

Experiential Ethics: 24.133

Summer, 2022

Course Leaders

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Course description

Welcome to Experiential Ethics! Through weekly, hour-long (60 minute) discussion groups of ~5 students, 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 weekly 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.

Grading and assessment

For the class to be student-driven, you have to be prepared to contribute to each session, which means reading, watching, or listening to the short, mandatory weekly assignments.

- Attendance and participation 40%
- Short weekly assignments 20%
- 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](#). For each unexcused day that an assignment is late, its grade drops by a third of a letter (e.g., A to A-).

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.

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. You can also participate through posting on your discussion group's Slack channel. Slack norms will be set by your group and TF.

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.

If you have concerns

If you have concerns with anything about the class for any reason, please contact your TF, the course leaders, or write through [this anonymous form](#). (You can also contact the [Ombuds Office](#).) Everyone in the class deserves to feel that they're in a positive and safe environment, and no issue is too small to raise.

Graduate Teaching Fellows

Each discussion group will be assigned a Graduate Teaching Fellow (TF). You will receive your TF assignment and discussion group time approximately one week before classes start.

- Javier Agüera Reneses, IDM, aguera@mit.edu
- Sonia Pavel, Philosophy, smpavel@mit.edu
- Alex Reiss-Sorokin, HASTS, rsalex@mit.edu
- Amelia Seabold, DUSP, aseabold@mit.edu
- Sarah Simon, DUSP, sarahsim@mit.edu
- Caroline White-Nockleby, HASTS, cwn@mit.edu
- Nicole Wilson, Political Science, newilson@mit.edu

Details subject to change

Some details of the syllabus may change over the course of the term, but the basic workload will remain the same. We will notify you if and when anything changes.

Accessing Readings

Difficult-to-access course readings and other course materials can be found on the [shared drive](#). Please contact your TF if you have trouble accessing anything.

Data Privacy

We want you to have ownership over your data and the assignments for the class. After the class is over, the Experiential Ethics team will delete the assignments you've submitted, unless you opt in to share them going forward.

Overview of assignments

As noted in the "Grading and Assessment" section above, there are two kinds of assignments for this class: weekly assignments, and an independent project.

- **Weekly assignments:**
 - *Pre-session assignments:* Each week, you will complete short pre-session assignments. All assignments are detailed in the course schedule below. Pre-session assignments are due *24 hours before the start time of that week's discussion session*.

- *Post-session assignments:* Most weeks, you will submit a short post-session assignment to your TF. The purpose of the post-session assignment is to help you connect that week’s class material to your own experience and/or your independent project. Post-session assignments are due *48 hours after the end-time of that week’s discussion session*.
- **Independent project:** Your project for this class is highly flexible. We will provide you with certain options—write an 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](#).

Key Dates (details below)

<i>Week 5 (Week of July 4)</i>	Deadline to meet with your TF to discuss project idea
<i>Week 5 (Week of July 4)</i>	Deadline to complete the Midterm Evaluation Form
<i>Week 6 (Week of July 11)</i>	Deadline to submit your project proposal
<i>Weeks 7-8 (Dates TBD)</i>	Field Trip Sessions (mandatory; attend one)
<i>Week 9 (Week of August 1)</i>	Workshop your project with your classmates and TF
<i>Sunday, August 21</i>	Deadline to submit your project to your TF and upload your shareable component for Fall Showcase
<i>Wednesday, September 14</i>	Present your project at Fall Showcase (In person)
<i>Wednesday, September 28</i>	Deadline to complete the End of Term Evaluation Form

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 6): Introduction

Pre-session assignment:

- Download and complete the [Personal Values Worksheet](#); submit to your TF

Post-session assignments: None this week!

Week 2 (Week of June 13*) Ethical Questions and Ethical Lenses

*If your session meets on Sundays, it will be rescheduled this week. Consult your TF for details.

Overview: This week, we begin diving into ethics. What is ethics? How can we go about answering ethical questions and handling ethical problems? We introduce a tool, the *ethical lenses*, to help us start thinking through real-life ethical challenges.

Pre-session assignments:

- Read [“The IRS Should Stop Using Facial Recognition,”](#) by Joy Buolamwini
- Download and complete the [Ethical Questions Assignment](#); submit to your TF

Post-session assignment:

- Choose one ethical lens and apply it to your summer experience (internship, research, job, field of study, potential project topic, future career, etc.). How does this exercise change the way you approach your experience? (100-250 words, submitted to your TF)

OPTIONAL supplemental reading:

- [“Ten Arguments Against Moral Objectivity,”](#) by Russ Shafer-Landau

Week 3 (Week of June 20) Decision-Making With Stakeholders in Mind

*If your session meets on Mondays, it will be rescheduled this week. Consult your TF for details.

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
- *Dockless scooters:* [“Electric Scooters are Causing Havok. This Man Is Shrugging It Off.”](#) by Nellie Bowles and David Streitfeld
- *Contact tracing apps:* [“For States’ COVID Contact Tracing Apps, Privacy Tops Utility”](#) by Lindsey Van Ness
- Complete the [Envisioning Futures Assignment](#)

Post-session assignment:

- Choose one step of the Ethics Protocol and apply it to your summer experience (internship, research, job, field of study, potential project topic, future career, etc.). How does asking this exercise change the way you approach your experience? (100-250 words, submitted to your TF)

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

Week 4 (Week of June 27): Science, Technology, and Justice

Overview: Here, we start looking at the broader, societal implications of our work. Specifically, we delve into the relationship between science, technology, and justice. How can science and 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
- Read [“Missed Connections: What Search Engines Say About Women”](#) by Safiya Umoja Noble
- Submit to your TF *two discussion questions* based on the video and reading. Your discussion questions should be ones you’d like to discuss in class with your peers. They should be *generative* (i.e., aimed at generating ideas, not yes/no questions), and at least one should be a *normative* question.

Post-session assignment:

- Reflect on your summer experience (internship, research, job, field of study, potential project topic, future career, etc.) in light of this week’s discussion. How did the discussion change how you think about your experience? (100-250 words, submitted to your TF)

*If you're stuck, you might consider: What are the broader societal implications of your experience? How might the activity you're engaged in worsen or help alleviate injustice in the world? Who's at the table when big decisions are made at your workplace/lab/etc., and who isn't?

OPTIONAL supplemental reading:

- ["Assessing Risk, Automating Racism."](#) by Ruha Benjamin (in *Science*)
- ["Big Data's Disparate Impact,"](#) by Solon Barocas and Andrew Selbst

Week 5 (Week of July 4*): Can Technology Be Value-Neutral?

*If your session meets on Mondays, it will be rescheduled this week. Consult your TF for details.

Overview: Building on our Week 4 discussion, we consider the question of whether technology can ever be "value-neutral." Can a technology itself ever be good or bad, or is it always a matter of how people use it? If technology were value-neutral, would that absolve us of responsibility for its bad effects?

Pre-session assignments:

- Watch ["Summary of 'Do Artifacts Have Politics?' by Langdon Winner"](#) by Tom Gorichanaz
- Meet with your TF (10-15 min) to discuss your independent project (Details about the project can be found in the [Project Guidelines](#))
- Complete the [Midterm Evaluation Form](#) and notify your TF that you've completed it

Post-session assignments:

- Reflect on your summer experience in light of this week's discussion. How did the discussion change how you think about your experience? (100-200 words, submitted to your TF)

OPTIONAL supplemental reading:

- ["Technologies as Forms of Life"](#) by Langdon Winner
- ["Do Artifacts Have Politics?"](#) by Langdon Winner

Week 6 (Week of July 11) Case Study

Overview: This week, we bring to bear the tools and concepts explored in earlier class sessions in discussing a case study. The case study is created by the [Social and Ethical](#)

[Responsibilities of Computing](#) group (SERC), a cross-cutting organization within the MIT Schwarzman College of Computing that is dedicated to facilitating the development of ethical habits in those who design and create technologies.

Pre-session assignments:

- Read one of the following SERC case studies (whichever corresponds to the topic your group selected last week)
 - [“The Puzzle of the Missing Robots,”](#) by Suzanne Berger and Benjamin Armstrong
 - [“Algorithmic Redistricting and Black Representation in US Elections,”](#) by Zachary Schutzman
- Submit *one discussion question* about the case study you read to your TF. Your question should be one you’d like to discuss in class with your peers and should be *generative* (i.e., aimed at generating ideas, not yes/no questions).
- Submit your independent project proposal to your TF (Details about the proposal can be found in the [Project Guidelines](#))

Post-session assignments: None this week!

Week 7 (Week of July 18): 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
- Read excerpts from [“Self-Interests, Roles, and Some Limits to Role Morality,”](#) by Patricia Werhane (221-223, 226-230, 234-235, 238-239)
- Complete the field trip assignment corresponding to the field trip session you signed up for.
 - **This assignment is due 3 days before the time of the field trip session, which may occur before or after your discussion session.**
 - [Session 1 Field Trip Assignment](#)
 - [Session 2 Field Trip Assignment](#)

Post-session assignments:

- Think of 3-5 roles that you are occupying this summer (e.g. student, intern, daughter). How are you currently navigating those different roles, including

conflicts that arise within or between them? How might you do so differently? (100-250 words, submitted to your TF)

OR if your independent project is not closely related to your summer experience

- Think of 3-5 different roles that are involved in the area that you are exploring in your independent project. How do those roles interact with each other? What ethical concerns are raised by the expectations for occupants in those roles? (100-250 words, submitted to your TF)

Week 8 (Week of July 25): 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 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:

- ["Working at MIT,"](#) by Noam Chomsky
- ["On Joi and MIT,"](#) by Lessig
- Submit *one discussion question* about the readings to your TF. Your question should be one you'd like to discuss in class with your peers and should be *generative* (i.e., aimed at generating ideas, not yes/no questions).

Post-session assignment:

- How did today's discussion affect the way you think about your summer experience? How did it affect how you think of your role as an MIT student? Do you see any connections between this week's material and the topic you are exploring in your independent project? (100-250 words, submitted to your TF)

OPTIONAL supplemental readings:

- ["Response to Professor Lester's Report on MIT's Involvement with Saudi Arabia,"](#) by MIT Philosophers
- ["Seven Dilemmas,"](#) by Angela Chen and Gideon Lichfield
- ["The Problem With Philanthropy,"](#) by Sally Haslanger

Week 9 (Week of August 1) Project Workshop

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

Pre-session assignment:

- Prepare to workshop your project. Before preparing, review the [Workshop Guidelines](#).

Post-session assignment:

- For today's post-session assignment, send 1-2 of your classmates some feedback on their project via Slack or email. *Your TF will pair you with 1-2 classmates and specify the platform to use.* 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. (150-200 word response per classmate, submitted both to your TF and directly to the relevant classmate)

Week 10 (Week of August 10) 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 turn back to the individual and ask how to live in ways that are responsive to your personal values.

Pre-session assignments:

- Return to the [Personal Values Worksheet](#) you completed in Week 1. Have your answers to any of the questions changed? Think of one additional way you can live by your values more completely. (100-250 word response, submitted to your discussion group's Slack channel)

Post-session assignment:

- How has your understanding of ethics changed in this course? Has this impacted how you understand your personal values? (100-250 words, submitted to your TF)

August 21: Deadline to submit your independent project to your TF and upload your shareable component to [this folder](#) (11:59 p.m. ET)

September 14: Fall Showcase (4-6 p.m. ET in person)

Overview: 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 in the [Project Guidelines](#).

September 28: Deadline to complete the End of Term Evaluation Form (link to come) (11:59 p.m. ET) and notify your TF that you've completed it

Other required class sessions

Field Trip (Two options available during Weeks 7-8; Exact dates TBD)

Additional optional events

We will host an (optional) on-campus dinner social for folks who are in town on **Friday, August 12:** 6:00 p.m., Building 32D, 8th Floor Lounge

- [RSVP here](#) by Friday, August 5