EXPERIENTIAL ETHICS 2021

Key Findings and Lessons

Report by

Sophie Gibert and Marion Boulicault

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96%
Say they would recommend the course to others

8.4/10
Average overall satisfaction

86%
Say their knowledge of ethics and ability to engage with ethics has increased

91%
Say we should expand the course to reach more students.

"Experiential Ethics is crucial for anyone majoring in a technical field and beyond."
- Experiential Ethics Student

Overview

24.133 Experiential Ethics is a 3-unit class that can be taken by itself or alongside popular summer experiential learning programs. It introduces MIT students to the fast-changing, real-time ethical landscape in industry, science, and technology while developing important interpersonal, professional, and leadership competencies along the way.

Experiential Ethics students participate in weekly discussion sessions in small groups of 3-7 students, facilitated by a graduate student Teaching Fellow (TF). In 2021, the course had 28 students and 6 TFs. Additional information about the course and the course syllabus are available.

This report summarizes key findings from the 2021 end-of-term student course evaluation survey (response rate = 79%, n=22).

Take-Aways

- Students love small-group, discussion-based learning, facilitated by TFs.
- Students are happy with the material and want to go into more depth.
- Virtual learning takes a toll. Students are yearning for more social connection.
- Students support expanding the course to more MIT students and offering both 3-unit and 6-unit versions.

Experiential Ethics Students presenting at EthicsFest (Fall 2021)

BACKGROUND

Course components.
- Weekly hour-long discussion sessions for a total of 10 weeks
- Small groups (3-7 students), facilitated by TFs
- Topics including:
  - *Ethical Lenses*
  - *Frameworks for Role Conflicts*
  - *Discriminatory Design*
  - *Ethics at MIT*
- Virtual field trips with prominent thinkers and activists
- Short assignments and readings
- Final projects (papers, blog posts, podcasts, videos, art exhibitions, and more) exploring the intersection of ethics with students' work, research, or career plans
- Presentations for the wider MIT community at EthicsFest
- See the syllabus for more information

Students.
- 28 students recruited
- 13 majors represented
- Half of students representing EECS
- 50% rising second years, 14% rising third years, 36% rising seniors or above
- 64% identifying as women, 27% as men, 9% preferring not to say
- 32% identifying as White, 50% as Chinese (non-exclusive categories)

Teaching Fellows.
- 6 Teaching Fellows recruited
- 5 departments and programs represented:
  - *Philosophy*
  - *Electrical Engineering and Computer Science*
  - *History, Anthropology, and Science, Technology, and Society (HASTS)*
  - *Integrated Design and Management*
  - *Technology and Policy Program*

KEY FINDINGS

### Students Knowledge and Interest

Knowledge.
- 86% of students said their knowledge of ethics and ability to engage with ethics increased. Only three students said it stayed the same.

Interest.
- 73% of students said their interest in ethics increased.
- 86% of students said they envision learning more about ethics independently and having conversations about ethics with peers.
- 55% of students said they envision pursuing extracurricular or volunteer opportunities in ethics.
- 46% of students said they envision taking another ethics class.

Student Satisfaction

- Students' average overall satisfaction with their learning experiences was 8.4/10. All students rated their satisfaction within the 7-10 range.

Overall, on a scale of 1-10 how satisfied are you with your learning experience in Experiential Ethics?
n=22
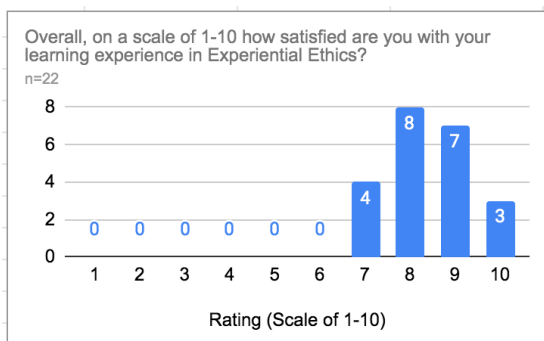
Course topics. The vast majority of students were satisfied or very satisfied with the course topics (range 77-100%).

- Students were most satisfied with:
  - Final project presentations (100%)
  - Discriminatory design (95%)
  - Ethical lenses (91%)
  - Frameworks for role conflicts (91%)
  - Value-ladenness of technology (91%)

Course elements. Most students were satisfied or very satisfied with the class elements (range 55-95%).

- Students were most satisfied with:
  - Weekly discussions (95%)
  - Guiding question assignments (95%)
  - Assigned readings and videos (95%)
  - Final project (91%)

Most students found the weekly discussion sessions to be the most enjoyable feature of the course. They wrote:

- *"I enjoyed having a safe environment for me to share my own personal views and thoughts with my small group."*

- *"I loved the supportive and creative discussion environment fostered by my TF and peers. I felt comfortable to share my thoughts at all times, and the conversations really expanded my thinking and encouraged me to dig deeper into the topics."*

- *"I liked the discussion component best since we had the freedom to explore and share our ideas."*

KEY FINDINGS

Student Feedback on Instruction

Nearly all students (95-100%) agreed or strongly agreed that their TF:

- Stimulated their interest in the course topics (95%).
- Displayed thorough knowledge of the subject material (100%).
- Supported their learning (100%).
- Gave adequate feedback about their progress during the course (100%).

Student Feedback on the Final Project and EthicsFest

Most students (82-91%) agreed or strongly agreed that:

- The workload for the final project was reasonable (91%).
- They had enough support to complete their project (82%).
- They were able to apply skills learned in class to their project (82%).
- The project helped them reflect on how ethics applies to their field of study or expected career path (91%).

Most students agreed or strongly agreed that participating in EthicsFest contributed positively to their learning (77%) and increased their sense of community (86%). Students wrote:

- *"It was so amazing to meet my classmates in person [at EthicsFest], present my project to others, and see other people's projects!"*

- *"Thank you for organizing EthicsFest -- it was a pleasure to present there!"*

Student Ideas About Course Expansion

96% of students said they would recommend the course to others.

The vast majority of students (91%) thought Experiential Ethics should be expanded to reach more MIT students.

- Most popular route: Offer the course as one of several options for fulfilling a degree or certificate program requirement (50% supported).

Most students (55%) thought we should offer 3-unit and 6-unit versions of the course that students can choose between.

Most students thought the workload this year was appropriate for a 3-unit class.

Additional Testimonials

- *"[I would recommend this course to] anyone who has some free time during their summer... I think it's really good for first years and the like, since they are so new and would get to see through an ethical lens right at the beginning of their MIT experience."*

- *"It was so enlightening to hear about the experiences of the guest speakers [at the field trip] and to put the knowledge we acquired in class into action!"*

- *"I think Experiential Ethics is crucial for anyone majoring in a technical field and beyond."*

CONTACT INFORMATION

2021 Course Leaders

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

Sophie Gibert, PhD Candidate, MIT Philosophy (sgibert@mit.edu)

James Magarian, Lecturer and Program Academic Coordinator, Gordon-MIT Engineering Leadership Program (magarian@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, First-Year Experience Coordinator, Office of the Vice Chancellor at MIT (katew@mit.edu)