

Cambridge Tutorial program emphasizes scholarship

My high school, The Cambridge School of Dallas, is one unique place. How many high schools have philosophy as an elective course, as well as an instructor who takes the course seriously? How many require their seniors to compose a thesis paper and then defend it before a panel of judges? How many schools have a bowtie as a uniform option?

While the last item on that list may have been in jest (though true), the first two most certainly were not. Cambridge is in the business of creating scholars who can engage the world around them and who have a strong knowledge of their worldview and beliefs. To Sloan Lee, Cambridge's philosophy professor, his class is a natural outgrowth of this mission.



Sloane Lee

Lee received his doctorate in philosophy at Wayne State University. After completing his studies, Lee moved to Dallas, where he took a job at University of North Texas, and soon after, Cambridge. He continues to do research, compose papers, and attend conferences as an active scholar in his field. At Cambridge, his desire to pursue truth through a careful analysis of the arguments and evidence and his love for his discipline are both contagious, as he certainly hopes they will be.

Lee has a clear mission in whatever he does: to produce thinkers and scholars who know how to engage difficult material and learn from great minds of the past. He does this with a passion and drive that are frankly extraordinary. Along with his elective philosophy course, Lee teaches a required course in Christian apologetics to Cambridge's seniors.

In this class, which has been one of my personal favorites, Lee lays out the case for the existence of God, the historical reliability of Scripture, and arguments regarding naturalism. He knows that college will challenge high-school graduates academically, but it will challenge their worldview as well. Thus, he does his best to present the arguments both for and against Christianity, analyzing and critiquing both, giving his students a firm intellectual foundation.

In addition, Lee is in charge of the senior thesis competition, called Tutorial. This



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program is considered to be the "capstone" of a Cambridge education. Its purpose, according to Lee, is "to turn non-scholars, or only partly-formed scholars, into scholars." It accomplishes this goal through a rigorous process designed to make the student an expert in his or her topic.

A full year before presenting their theses, Cambridge students select an area of interest and intensely research them over the summer. Under the guidance of a faculty tutor, students continue to research, painstakingly craft an outline and finally begin to write. By March of senior year, after several drafts, the thesis paper is submitted for review by a panel of faculty judges.

At the end of March, each student in the senior class defends their paper before this panel, and the students' conclusions are challenged by difficult questions from both the judges and the audience. The top three papers, as determined by the faculty judges, move on to the Tutorial Finals, where they are presented again before a second academic committee, this time made up of outside judges.

As an underclassman at Cambridge, when I watched previous classes of seniors deliver their Tutorial papers, it filled me with anticipation for the day when I could show what I had learned and defend a paper of my own. Now that that day is almost upon me, I understand the value of Tutorial and the confidence that creating my own scholarly work has given me.

I have found this process to be extremely taxing, even exhausting at times. Having written my thesis this past year, I can speak from experience. However, I also know that this experience has great rewards. It has taught me how to extensively research a topic — a skill which I will certainly need in college.

Connor Mighell contributes to neighborsgo.com on behalf of The Cambridge School of Dallas.