

EXPERIENTIAL ETHICS 2023

Key Findings and Lessons

Report by

Sonia Maria Pavel and Eliza Wells

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100%
of students report that
Experiential Ethics
improved their ability to:

**identify and critically
evaluate ethical
dimensions of real-
world situations**

**interpret ethical
arguments in different
contexts**

**advocate for a real-
world ethical decision
facing a community
they participate in**

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 Teaching Fellow (TF), 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.

Key Findings and Lessons

- Students found their small-group discussions conducive to their learning and growth. The majority of students listed the ability to engage in critical conversations on normative issues from their work and daily lives as their favorite part of the course.
- There is significant interest in the 6-unit version; more than half of all students chose that version. The 6-unit version fulfills a GEL requirement, and students expressed interest in other opportunities to expand Experiential Ethics and integrate it into MIT programs.
- Students expressed satisfaction with the expanded theoretical content in the 6-unit version.



COURSE ELEMENTS

- Weekly 60 min (3-unit) or 90 min (6-unit) discussion sessions over 10 weeks. Sections are primarily on Zoom, but we offered our first in-person section in 2023.
- Small groups (4-8 students), facilitated by graduate student Teaching Fellows.
- Topics including:
 - Values in Science and Technology
 - Social Construction, Technology, and Justice
 - Responsibility and Social Roles
 - Ethics at MIT
- Virtual field trips with prominent activists and professionals.
- 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.

2023 STUDENTS

- 43 students completed the course
- 15 majors represented
- 58% rising seniors or graduate students, 18% rising third years, 24% rising second years
- 70% identifying as women, 18% as men, 12% preferring not to say
- 53% identifying as Asian, 30% as White, 12% as Black or African American.

2023 TEACHING FELLOWS

- 6 graduate student teaching fellows recruited
- 5 departments and programs represented:
 - Philosophy
 - Media Arts & Sciences
 - History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS)
 - Political Science
 - Sloan School of Management

This report summarizes key findings from the 2023 midterm and end-of-term student course evaluation surveys and from Teaching Fellows' assessments of learning outcomes.

Assessment of Learning. In 2023, we developed **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, 37 total respondents

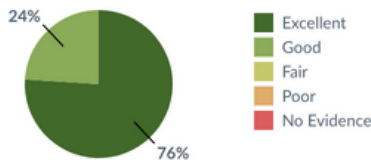
E = end of term results, 17 total respondents

- Identify your personal values and challenges you might face, such as in the workplace (M: 86.5%, E: 86.7%)
- Identify and critically evaluate ethical dimensions of real-world situations from current events to your own life (M: 94.6%, E: 94.1%)
- Explain philosophical concepts including ethical lenses, stakeholders, value-laden choice points, and structural injustice (M: 89.2%, E: 70%)
- Communicate and defend your own ethical perspectives on real-world issues to different audiences (M: 81.1%, E: 70%)
- Recognize and critically evaluate the social and political dimensions of your personal decision-making, scientific inquiry, and technology design (M: 94.6%, E: 86.7%)
- Advocate for a real-world ethical decision facing a community you participate in (M: 81.1%, E: 86.7%)

Teaching Fellows' Assessments of Learning Outcomes

Advocacy

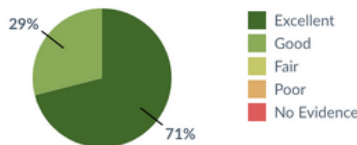
Advocate for a real-world ethical decision facing a community you participate in



6-unit aggregate data

Ethical Dimensions

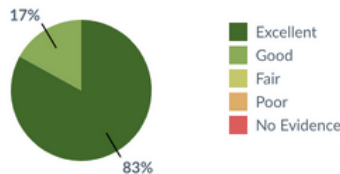
Identify and critically evaluate ethical dimensions of real-world situations from current events to their own lives



6-unit aggregate data

Social & Political Dimensions

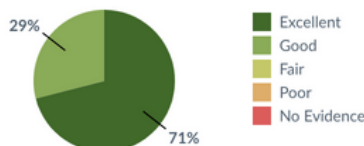
Recognize the social and political dimensions of their personal decision-making, scientific inquiry, and technology design



3-unit aggregate data

Communication

Communicate and defend their own ethical perspectives on real-world issues to different audiences



6-unit aggregate data

Knowledge. At the end of the course, 76.5% 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 7.35/10 (on a scale from 1 to 10). No students rated their satisfaction with the course below 5.

“I enjoyed that I got to relate what we were learning to my internship over the summer. When I took [another ethics class] it felt very removed from my day to day life, so I appreciated the personal aspect of it and us being able to present on what we were doing for the summer.”

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

- Living in light of your values (82.35%)
- Social construction, technology, and justice (82.35%)
- Project workshop (82.35%)
- Ethical lenses (82.35%)
- Values in science and technology (70.58%)
- Social structures and structural injustice (70.58%)

“I really enjoyed the opportunity to discuss these issues that I learned about in my other philosophy classes in a more practical context.”

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

- Final project (94%)
- Weekly discussions (88.23%)
- Assigned readings and videos (82.35%)
- Writing assignments (70.58%)

Many students found the **weekly discussion sessions** to be the most enjoyable feature of the course.

“My course leader [...] did a spectacular job of getting us interested in the course material and ran the course very well.”

“We have a very welcoming and inclusive class environment.”

“I loved the discussions that we had in the classroom & how we were able to chime in while listening to others.”

Instruction. Nearly all students (94-100%) agreed or strongly agreed that their TF:

- Stimulated their interest in the course topics (100%).
- Displayed thorough knowledge of the subject material (94.11%).
- Supported their learning (94.11%).
- Gave adequate feedback about their progress during the course (100%).

“The best! One of the best taught classes I've experienced at MIT.”

Final Project and Fall Showcase. Most students agreed or strongly agreed that:

- The workload for the final project was reasonable (88.23%).
- They had enough support to complete their project (94.11%).
- They were able to apply skills learned in class to their project (82.35%).
- Participating in the Fall Showcase contributed positively to their learning (76.47%) and increased their sense of community (76.47%).

Course Expansion. In 2023, the 3-unit version was required for 6A students and the 6-unit version fulfilled a GEL elective. 7 of 9 6A students reported that Experiential Ethics contributes positively to the 6A program.

The majority of students (76.5%) would recommend the course to others and agreed that it should be expanded or made into a requirement for more programs to reach more MIT students.

“If it is possible to add an ethics requirement to MIT's curriculum I think this could be a great way to fulfill such a requirement. This class along with past classes I have taken in similar topics has made me realize just how important it is for engineers and scientists to think about the impacts and social implications of our work.”

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

2023 alums would recommend Experiential Ethics to:

“Everyone, it's very insightful”

“Students that are working on projects that engage with an ethical issue”

“PKG Students, also any 6-4 majors”

“First years!”

“Students doing UROPs, particularly in a field relating to policy or governance.”

“All MIT undergrads”

CONTACT INFORMATION

2023 Course Leaders

Marion Boulicault, Distinguished Postdoctoral Scholar in Ethics & Technology at the MIT Schwarzman College of Computing
(marionb@mit.edu)

Eliza Wells, PhD Candidate, MIT Philosophy (elizaw@mit.edu)

Sonia Maria Pavel, PhD Candidate, MIT Philosophy (smpavel@mit.edu)

MIT Office of Experiential Learning (OEL)

Kate Trimble, Senior Associate Dean and Director, MIT Office of Experiential Learning (ktrimble@mit.edu)

Kate Weishaar, Senior Program Coordinator, MIT Office of Experiential Learning (katew@mit.edu)
