companies be held liable for the negative externalities of their business practices? How is your response affected with reference to the lack of clear, scientific, evidence on the health effects of these business practices?

NEXT MEETING:

<u>NEXT GENERAL MEETING</u>

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 26TH @ 8PM

IN MEMORIAL 201