

Key Findings and Lessons

Report by

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October 2024

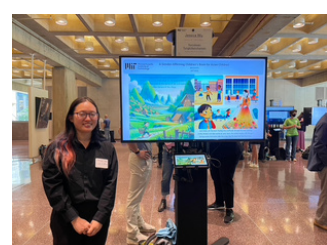
Overview

Experiential Ethics is a collaborative, discussion-based summer course where students gain theoretical and practical tools while reflecting critically on their personal, professional, and political roles. In small-group weekly sessions led by a graduate student section leader, students engage in conversations about their own values as well as the moral, social, and political dimensions of their summer experiences.

In the summer of 2023, in addition to the existing **3-unit** version of the class, we offered an expanded **6-unit** course. The 6-unit version gave students the opportunity to explore theoretical frameworks and ethical tools in more depth through an expanded syllabus and additional assignments. In 2024, we ran two large sections of the 6-unit course; students reported satisfaction with the expanded theoretical content of this course and the extra time the 6-unit course provided for discussion.

Key Findings and Lessons

- Students found their small-group discussions conducive to their learning and growth. Many listed the ability to engage in critical conversations on normative issues from their work and daily lives as their favorite part of the course, and thought of the course's focus on "real life" examples as unique when compared with other ethics classes and classes at MIT more generally.
- Students expressed satisfaction with the final project they completed for the course, as well as the showcase at which they presented their projects. (R: photos from the showcase!)
- Students expressed substantial interest in topics which engaged with both ethical issues and structural, social, or political ones. Among our most popular topics were: Social Structures and Structural Injustice, Justice and Discriminatory Design, and Values in Science and Technology.





COURSE ELEMENTS

- Weekly 60 min (3-unit) or 90 min (6-unit) discussion sessions over 10 weeks. Sections are primarily on Zoom, though some section leaders held in-person events.
- Small groups (4-11 students), facilitated by graduate student section leaders.
- Topics including:
 - Effective Altruism
 - Values in Science and Technology
 - Social Construction, Technology, and Justice
 - Responsibility and Social Roles
 - Ethics at MIT
- Interdisciplinary reading assignments
- Writing assignments, including op-eds
- Final projects (papers, blog posts, podcasts, videos, choose-your-own adventure games, visual art, and more) exploring the intersection of ethics with students' work, research, or career plans.
- Presentations for the wider MIT community at the Fall Showcase.

2024 STUDENTS

- 46 students completed the course: 19 in 24.134, 27 in 24.133
- 14 majors represented
- 48% rising seniors or graduate students, 24% rising third years, 26% rising second years
- 41.2% identifying as women, 52.9% as men
- 30% identifying as Asian, 23% as White, 23% as Hispanic/Latino, 1% as Black or African American

2024 Section Leaders

- 6 graduate student section leaders recruited
- 4 departments and programs represented:
 - Philosophy
 - History, Theory and Criticism of Architecture
 - Science, Technology, and Society (STS)
 - Political Science

This report summarizes key findings from the 2024 midterm and end-of-term student course evaluation surveys and from section leaders' assessments of learning outcomes.

Students’ Assessments of Learning

Outcome Achievement. Since 2023, we have been developing and refining our learning outcomes and rubrics to more clearly gauge success in the course. A majority of students on both the midterm and end-of-term evaluations felt that Experiential Ethics helped them achieve the learning outcomes to a great extent or to a moderate extent (as opposed to to a small extent or not at all).

M = midterm results, 39 total respondents

E = end of term results, 18 total respondents

- Identify and critically evaluate ethical dimensions of real-world situations from current events to your own life (M: 77%, E: 71%)
- Explain philosophical concepts including ethical lenses, stakeholders, value-laden choice points, and structural injustice (M: 77%, E: 76%)
- Communicate and defend your own ethical perspectives on real-world issues to different audiences (M: 77%, E: 65.7%)
- Recognize and critically evaluate the social and political dimensions of your personal decision-making, scientific inquiry, and technology design (M: 77%, E: 71%)
- Advocate for a real-world ethical decision facing a community you participate in (M: 79%, E: 71%)

Section Leaders’ Assessments of Learning

Outcome Achievement. We asked section leaders to evaluate students’ achievement of our learning outcomes throughout the course. Section leaders assessed student achievement on a four-point scale (4 = Excellent, 3 = Good, 2 = Fair, 1 = Poor, 0 = No evidence). By the end of the course, **100%** of students were assessed by their section leaders as having demonstrated either excellent or good achievement of learning outcomes.*

- Ethical dimensions: Identify and critically evaluate ethical dimensions of real-world situations from current events to their own lives (Excellent: 90%, Good: 10%)
- Concepts: Explain philosophical concepts including ethical lenses, stakeholders, value-laden choice points, and structural injustice (Excellent: 90%, Good: 10%)
- Communication: Communicate and defend their own ethical perspectives on real-world issues to different audiences (55% Excellent, 45% Good)
- Social and political dimensions: Recognize the social and political dimensions of their personal decision-making, scientific inquiry, and technology design (95% Excellent, 5% Good)
- Advocacy: Advocate for a real-world ethical decision facing a community they participate in (86% Excellent, 14% Good)

*Summary of data from 3-unit classes

Knowledge. At the end of the course, **88.9%** of students said their knowledge of ethics and ability to engage with ethics **increased**.

Interest. **94.1%** of students said they envision **learning more and engaging with ethics further** after the course has concluded.

- 76.5% of students said they envision engaging in conversations about ethics with friends and classmates.
- 58.8% of students said they envision continuing to learn about ethics independently.
- 35.5% of students said they envision taking another ethics class.
- 29.4% of students said they envision pursuing extracurricular or volunteer opportunities in ethics.

Satisfaction. Students' average overall satisfaction with their learning experience was **7.7/10** (on a scale from 1 to 10).

"I really liked the focus on ethics of science and technology, and particularly how it can be applied to real-world scenarios we might face in the future. I also think some of the readings and discussions were really valuable in forcing me to question assumptions and reframe the way I thought about how to address big problems, which is super important."

Course topics. The majority of students were satisfied or very satisfied with course content, including:

- Responsibility and social roles (94%)
- Justice and discriminatory design (89%)
- Project workshop (89%)
- Ethical lenses (94%)
- Values in science and technology (94%)
- Social structures and structural injustice (94%)

"The discussion section was a great space to learn and talk about ethics. I felt ethics isn't covered very often and the class used a lot of real world examples to make the topics applicable."

Course elements. Most students were satisfied or very satisfied with the class elements:

- Final project (94%)
- Weekly discussions (83%)
- Assigned readings and videos (82%)
- Writing assignments (77%)

Many students found the **weekly discussion sessions** and **final projects** to be the best parts of the course.

"I really enjoyed the discussions with my class and my section leader. I learned a lot from everyone else and got to express thoughts and opinions that I didn't even know I had."

"I enjoyed the engaging material and the open discussions we were able to have through it."

"I liked the creativity allowed for the final project."

Instruction. Students felt very positively about their section leaders for the course. Many agreed or strongly agreed that their section leaders:

- Stimulated their interest in the course topics (83%).
- Displayed thorough knowledge of the subject material (88%).
- Supported their learning (88%).
- Gave adequate feedback about their progress during the course (94%).

“[My section leader] created a very inclusive environment and is overall a very welcoming persona, and I feel like everyone in the class generally subscribes to a similar mindset.”

Final Project and Fall Showcase. Nearly all students (80-100%) agreed or strongly agreed that:

- The workload for the final project was reasonable (83%)
- They had enough support to complete their project (94%)
- They were able to apply skills learned in class to their project (94%).
- Participating in the Fall Showcase contributed positively to their learning (83%)

Course Expansion. In 2023, the 3-unit version was required for 6A students and the 6-unit version fulfilled a GEL elective. In 2024, the 3-unit version was also required for the MIT Office of Sustainability & PKG Boston Summer of Service programs

The vast majority of students (89%) would recommend the course to others.

“I would recommend this class because of the way it encourages you to think in new ways, and because of the interesting and educational discussions it facilitates.”

We received detailed feedback from both students and S that will allow us to improve Experiential Ethics even more in future years.

2024 alums would recommend Experiential Ethics to:

“[T]here's not anyone I wouldn't recommend this class to.”

“I would recommend it to anyone who seems interested, though people who are doing a UROP or similar work that they can connect it to would be the ideal target.”

“Students doing UROPs”

“[A]nyone, for sure first years, students who are working at big tech/pharma companies, people in any major”

“UROPs & MEng”

“Everyone haha”

CONTACT INFORMATION

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