

# 24.133 Experiential Ethics (3-unit) Syllabus

## Summer 2024

### Course Leaders

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Welcome to Experiential Ethics! Through weekly, hour-long (60 minute) discussion groups, you'll have the opportunity to explore ethical and social issues related to your own experiences—whether these are projects you're working on, internships, future goals, or your experiences at MIT. Each discussion group will be led by a Graduate Teaching Fellow (TF), and you will have short assignments to guide you through your ethical exploration, as well as a final project. Fundamentally, the class is driven by you: we want you (as a discussion group and as an individual) to explore these issues as *you* want to explore them, with our help and guidance along the way. All of us on the Teaching Team are excited to work with you this summer.

This course runs alongside 24.134, which is an expanded version of Experiential Ethics. You will participate in virtual field trips and a final showcase with classmates from 24.134.

### Intended learning outcomes

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Identify your personal values and challenges you might face, such as in the workplace
- Identify and critically evaluate ethical dimensions of real-world situations from current events to your own life
- Explain philosophical concepts including ethical lenses, stakeholders, value-laden choice points, and structural injustice
- Communicate and defend your own ethical perspectives on real-world issues to different audiences
- Recognize and critically evaluate the social and political dimensions of your personal decision-making, scientific inquiry, and technology design
- Advocate for a real-world ethical decision facing a community you participate in

### Time commitment

This is a 3-credit class, which means you can expect a total time commitment (including all homework and class time) of approximately 40 hours over the term.

## Sections and Graduate Teaching Fellows

- **Section 1** (Thursday at 7 pm; [Zoom link](#)): **Katie Zhou**, Philosophy ([katie\\_z@mit.edu](mailto:katie_z@mit.edu));
- **Section 2** (Thursday at 6 pm; [Zoom link](#)): **Olivia Wynne Houck**, History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture ([owhouck@mit.edu](mailto:owhouck@mit.edu));
- **Section 3** (Wednesday at 10 am; [Zoom link](#)): **Sakinah Munday**, Philosophy ([sakimund@mit.edu](mailto:sakimund@mit.edu))
- **Section 4** (Tuesday at 6 pm; [Zoom link](#)): **Maríel García Montes**, Science, Technology, and Society ([marielgm@mit.edu](mailto:marielgm@mit.edu)).

## Academic integrity

We take academic integrity very seriously. If you're in doubt about what counts as a breach of academic integrity, get in touch with your TF or refer to the [Academic Integrity Handbook](#). If academic dishonesty is proven, there will be severe disciplinary consequences, which may include any or all of: a redo of the assignment for a reduced grade; failure on the assignment; failure of the course; a letter in the student's file in the Office of Student Citizenship or referral to the Committee on Discipline. If you're tempted to plagiarize, it's always better to speak to your TF, the course leaders, your advisor, academic deans, or another trusted authority on campus who can help you.

## Accommodation

If you have a disability, you have a right under the American with Disabilities Act to an accommodation. As a matter of Institute policy, requests for accommodation must first go through [Student Disabilities Services](#). If you are eligible, they will give you an accommodation letter that you should bring to your TF as soon as possible. That way you and your TF can work together to make sure all of the course content is accessible to you. We take this very seriously, and it is our top priority to support all of our students.

## Inclusivity

MIT values an inclusive environment. Experiential Ethics seeks to foster community, collaboration, and respectful dialogue within discussion sections and across the course. We welcome individuals of all backgrounds, beliefs, ethnicities, national origins, gender identities, sexual orientations, religious and political affiliations – and other visible and nonvisible differences. All members of the class are expected to contribute to a respectful, welcoming, and inclusive environment for every other member of the class.

## Assessments and grading

24.133 is graded A/B/C/etc. The grading distribution is as follows:

- Attendance and participation 30%
- Pre-session assignments and discussion questions 10%
- Op-Ed assignment 10%
- Advocacy assignment 10%
- Independent project 40%

You must pass each portion of the class to pass the class as a whole. In order to pass the participation portion, you may have only one unexcused absence (including from discussion sessions, field trip, and Fall Showcase). Missed classes and late assignments are excused with a note from Student Support Services.

To make sure expectations are clear, we have developed **rubrics** for each assessment that you will be able to consult in advance. Rubrics will be available on Canvas.

## Participation

Participation is central to Experiential Ethics. We want you to work through ethical issues together with your peers, which requires participation. Your participation grade will not just be determined by the amount you participate, but also the manner. On the first day of class, the members of your discussion group and your TF will create ground rules for discussion.

In addition to your contributions in discussion sections, your participation grade will also reflect your completion of the midterm and end-of-term evaluation forms.

## Assignments

We have crafted assignments that directly contribute to the course's intended learning outcomes. Assignments are designed to help you engage with course material and integrate the concepts we learn into your personal life.

- **Weekly pre-session assignments**
  - For the class to be student-driven, you have to be prepared to contribute to each session. Each week, there is usually a short mandatory reading, video, or worksheet/exercise introducing the content for the session.

- **Op-Ed assignment (due Week 4)**
  - Select a choice point faced by a community you're in and write an op-ed to persuade them to make a particular choice. Details can be found on the assignment page.
  
- **Advocacy Assignment (due Week 7)**
  - Research an issue you care about outside your work or school. Consider potential actions you could take to advocate on this issue. Details can be found on the assignment page.
  
- **Independent project (milestones throughout the summer; final version due after Week 10)**
  - Your project for this class is highly flexible. We will provide you with certain options—write a 1,750-word essay, create a website, perform an interview on someone in your field and write a commentary about it, make a series of vlogs, etc. You may also propose your own. Details can be found in the [Project Guidelines](#).
  - An important element of the project is a poster presentation at the Fall Showcase. This year's Showcase will be held **Tuesday, September 10, at 4 pm.**

## Key dates and deadlines

<i>Week 4 (Week of July 1)</i>	Op-Ed Assignment Due
<i>Week 5 (Week of July 8)</i>	Deadline to meet with your TF to discuss project idea
<i>Week 5 (Week of July 8)</i>	Deadline to complete the Midterm Evaluation Form
<i>Week 6 (Week of July 15)</i>	Project Proposal Due
<i>Week 7 (Week of July 22)</i>	Advocacy Assignment Due
<i>Week 8 (Week of August 5)</i>	Workshop your project with your classmates and TF
<i>August 20</i>	Deadline to submit your project and upload your shareable component for Fall Showcase
<i>September 10</i>	Fall Showcase

# Course Schedule

Below is an overview of the class, including all assignment details and deadlines. Please note that every class discussion session starts on the hour (*not 5 minutes past*) and is a full 60 minutes long.

## Week 1 (Week of June 10th): Introduction - Ethics of Science and Technology

*Overview:* This week, we discuss the ethics of science and technology, while introducing the ethical lenses.

*Pre-session assignment:*

- None

## Week 2 (Week of June 17): Effective Altruism

*Overview:* This week, we discuss a philosophical position which is very popular in the fields of science and technology, and debate its merits.

*Pre-session assignments:*

- Read Alice Crary's *Against 'Effective Altruism'*
- Browse <https://www.effectivealtruism.org/>, <https://www.givingwhatwecan.org/en-US>, <https://www.givingwhatwecan.org/en-US/what-is-effective-altruism>, etc.
- Download and complete the Ethical Questions Assignment; submit to your TF

OPTIONAL supplemental reading:

- BBC article on Sam Bankman-Fried's involvement with the EA movement
- C. Thi Nguyen, *Gamification and Value Capture* (or watch his lecture on gamification)
- Amia Srinivasan, *Stop the Robot Apocalypse*
- Peter Singer, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*

## Week 3 (Week of June 24): Decision-Making With Stakeholders in Mind

*Overview:* This week, we practice applying a framework for integrating ethics and values into our work: the Ethics Protocol. The Ethics Protocol builds on the ethical lenses we encountered last week.

*Pre-session assignments:*

- Watch the [Ethics Protocol Video](#) (23 min)
  - Version with subtitles available [here](#)
- Read one of the following articles (whichever corresponds to the topic your group selected last week)
  - *Navigation apps*: [“Navigation Apps are Turning Quiet Neighborhoods Into Traffic Nightmares,”](#) by Lisa Foderaro ([pdf](#))
  - *Dockless scooters*: [“Electric Scooters are Causing Havoc. This Man Is Shrugging It Off,”](#) by Nellie Bowles and David Streitfeld ([pdf](#))
  - *Contact tracing apps*: [“For States’ COVID Contact Tracing Apps, Privacy Tops Utility”](#) by Lindsey Van Ness
  - Bus stop shade structures: [“L.A.’s Bus Stops Need Shade. Instead, They Got La Sombrita”](#) by Jesus Jiménez and Livia Albeck-Ripka ([pdf](#))
  - *Deepfake Images*: [“Explicit Deepfake Images of Taylor Swift Elude Safeguards and Swamp Social Media”](#) by Kate Conger and John Yoon
  - Choose your own example if you think something else would work better for your group!
- Complete the [Envisioning Futures Assignment](#)

*Optional Supplemental Reading:*

- [“Meant to Keep Malaria Out, Mosquito Nets Are Used to Haul Fish In,”](#) by Jeffrey Gettleman; and a response article from the GiveWell Blog, [“Putting the Problem of Bed Nets Used for Fishing In Perspective,”](#) by Jake Marcus
- T.M. Scanlon, [“Contractualism and Utilitarianism”](#) (start with section II)
- [“Reflecting on our Language: Stakeholder”](#) by Sarah Bentley

## **Week 4 (Week of July 1): Values in Science and Technology**

*Overview:* Here, we start looking at the broader, societal implications of our work. We consider the questions of whether science can be objective and whether technology can be value-neutral. Can a technology itself ever be good or bad, or is it always a matter of how people use it? Is science just a matter of collecting and interpreting data, or is it also a social project?

*Pre-session assignments:*

- Read [“Do Artifacts Have Politics?”](#) by Langdon Winner (focus especially on p. 123-129)
  - You can consult the following video for an overview: [“Summary of ‘Do Artifacts Have Politics?’ by Langdon Winner”](#) by Tom Gorichanaz
- Watch Michael Weisberg, [“Should Science be Value-Free?”](#)
- Op-Ed Assignment Due.

*Optional Supplemental Reading:*

- “Technologies as Forms of Life” by Langdon Winner
- “Knowledge, Human Interests, and Objectivity in Feminist Epistemology” by Elizabeth Anderson
- “The Image of Objectivity” by Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison
- “Inductive Risk and Values in Science” by Heather Douglas
- “Bias in computer systems” by Batya Friedman and Helen Nissenbaum
- Opinion: “Is Science Value Free?”

## **Week 5 (Week of July 8): Technology and Justice**

*Overview:* Here, we delve into the relationship between justice and technology, understood broadly. How can technology either worsen or help alleviate injustices such as economic inequality, racism, sexism, and ableism? We think through these issues using real-world cases and the concept of *discriminatory design*.

*Pre-session assignments*

- Watch “From Park Bench To Lab Bench: What Kind of Future Are We Designing?” *TEDxBaltimore* talk by Ruha Benjamin
- Meet with your TF (10-15 min) to discuss your independent project (Details about the project can be found on the assignment page)
- Complete the Midterm Evaluation form.

*Optional Supplemental Reading:*

- “Assessing Risk, Automating Racism” by Ruha Benjamin (in *Science*)
- “Big Data’s Disparate Impact” by Solon Barocas and Andrew Selbst
- *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build The Worlds We Need* by Sasha Costanza-Chock (2020)
- “Gender and Social Construction: Who? What? When? Where? How?” by Sally Haslanger

## **Week 6 (Week of July 15): Social Structures and Structural Injustice**

*Overview:* This week, we build on our understanding of social structures to discuss structural injustice. What is it, and what might it mean to say that we are responsible for it as individuals? We discuss different senses of responsibility and see them in action in real cases.

*Pre-session assignments:*

- Read Iris Marion Young, "Structure as the Subject of Justice" (sections I and II)
- Read Atoosa Kasirzadeh, "Algorithmic Fairness and Structural Injustice: Insights from Feminist Political Philosophy" (Sections 2 & 3)
- Submit your independent project proposal to your TF

*Optional Supplemental Reading:*

- Iris Marion Young, "Responsibility and Global Justice: A Social Connection Model"
- Safiya Umoja Noble, Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism (2018)
- Virginia Eubanks, Automating Inequality: How High-Tech Tools Profile, Police, and Punish the Poor (2018)
- Mar Hicks, Programmed Inequality: How Britain Discarded Women Technologists and Lost Its Edge in Computing (2017)
- Charlton D. McIlwain, Black Software: The Internet and Racial Justice, from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter (2020)

## **Week 7 (Week of July 22): Responsibility and Social Roles**

*Overview:* We all have multiple distinct sets of responsibilities at a given time; e.g., those from among: employee, student, daughter/son, parent, scientist, teacher, manager, neighbor, doctor, etc. This week, we consider how occupying those roles can lead to ethical conflicts, and how we can navigate them responsibly.

*Pre-session assignments:*

- Read "How Not To Teach Ethics," by Susan Silbey
- Advocacy Assignment due.

*Optional Supplemental Reading:*

- Excerpts (noted on pdf) from "Role Morality," by Patricia Werhane
- "What is My Role in Changing the System? A New Model of Responsibility for Structural Injustice," by Robin Zheng

## **Week 8 (Week of July 29): Project Workshop**

*Overview:* This week, you workshop your independent project with your peers and TA. Your assigned TA will provide guidelines and expectations for workshopping.



*Pre-session assignment:*

- Prepare to workshop your project. Workshop guidelines are [here](#). Before preparing, review the instructions for the final project in the [Project Guidelines](#).

*Post-session assignment:*

- Provide peer feedback on one or two of your classmates' project presentations (your TA will make the assignments). Include (1) one thing you like about your classmate's project that you think they should keep and/or build on; and (2) either a response to a question they posed to the group during their presentation or one thing you think they should clarify, improve, or delve deeper into.

## **Week 9 (Week of August 5): Ethics at MIT**

*Overview:* This week, we think through some of the complicated and difficult ethical issues arising at our shared academic home, MIT. We bring to bear all the tools we've gained in the course to consider what responsibilities we might have in virtue of benefitting from, and contributing to, MIT, as well as how we might go about fulfilling those responsibilities.

*Pre-session assignments:*

- Watch "[Working at MIT](#)," by Noam Chomsky
- Read "[Why is there so much Saudi money in American universities?](#)" NYT 2019
- Read MIT [philosophers respond](#) to [MIT's decision](#) not to cut financial ties
- Optional: Turn in project draft

*Optional Supplemental Reading:*

- "[Seven Dilemmas](#)," by Angela Chen and Gideon Lichfield
- "[The Problem With Philanthropy](#)," by Sally Haslanger
- "[On the Value of the Intellectual Commons](#)" by James Wilson
- "[On Joi and MIT](#)" by Lessig

## **Week 10 (Week of August 12): Living in Light of Your Values**

*Overview:* Ethics is the study of how to live one's life. Living ethically requires navigating the world around you in responsible ways, as we've discussed throughout

this course. This week, we bridge the individual and community and ask how to live as an ethical global citizen.

*Pre-session assignments:*

- Read “[Conclusion: Now Let’s Multiply](#)” by Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren Klein from Data Feminism;
- [Sign up](#) for a slot at the Showcase (form due August 15).

*Optional Supplemental Reading:*

- “[Introduction: #TravelingWhileTrans, Design Justice, and Escape from the Matrix of Domination](#)” by Sasha Costanza-Chock (from *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, 2020)
- MIT D-Lab [Creative Capacity Building \(CCB\)](#)
- Dean Spade, [Solidarity Not Charity: Mutual Aid for Mobilization and Survival](#)
- Andrew Feeberg, “[Agency and Citizenship in a Technological Society](#)” (talk transcript)

**August 20:** Deadline to submit your independent project ([Project Guidelines](#)) on Canvas and upload your shareable component to **[this folder](#)**. Details on the Canvas assignment page under Week 10.

**September 10:** Fall Showcase

*Overview:* The Fall Showcase is the culminating event for the Experiential Ethics course. It gives you all an opportunity to present the projects you’ve been working on all summer long to members of the broader MIT ethics of technology community. More details about Fall Showcase and how to prepare for it can be found on the assignment page on Canvas and in the [Project Guidelines](#).

**September 22:** Deadline to complete the End of Term Evaluation Form.