

TEACHING WITH SIMULATIONS

RATIONALE FOR SIMULATION-BASED LEARNING

The purpose of the simulation is to provide an immersive learning experience in which students grapple with the real-world complexities of ethical decision-making. While classical case studies provide some glimpse into real-world scenarios, students are still able to maintain distance from the situation, telling themselves “I would have chosen differently.” In a simulation, by contrast, students are forced to make real choices (despite the fictional scenarios) and to recognize the consequences of those decisions. Working in groups, the students gain experience deliberating across values and perspectives, and encounter firsthand the challenges of reaching consensus. Uncertainty adds another layer in mimicking real-world conditions; a roll of the dice is combined with the students’ final choice to dictate the consequence of their decision.

Be sure to schedule plenty of time for the simulation debrief (30 minutes at minimum). The debrief is incredibly important for achieving the learning objectives of the simulation and so it should not be rushed. It is an opportunity to take a deeper dive into the ethical concepts highlighted by the simulation, and other concepts such as group dynamics and moral psychology. The debrief should include discussion questions that cover three major themes: i) student self-reflection on their own ethical approaches, ii) the decision-making process itself and tensions that may have come up in their groups, iii) salient ethical topics that the scenarios brought up. Some debrief considerations will be specific to the content of the scenarios, while others will attend to more general ethical concepts.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SIMULATION

- It is important to make clear that the students should be playing themselves in the situations the scenario puts them in. This way students can recognize the decisions they make as their own, and ones for which they feel responsible.
- You don’t want students to read ahead and know where the simulation is going, so be sure to hand out each scenario right before you do that scenario.
- For a simulation to be successful, it is important that students stay immersed in their roles throughout the simulation. Open class discussions should be discouraged between each scenario and saved for the debrief.
- If dice are used in a simulation to decide outcomes, make it clear that the dice are meant to represent uncertainty, not to make this a “game”. If you are running the simulation in person, have each group nominate a group member to roll the dice to determine the consequences of their decision. This reveals interesting group dynamics. (E.g., how the group reacts to the dice roller).
- Encourage the students to jot down their thoughts, feelings and reflections throughout the simulation. This will come in handy for when you hold the debrief.