THE ELIE WIESEL FOUNDATION

PRIZE IN ETHICS
2027 Essay Contest
Information & Guidelines

Awards

Financial awards will be made to the winners in amounts determined at the sole discretion of The Elie Wiesel Foundation. Scholarship awards have ranged from $1,500 to $12,500, and are different each year.

The Prize provides a scholarship and also delivers a significant professional development component for the winners. In 2026, we and the students are fortunate that Accenture is sponsoring and hosting our in-person, full-day professional development seminar on the ethics of technology and storytelling. In today's world, we need young people that can explore difficult topics with grace — building a stronger, civics-minded community.

The winners are selected through an anonymous and rigorous process involving a readers' committee and jury led by Elisha Wiesel and Elie's former colleagues. The student winners provide a multiplier effect by leading peer-to-peer learning on their campus co-sponsored by the Foundation. The peer-to-peer seminar is a key component of the award. Participation and attendance at all events is required to receive the monetary award.

Eligibility

- Open to registered full-time undergraduate students at accredited four-year colleges or universities in the United States. Proof of enrollment will be required.
- Students studying abroad are eligible if enrolled full-time in a U.S.-accredited institution.

Essay Topic for 2027

Essay Theme: Complicity and Courage

Most of us are never asked to be heroes. But, at some point, nearly all of us face a smaller and harder question: Do I go along with this, or do I refuse?

Does our responsibility change depending on the scope of the question? Explain the moral standard behind your decision, then confront the strongest objection to it.

Each essay will be judged on the quality of the writing along with its integration of ethical concerns and questions of personal and social responsibility. Engage us. Enlighten us. Explore any ethical question that moves you, whether it arises from the tension between complicity and courage or from another moral or ethical challenge, close to home or across the world. We are eager to learn from you.

What the Readers Look For

- Clear articulation and genuine grappling with an ethical dilemma.
- Adherence to guidelines and careful proofreading.
- Observation of Standard English usage (grammar, punctuation, mechanics).
- Thoughtful, tightly focused essays demonstrating originality and imagination.
- Eloquence of writing style and unity of purpose.
- The quality of writing, the clarity of the ethical problem or issue, and the depth of ethical analysis, including reflections on right and wrong, justice and injustice, and the broader moral implications

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Essay Format

- Length: 2,500–3,500 words. Must be the original, unpublished work of one student. Papers previously submitted for class are acceptable. Only one essay per student per year.
- Must be written in English, titled, double-spaced, 12-point readable font (e.g., Times New Roman), with 1" margins and numbered pages. Submissions are judged anonymously — do not include your name, school, or identifying references on the essay or title page.
- "Complicity and Courage" is a suggested point of departure, not a required subject. You may write about any ethical question that moves you. Consider a moment, in your own life or in the wider world, when you had to determine where your or another person's responsibility began and ended. Points of departure for such writing could include the following examples:
  - a current conflict in American life, including threats to democracy or public policy issues so long as they have an ethical focus
  - an international crisis
  - an ethically challenging choice that you are facing or that someone close to you is facing
  - an assignment, college course, or other personal experience that unsettled how you think and impacted how you approach an important ethical issue or concern
- The strongest essays will do more than recount an experience or describe how it felt. They will identify an ethical question and examine it with care, honesty, and depth. You are encouraged to think about what makes a dilemma an ethical dilemma as part of your essay. Your essay may take the form of a personal narrative, a sustained argument, a reflection on a contemporary issue, or a combination of these approaches. Whatever form you choose, make clear what is ethically at stake, explain how you understand the question, and consider a serious challenge to your own reasoning. We are interested not only in the conclusion you reach, but also in the quality of thought that leads you there.

- **Use of Artificial Intelligence**

Applicants must provide a complete and accurate account of whether and how they used generative artificial intelligence or other AI-assisted tools in preparing their submission. These tools may be used only for limited purposes, such as brainstorming, outlining, or minor editorial assistance. The central ideas, argument, analysis, structure, and substantive writing must be the applicant's own. Applicants may not submit AI-generated prose as their own work.Every submission will undergo an initial AI-assisted review. The Foundation will assess the results in light of the applicant's disclosure and any other relevant evidence. Evidence of undisclosed AI use, a significant discrepancy in the applicant's disclosure, or another reason to question the submission's originality or authorship may lead to further review. The Foundation may ask the applicant to provide reasonably available materials, including drafts, revision histories, and any prompts entered and outputs received from an AI-assisted tool. Applicants who use such tools should retain these materials until the competition has concluded. Failure to disclose AI use fully and accurately, provide reasonably available materials when requested, or cooperate with an authorship review may result in disqualification. If a violation is discovered after an award has been announced, the Foundation may withdraw the award.

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Submission of Materials

- Entries must be submitted online at https://center.uoregon.edu/EWF/2027/CMS_CFP_Login::pageIndex?formid=2810046.
- Upload your essay and enrollment verification as PDF files.
- You may edit an unfinished submission until the final deadline. Once submitted, no further edits are allowed. **Due to volume, no materials will be critiqued or returned.**
- Upload an official enrollment verification (Registrar letter on institutional letterhead or National Student Clearinghouse document) confirming full–time undergraduate status at the time you submit your essay. **Certify that you intend to continue your studies in Spring 2027 if you submit prior to then. By submitting an essay, you are deemed to have made this certification.**

Use of Name, Image, and Likeness

By submitting an essay, you acknowledge that if selected as a winner, The Elie Wiesel Foundation may use your name, image, likeness, voice, biographical information, and essay (in whole or in part) for publication, educational, and promotional purposes without additional consent or compensation.

Ethics Prize Alumni Network

All prize recipients become members of the Elie Wiesel Prize in Ethics Alumni Network, a lifelong community inspired by the legacy of Elie Wiesel – the challenge to us all.
Building on Professor Wiesel's teaching, alumni are encouraged to deepen their understanding of ethics and leadership, and to advance their own leadership skills and potential in service of humanity.

Through this network, winners continue to engage with the Foundation's programming, mentorship, and collaborative opportunities that uphold moral courage, responsibility, and the pursuit of conscience.

Rights and Discretion

The Elie Wiesel Foundation reserves the right to:

- Publish winning essays, in whole or in part, in print or digital form;
- Modify, amend, or discontinue any policies or procedures at its sole discretion and without prior notice; and
- Disqualify any entries that fail to meet the contest's ethical or procedural standards.

Changes may be implemented based on evolving operational needs, legal requirements, or organizational priorities. The Elie Wiesel Foundation will not tolerate any expression of hatred or discriminatory content, as determined in its sole discretion. Essays containing such content will be disqualified.

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