

COMMENTARY

Instilling ethics in I-O: The responsibility of graduate training programs

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In Watts and colleagues' (2022) focal article, the authors demonstrate the relevance of the APA Ethics Code for the field of I-O psychology, while also highlighting some key deficiencies, including those pertaining to I-O trainees; "The code is silent regarding its relevance to students" (Watts et al., 2022, pg. 25). In this statement, the authors were suggesting that a revised Ethics Code should explicitly clarify the extent to which it applies to students and should include more references to ethical situations students may encounter (e.g., academic integrity). We extend this statement to also point out the deficiency in the code regarding how to properly train graduate students in ethics. A relevant and revised Ethics Code can only help guide I-O psychologists if they have proper education and training around it. Accordingly, we respond to two of the questions posed by Watts and colleagues (i.e., questions #3 and #6).

Who is ultimately responsible for ensuring that I-O psychologists are sufficiently educated about navigating ethical dilemmas (e.g., APA, SIOP, training programs, supervisors, employers)?

In response to this question, we argue that the onus of responsibility falls, in large part, on I-O training programs. Others within and outside of psychology have taken a similar stance that educational institutions have a responsibility to instill and develop students' values around ethics (e.g., Beever et al., 2021; Plante, 2016), and scholars have identified effective strategies for teaching students about ethics (e.g., Bravin et al., 2020; Fisher et al., 2009; Giubilini et al., 2016; Watts et al., 2017). Organizations such as SIOP and APA are responsible for setting standards, both for ethics and for education (e.g., the first competency in SIOP's Guidelines for Education and Training in I-O Psychology is "ethical, legal, diversity, and international issues"; SIOP, 2017). However, it would be difficult for SIOP or APA to be responsible for the on-the-ground education around ethics, beyond perhaps developing curricula. Moreover, it would be irresponsible and challenging (if not impossible) to expect supervisors or employers to be responsible for sufficiently educating I-O psychologists about ethics (e.g., Do supervisors have a foundational understanding of ethics that they can teach their employees? Who would hold all supervisors accountable for training ethics? When in the employee lifecycle would ethics be incorporated?). Although we recognize that professional organizations (APA, SIOP), supervisors, and employers can contribute to this effort, we focus specifically on the critical role of I-O graduate programs in training students on ethics.

Graduate training programs are particularly responsible for instilling ethics into the field through future I-O psychologists. The importance of training I-O graduate students on ethics has been acknowledged previously (e.g., Naidoo, 2020; Payne et al., 2015), and many I-O graduate

students are members of APA and/or SIOP and thus agree to adhere to the APA Ethics Code. We view graduate school as an opportune time for I-O students to develop an understanding of the APA Ethics Code, as well as practical skills for addressing and handling ethical dilemmas that may arise in their graduate and professional careers. It is important to learn ethics simultaneously with foundational I-O psychology content knowledge and methods. Incorporating ethics training during graduate school can signal that ethics are inextricable from the work we do. We believe that ethics are best learned through multiple touch points with others in the field, with frequent and varied teachable moments (which we discuss in further detail below).

How can I-O psychology training programs and professional organizations better prepare students to navigate modern ethical dilemmas?

Next, we provide an in-depth response to this question and focus specifically on what training programs can do. We review the extent to which ethics training occurs in I-O graduate training programs, before offering specific tactics for how I-O graduate programs can contribute to students' knowledge and skills related to identifying and resolving ethical dilemmas.

Ethics in I-O graduate training

In 2021, we co-wrote a TIP article on the current state of I-O graduate training on ethics. After surveying I-O program directors across masters and doctoral programs internationally, we learned that although most program directors believe their program values graduate training in ethics (particularly related to research), most programs (56%) do not have specific courses on ethics and opt to discuss ethics as a unit within separate courses (Brossoit et al., 2021). Despite using varied methods to teach ethics (e.g., coursework, conversations in lab or advising meetings), the perceived effectiveness of ethics training is questionable. Most program directors perceived the graduates of their program as sufficiently prepared to address ethical issues in research (69%), but only about half perceived graduates as sufficiently prepared to address ethical issues in consulting/applied work (58%) and internships (50%), and less than half perceived graduates as sufficiently prepared to address ethical issues in advising/mentoring (39%) and teaching (28%) (Brossoit et al., 2021). We suggest that I-O training programs develop more intentional, strategic, and effective approaches to teach graduate students about ethics.

How to teach I-O graduate students about ethics

We provide specific ideas for how I-O graduate programs can incorporate ethics-related training and present several questions to prompt critical thinking surrounding ethics in core areas of I-O psychology (i.e., research, teaching, practice, and professional development). Our goal is to provide I-O graduate programs with a menu of ideas for how they can more intentionally train graduate students on ethics, and ultimately foster program cultures that value ethical processes and decision-making.

Graduate student training: suggestions for I-O graduate programs

- Offer graduate courses specific to ethics in I-O. Ethics-related coursework should be offered early-on in graduate training programs to signal its importance (Brossoit et al., 2021). SIOP's Committee for the Advancement of Professional Ethics (CAPE) offers a host of resources that can be used in ethics-specific courses, including example syllabi and course assignments.

- Include specific units related to ethics in other I-O coursework (e.g., history of why the IRB was developed, decolonizing methodologies, and/or QuantCrit perspectives in research methods and statistics courses).
- Explicitly include ethics in class assignments (e.g., discussion of ethical considerations and potential unintended consequences in research proposal assignments).
- Review case studies in courses or lab meetings to help students identify and consider how they could address ethical dilemmas. Include role-play activities for students to practice addressing ethical dilemmas and receiving feedback on their approach (e.g., see CAPE's "Dilemma Deck"; Lefkowitz, 2021; Lowman, 2006).
- Provide space to debrief, discuss, and process ethical dilemmas that have occurred (e.g., in professional development and practicum courses and/or in advising and lab meetings).
- Encourage students to bring ethical dilemmas that arise (e.g., breach of confidentiality in a research project/IRB violation; identification of an error in data analysis) promptly and directly to their advisors or other faculty mentors. Faculty members should approach these situations developmentally, rather than punitively, to reinforce the students' integrity.
- Invite guest speakers who can discuss their experiences with ethical dilemmas in their research, teaching, and/or applied roles.
- Provide opportunities for I-O faculty members to further develop their understanding of ethics. One of the reasons I-O programs do not have a course on ethics is perceived "lack of faculty expertise/qualifications to teach a course on ethics" (Brossoit et al., 2021). Consequently, as more students take ethics courses, more incoming I-O faculty members will have these qualifications to teach future courses (or serve as role models/mentors in applied settings).
- Recognize that I-O faculty members serve as role models in how they address ethical dilemmas (Bravin et al., 2020).
- Ask students during milestone meetings (e.g., for theses or dissertations) about the ethical implications of their project, or to reflect on any ethical dilemmas they encountered as they completed their project.
- Seek out and share ethics-related resources with students (e.g., workshops, articles, blogs, podcasts).
- Encourage and work with students to explore ethics in conference submissions and attend conference sessions related to ethics.
- Consider extending the typical scientist-practitioner model to adopt the scientist-practitioner-humanist model proposed by Lefkowitz (2008). This could be explicitly stated on program websites and incorporated into I-O graduate program's vision and mission statements.
- Stay well-informed of current events occurring in the field of psychology, as well as in businesses and the government, and their relevance to ethics. Encourage students to reflect on these and consider their stance on current issues.

Questions to ask graduate students

The following list of ethics-related questions can be considered and discussed in courses, lab meetings, and advising discussions.

Core I-O area	Questions
<i>Research</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What potential negative consequences might there be from answering your research questions? • How might recruitment methods influence the workers whose perspectives are reflected in your project? • How will you compensate participants? How will you determine the amount of compensation? Who might you inadvertently exclude based on the compensation strategies used? • What steps will you take when you believe there has been an ethical or IRB violation in one of your projects? • When, where, and how should you report ethical issues (e.g., to IRB, to organizational clients, to participants, to I-O faculty members)? • What is driving your data cleaning and analytical decisions? • Should you refrain from publishing results that could potentially be harmful or misinterpreted? How can you mitigate results being misconstrued? • Have you considered potential ethical considerations and addressed them directly in a discussion section? • How do you determine authorship credit on papers (e.g., Fine & Kurdek, 1993)? • How do you balance sharing papers (e.g., via email, on platforms like ResearchGate, or professional websites) with publisher copyright policies? • What open science strategies are you using (e.g., preregistering studies or sharing materials on the Open Science Framework) to share your work with other researchers? • What science communication strategies do you use to share the findings from your research projects with the public, particularly audiences it may impact the most? • In what ways do you encourage others in the research community to consider ethics (e.g., when reviewing papers or conference submissions)?
<i>Teaching, advising, & mentoring</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What power dynamics exist within a classroom? How do these dynamics shift depending on the students' stage (e.g., undergraduate versus graduate level)? • What power dynamics exist in advising and mentoring relationships? • What information should be shared with students/advisees? • How do you address academic dishonesty or cheating? • What inclusive teaching strategies do you use? • How do you determine the policies and practices you use in your courses? • How do you navigate diversity of thought/ideas/perspectives in the classroom and in content? How do you foster psychologically safe class environments? • How and when do you address current events or political issues in the classroom?
<i>Practice/ Applied work</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the potential unintended consequences of the projects you work on for stakeholders (e.g., workers, organizations)? • How do you balance organizational objectives and goals (e.g., profit) with worker rights and well-being? • What are your practices for data protection and privacy? • How do you tell stories when you share data? How do you balance rigorous statistics with communicating clearly to non-statistics audiences? • How do you navigate diversity of thought/ideas/perspectives? How do you foster psychologically safe environments? • What steps will you take when you believe there has been an ethical violation? • When, where, and how should you report ethical issues? • What role do you play in broader organizational or company goals? In your role, who are you helping become more successful? • How do you identify the bounds of your competence?
<i>Professional development/ Career decisions</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do your personal values and ethics align with the field's professional values and ethics? What will you do when these conflict? • How can you contribute to fostering ethical practices and decision-making in the field of I-O? • How do you reflect on the ethics and impact of your work? • What types of jobs are aligned not only with your skill sets and interests but also with your values and ethics? • What organizations align with your values and ethics? • How do you weigh values alignment with other considerations (e.g., salary, benefits, schedule) when selecting where to work?

Conclusion

In line with Watts and colleagues' (2022) conclusion that the APA Ethics Code is indeed relevant for I-O psychologists, it is imperative that I-O graduate students develop knowledge of the APA Ethics Code and related skills surrounding potential ethical dilemmas they may face. We argue that graduate school is the appropriate time to develop this knowledge, and the preceding strategies and questions are meant to serve as a starting point for developing ethics-related curricula, practices, and culture in graduate training programs. In this way, we agree with Watts and colleagues' (2022) assertion that "I-Os should educate themselves in the content and application of the code" but extend this to "I-O graduate training programs should educate students on the content and application of the code," as well.

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Resources

- CAPE's educator resources: <https://www.siop.org/Career-Center/Professional-Ethics>
- CAPE's Dilemma Deck: <https://www.siop.org/Career-Center/Professional-Ethics/Dilemma-Deck>
- Determining authorship: Fine, M. A., & Kurdek, L. A. (1993). Reflections on determining authorship credit and authorship order on faculty-student collaborations. *American Psychologist*, 48(11), 1141–1147.
- Ethics-related case study examples:
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- Open science framework: <https://osf.io/>
- Role of Mentors in Promoting an Ethics Culture: Bravin, J., Carrasco, J., & Kalichman, M. (2020). Ethical foundations for graduate students in the psychological sciences. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science*, 6(3), 247–256.

Cite this article: Brossoit, R. M., & Wong, J. R. (2023). Instilling ethics in I-O: The responsibility of graduate training programs. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* 16, 182–186. <https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2023.4>