Mission

The Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics advances teaching, research and engagement efforts that explore how best to live together as a human community, so that we all may achieve purposeful, productive and prosperous lives.
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Director’s note

Arizona State University is home to the Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics, a one-of-a-kind, distributed, University-wide resource for practical ethics teaching, research, and outreach. Our Lincoln Professors and affiliated faculty are a diverse group of ASU’s best and brightest contributors to the knowledge enterprise, helping to fulfil the University’s Charter:

ASU is a comprehensive public research university, measured not by whom it excludes, but by whom it includes and how they succeed; advancing research and discovery of public value; and assuming fundamental responsibility for the economic, social, cultural and overall health of the communities it serves.

The Lincoln Center contributes to all aspects of the Charter, thanks to the generous support of the Lincoln Family.

As you will see in the following pages, we have dramatically increased our efforts in both research activity and student engagement and support. Thanks to the efforts of Lincoln Center assistant director Stephanie Birdsell and Lincoln Postdoctoral Fellow Dr. Erica O’Neil, we submitted a number of external grant applications to the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and several private foundations, and all of our Lincoln Professors have active research programs in their areas of expertise. Additionally, thanks to Lincoln Center Education Lead Sean Kenney, we were able to expand our Lincoln Undergraduate Scholars program, providing scholarships to deserving students who also take a one-credit practical ethics class coordinated by Sean and featuring our Lincoln Professors and affiliated faculty. Finally, thanks to David Lincoln’s generosity, we secured an endowment for the Lincoln-Chautauqua partnership to allow us to continue to send a cohort of ASU undergars to the famed Chautauqua Institution every summer – in fact, I am writing this Director’s Message from the shores of Lake Chautauqua, where I am joined this week by our group of six students and their intrepid chaperone, Dr. O’Neil.

In 2018, we suffered not only the loss of David Lincoln but also of one of our relatively new but beloved Lincoln Professors, Dr. Mary Sigler, who died after a three-year battle with pancreatic cancer on June 9. A double graduate of ASU (BA 1989, PhD 2003) and alumna of Penn Law (JD 2000), she taught at ASU’s College of Law for fifteen years and served for six years as Associate Dean. She was a careful scholar and a brilliant and passionate teacher, and not a week passes without me missing her deeply.

Here’s to a better 2019!

Jason Scott Robert
Director
Lincoln Chair in Ethics
Staff

Catherine O’Donnell
Associate Director

Stacey Trowbridge
Business Operations Specialist, Senior

Gaymon Bennett
Senior Research Fellow

Sean Kenney
Program Manager

Stephanie Birdsall
Assistant Director

Erica O’Neil
Postdoctoral Fellow
Lincoln Professors

Lincoln Professorships are a distinct honor for ASU faculty members with research and teaching interests in applied ethics. These professors, with appointments in diverse disciplines across multiple campuses, guide thousands of students along their paths to ethical, fulfilling lives. Lincoln Professors also make important contributions in terms of knowledge, innovations and tools that help us create the world in which we want to live.

Braden Allenby
Lincoln Professor of Engineering and Ethics
Professor, Ira A. Fulton School of Engineering and Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law

My research focus involves several areas. First, I am exploring the ethical, operational and design implications of sustainable engineering in the Anthropocene (roughly, the “Age of Humans” as scientists are calling it), when large engineering projects have the potential to impact regional and global natural systems such as biodiversity, the oceans, the atmosphere, and the nitrogen, phosphorus, carbon, water, and other cycles. I am in the process of writing a book on the general topic of “Engineering in the Anthropocene: Ethical, Responsible, and Rational Design on a Terraformed Planet.” I am also investigating the ethical, geopolitical and operational implications of emerging military and security technologies in light of changing geopolitical realities such as the failure of the Westphalian World Order and the continuing rejection of Western Universalist values around the world, and the new strategies and doctrines adopted by such states as Russia and China which contemplate “whole of society” conflict, at which the United States is structurally incompetent.

“In a period of rapid and pervasive technological, social, cultural, economic and geopolitical change, ethics and values are integral supports for any sort of effective, rational and responsible action.

The challenge is that older formulations may not be applicable to modern conditions. My Lincoln Professorship gives me the resources and the bandwidth to be able to contribute to this critical dialog, and thus to play a part in shaping an ethical, responsible and rational future.”

Athena Aktipis
Lincoln Professor of Cooperation and Social Behavior
Assistant Professor, Psychology, The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

At this time I have three main projects that I am working on. The first is the continuation of our work on The Human Generosity Project (I am Co-Director, www.humangenerosity.org) which involves fieldwork, experiments with human subjects, computational modeling and outreach activities. The second is approaching cancer as a breakdown of multicellular cooperation—for this I am working on several papers and a book to be published in Spring of 2019 by Princeton University Press. The third is my work on multispecies cooperation, using kombucha as a model system to investigate how yeast and bacteria cooperate to exclude potential invaders/contaminants. In addition to these three main projects, I have also started a new meeting called the Zombie Apocalypse Medicine Meeting, and I am now developing a new podcast called Zombified, both of which explore issues of autonomy and control from a multidisciplinary perspective. I also direct a new strategic initiative called the Interdisciplinary Cooperation Initiative which includes a working group, symposia and a winter school on the interdisciplinary study of cooperation.

“I am very grateful to have the support of the Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics. It allows me to do many creative and boundary pushing things I would not otherwise be able to do.”
Mary Feeney  
Lincoln Professor of Ethics in Public Affairs  
Professor, School of Public Affairs, College of Public Service and Community Solutions

This year I became the editor of the leading journal in my field, the Journal of Public Administration Research & Theory. I also gave talks outside of ASU at Chinese University of Hong Kong, American University, North Carolina State University and University of Georgia. I am working on research on diversity in public organizations and technology use in government (through our center, Center for Science, Technology and Environmental Policy Studies).

“"It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as a Lincoln Professor. I have gained a great deal from the opportunity to connect with other ASU faculty, participate in events with the Center, and direct students to the Center’s programs. Also, having the title of Lincoln Professor of Ethics in Public Affairs has raised my profile in the field with regard to ethics issues.”

Emma Frow  
Lincoln Professor of Bioengineering, Policy and Society  
Assistant Professor, School of the Future of Innovation in Society and Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering

My research interests center around the governance of emerging biotechnologies. I take a science and technology studies/sociological approach to studying biotechnology and am particularly interested in the role and use of standards and infrastructure as forms of governance. At the moment I am researching synthetic biology and the relationship between biology and engineering. Recent work in this domain includes: two book projects, a monograph (with two colleagues) based on our research activities over the past decade, and (with two different colleagues) a primer designed for teaching about social dimensions of synthetic biology targeted primarily at undergraduate students; fieldwork tracing the rise of automation in synthetic biology facilities; and participation in an NSF ‘Ideas Lab’ focused on ‘building a synthetic cell.’ I am also researching the regulatory oversight of stem cell therapies, and the rise of for-profit clinics offering stem cell injections to treat a variety of medical conditions. This work has an explicit policy focus, developing recommendations for prospective patients and the Food & Drug Administration (FDA).

“It’s a great privilege to be a Lincoln Professor, and to be part of a fantastic, cross-disciplinary community of colleagues across the university. The Lincoln Professor title and its accompanying funding continue to provide me with amazing flexibility to fund undergraduate research experiences, and experiment with new ways to build community and ethical capacities into my teaching and extracurricular activities at ASU.”

Stephen Helms Tillery  
Lincoln Professor of Neural Engineering, Research and Ethics  
Associate Professor, School of Biological and Health Systems Engineering, Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering

My key efforts remain in the areas of neurotechnology development. Specifically, I work on signal processing algorithms for interfacing computer and other electronic technologies to the nervous system for the purposes of brain-computer interface. I also have a serious effort devoted to developing technologies that can be used to optimize human performance without
any surgical interventions. Both of these areas are fraught with ethical questions: how does interfacing the nervous system to a computer have the potential to change the person, how does amping a person’s processing power impact other cognitive and neural systems, who has access to such technologies, and what resources are used in developing these technologies?

“As an engineer and neuroscientist, it is humbling and inspiring to be in the company of people who have devoted so much thought, energy and writing to questions of ethics.”

Douglas Kelley
Lincoln Professor of Relationship Ethics
Professor, School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, New College

My research and teaching focus on how relational partners can treat one another humanely through their responses to hurt and struggle, and the experience of intimacy and love. I was the recipient of the 2017 Bernard Brommel Award for Family Communication and most recently author/co-author of, A Communicative Approach to Conflict, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation: Reimagining Our Relationships (2019). I am currently writing Intimate Spaces: A Conversation about Being, Discovery, and Connection. I’m also actively involved in promoting reconciliation and forgiveness in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

“My role as Lincoln Professor of Relationship Ethics is central to my professional identity. I am involved in projects that focus on various aspects of social justice, forgiveness and reconciliation, and intimacy. Relationship ethics, that which makes us fully human, is what ties this work together. I am extremely thankful for my association with the Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics, not merely for the financial aid, but because it serves as a vehicle to unify my work.”

Don Lange
Lincoln Professor of Management Ethics
Associate Professor, Management and Entrepreneurship, W.P. Carey School of Business

My current research interests are at the intersection of corporate social responsibility, business ethics and organizational reputation. Some scholarly projects related to those interests include the following. My coauthor, Nicole Gillespie, and I are working on a study of the controversial coal seam gas industry in Australia. We are investigating how the nature of particular stakeholder-organization relationships affects how and whether stakeholder trust in an organization is built and sustained. With my coauthor, Helen Hu, I am studying corporate philanthropy in China. We explore two perspectives on corporate giving in China. With a coauthor and a PhD student, I am developing a conceptual model of the social nature of stakeholder utility perceptions. With a coauthor, I am working on an empirical study of a possible cause of unethical decision making on a board of directors. We explore a kind of cognitive error called “pluralistic ignorance,” which consists of a group arriving at some kind of norm or decision even though, privately, each of the group members has concerns about the perceived consensus. And with a PhD student, I am investigating the interrelationship between corporate social responsibility and irresponsibility. Another project in progress during this past year is pedagogical in nature. I am spearheading an effort to teach a common framework for business ethical decision making to all of our MBA students.

“I continue to be delighted that my association with the Lincoln Center is helping me expand my network of ethics scholars and teachers here at ASU, far outside my usual sphere in the business school. I also continue to be pleased with the increased knowledge I’ve received by attending
the many presentations associated with the Lincoln Center. And, I’m grateful that the Lincoln Center has supported me as I engage in the business of studying ethics in organizations—particularly in organizational leadership—and in teaching applied ethics to future business managers and leaders in the MBA program.”

Gary Marchant
Lincoln Professor of Emerging Technologies, Law and Ethics
Regents’ Professor of Law, Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law

This has been a busy year. I am a member of a National Academy of Sciences study on the future of trucking that has wrapped up its report this past year. I have also been appointed Chair of a new National Academy of Sciences committee on fuel economy and greenhouse gas emissions of light duty vehicles for the period 2025 to 2035. I have also been one of four task force leaders of a large National Institutes of Health initiative called LawSeq, which is examining how law affects clinical genomics. I have also been an invited speaker at many judicial and other conferences this past year, giving a total of 65 invited talks in 2018 all around the country and the world. I also published 10 articles in 2018, and was the lead or co-lead organizer of ten conferences and workshops in 2018.

“The diverse, interdisciplinary and applied focus of the Lincoln Center to ethics and ethical issues is a unique and much needed asset for this university and our society more generally. I am proud to have my name and work associated with the Lincoln Center as a Lincoln Professor.”

Martin Matustik
Lincoln Professor of Ethics and Religion
Professor, School of Humanities, Arts and Cultural Studies,
New College

This year, I was invited to three occasions connected with Juergen Habermas’s 90th birthday. The first was Festschrift honoring Jurgen Habermas on his 90th birthday, Bad Homburg. My contribution reviewed Habermas’s sustained interest in Kierkegaard’s ethics. My dissertation and first book discussed Habermas, Kierkegaard and Havel. Second, I helped to move a conference from Dubrovnik during the shelling of Croatia at the time of the civil war. The venue in Prague became a permanent home to the international group of critical theorists. I presented new research on Habermas’s unpublished and partly published considerations of rituals in relation to post-metaphysical thinking. Third, Lodz setting gave me the plenary space to develop my new work. I am looking at the dialectic of myth and enlightenment (Horkheimer and Adorno 1944) in the new constellations and the dialectic of rituals and algorithms (A.I.) in the Anthropocene. I brought Israeli historian Yuval Noah Harari (his thesis that our Homo Sapiens species is becoming Homo Deus) as an interlocutor for Habermas’s novel work on rituals.

“I am proud to list my Lincoln Professor title with my publications and any public presentation.”
Ersula Ore
Lincoln Professor of Ethics
Assistant Professor, School of Social Transformation, The College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

My book, *Lynching: Violence, Rhetoric, & American Identity* was published in March 2019. While victims of antebellum lynchings were typically white men, postbellum lynchings became more frequent and more intense, with the victims more often black. After Reconstruction, lynchings exhibited and embodied links between violent collective action, American civic identity, and the making of the nation. In the book, I investigated lynching as a racialized practice of civic engagement, in effect an argument against black inclusion within the changing nation. I scrutinized the civic roots of lynching, the relationship between lynching and white constitutionalism, and contemporary manifestations of lynching discourse and logic today. I also published the first piece from my new research project on civility, “The moral implicative of race for rhetorical studies: On civility and Walking-in-White in Academe.”

“I appreciate that my appointment allows me to develop programming that advances critical knowledge about civics and ethics in ways that also support the retention of Black and non-Black students of color.”

Vince Waldron
Lincoln Professor of Relationship Ethics
Professor, School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, New College

I finished a book this year on forgiveness and reconciliation (with colleague Douglas Kelley) and had a chapter on my forgiveness-based work with Boys and Girls clubs accepted for publication. I submitted several grant proposals to support our research and community outreach, including one to fund a summer seminar for community college instructors. While on sabbatical in Fall 2019, I traveled to Old Dominion University to lecture on forgiveness and develop research collaborations with colleagues and graduate students.

“I feel quite lucky to be supported in work that engages students and community members in discussions of the practices that make relationships good, in the moral sense of that word.”

The diverse, interdisciplinary and applied focus of the Lincoln Center to ethics and ethical issues is a unique and much needed asset for this university and our society more generally.

— Gary Marchant
Community

The Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics partners with academics and community members to locally and socially embed research and education. We are committed to working with community members in equity-based partnerships to create meaningful products, and contribute to university efforts to support those efforts.

Film Bar

The Lincoln Center partnered with the independent movie theatre, Filmbar, to put on two ethics-related films series this year. Lincoln Center affiliated speakers introduced each film screening with a short discussion on relevant ethical issues for a community audience.

In the fall semester, “This Won’t Hurt a Bit: Ethics at the Mind-Machine Interface” featured Total Recall introduced by Stephen Helms Tillery, Ex Machina introduced by Gary Marchant, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind introduced by Stephanie Koebele, and Wargames introduced by Braden Allenby.

In the spring semester, “It’s the End of the World as We Know It: Ethics in the Apocalypse” featured Shaun of the Dead introduced by Athena Aktipis, Snowpiercer introduced by Brian Gerber, 28 Days Later introduced by Elizabeth Brake, and Planet of the Apes introduced by Andrew Maynard.

Ethics at Twilight

Ethics at Twilight this year was a collaboration between the Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts and the Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics to help expose students to the breadth of ethical issues in their chosen domain of practice. Panelists elaborated on ethical dimensions in their areas of expertise, followed by a moderated question and answer period with the audience. “Ethics of Community Engagement,” featured panelists Michael Rohd, Stephani Etheridge Woodson, Erika Moore, and Lindsey Beagley. “Culture of Abuse in the Arts,” featured panelists Reslie Cortes, Rachel Mowry, and Rachel Kuntz.
Undergraduate Scholars
Lincoln Center Undergraduate Scholars receive a scholarship and attend a one-credit class in both semesters of the academic year. In the fall, they engage with the knowledge, expertise and insight of multiple academic traditions represented by cross-disciplinary Lincoln Center faculty. In the spring, they choose a topic they are interested in exploring further and design and lead a class discussion with their fellow scholars.

The Undergraduate Scholar program is entering its third year engaging more than 70 students from six different colleges and involving dozens of faculty from eight different colleges.

“As a Lincoln Undergraduate Scholar, I've been granted the opportunity to engage with a community of experts and collaborate with my peers, expanding my growth and learning outside the traditional major-focused path. The class has challenged me to think beyond having an "immediate answer," and instead learn to hear, understand and explore the questions pressing our local communities and present-day society. I have cherished the opportunity to further my vision of inviting diversity—both demographically and intellectually—into higher education.”

Delaney Bucker
2018-2019 Lincoln Scholar
Biology and Society, B.S.

“It has been a privilege and an absolute blast to be a Lincoln Undergraduate Scholar, where I have the chance to engage in thoughtful discourse on some of today's most impending and complex ethical questions. Every week, I am always excited to go to class. Whether it is discussing the role of A.I. in our future or deliberating the deep-rooted faculties that encompass the human condition, the class time is always thought-provoking. I am grateful for the opportunity to develop a better understanding of not only the social complexities of the 21st century but also the fundamental intricacy of mankind. Both will immensely help me as future physician who is interested in tackling the issue of chronic diseases in low socioeconomic communities.”

G. Ivan Bascon
2018-2019 Lincoln Scholar
Molecular Bioscience and Biotechnology, B.S.
Introducing the 2019-2020 Undergraduate Scholars

Alondra Maricela Arellano
Supply Chain Management

Huong Dang
Environmental Engineering

Aldwin Galang
Community Health

Ramon Bedolla
Family & Human Development

Primrose Dzenga
Global Studies

Francisco Garcia
Studio Art

Josephine Bucker
Psychology

Emily England
Anthropology

Justin Richard Heywood
Political Science

Isabel Kay Brady
Business Management

Anthony Lara Figueroa
Mechanical Engineering

Ibrahim Nejib Ibrahim
Biology
2019-2020 Undergraduate Scholars (cont.)

Sadiya Khan
Justice Studies

Taylor Oran Medina
Chemical Engineering

Christopher Hernandez Salinas
Biomedical Engineering

Violet Konopka
Biology

Asia Mercer
Family and Human Development

Jonah Luke Ivy
Civic and Economic Thought and Leadership

Trey Emerson Leveque
Business Global Politics

Suhey Ortega
Interdisciplinary Studies

Carla Gianne Barbosa Rendon
Global Studies

Destiny Alana May
Conflict Resolution

Emily Grace Rosenthal
Business

Diane Solorio, Sr.
Political Science
2019-2020 Undergraduate Scholars (cont.)

Sydney Shyanne Stephens
Medical Studies

Missy Tran
Biochemistry

Stone R. Woodham
Earth and Space Exploration

Rebecca Ashlyn Strum
Global Health

Monique Georgina Webley
Political Science

CAMP Scholars Lincoln Center Partnership

The College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) at Arizona State University is federally funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Migrant Education. Run by faculty in the School for Social Transformation, the program provides academic support to students from migrant and seasonal farmworker backgrounds during their first year in college. Students are provided with academic, social and financial support to enable the completion of their first year of college, and establish a strong foundation for continued success at university.

The Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics has partnered with ASU CAMP by encouraging CAMP students to apply for and become Lincoln Undergraduate Scholars during their second year at ASU.
Aside from the daily lectures about the ethics of dissent, some of the events I attended include an opera performance of Candide and a symphony performance in an open-air amphitheater, which were both new for me! Without a doubt, the most valuable part of this experience for me are the friendships I cultivated during my time at Chautauqua, and I am grateful I was able to share such a unique experience with such a great group of people.

— Chloe Robertson

Lincoln-Chautauqua Faculty and Undergraduate Fellows

The Chautauqua movement has long offered the American public access to life-long learning in its fullest sense—educational and cultural opportunities for the whole person. The Chautauqua Institution, a community on the shores of Chautauqua Lake in southwestern New York state, is dedicated to keeping the Chautauqua tradition alive, with a nine-week summer season focused on fine and performing arts, lectures, interfaith worship and programs, and recreational activities.

The Lincoln Center has partnered with the Chautauqua Institution to enhance their ethics programming and to provide ASU students with the opportunity to participate in this unique cultural and educational experience.
Faculty Fellows

Lincoln Center Professors and affiliated faculty presented across four of the nine weeks of 2018 summer programing at the Chautauqua Institution on the topics of: Russian imperialism, civic dissent and democracy, the future of artificial intelligence, and the enduring memory of the Holocaust.

Braden Allenby, Lincoln Professor of Engineering and Ethics and President’s Professor of Engineering, presented in Week 4 with the theme “Russia and the West.” He delivered a lecture titled “Russia at the Gates: The Fall of the American Empire,” and taught an in-depth class on the topic of “Russia and America: What Russia Tells Us About Ourselves.”

Ersula Ore, Lincoln Professor of Ethics in the School of Social Transformation and Assistant Professor of African and African American studies and rhetoric, presented in Week 5 on the theme “The Ethics of Dissent.” She spoke on the topic of “Democracy and Dissent,” and taught a small, close-reading class titled “A Rhetoric of Civic Belonging.”

Gary Marchant, Lincoln Professor of Emerging Technologies, Law and Ethics and Regents’ Professor of Law, presented on the Week 6 theme “The Changing Nature of Work.” He delivered a lecture titled “(When) Will a Robot Steal Your Job?” and offered a class on “Technological Unemployment: Risks and Solutions.”

Volker Benkert, Lincoln Center affiliated faculty and Assistant Professor of History, presented during the Week 8 theme of “The Forgotten: History and Memory in the 21st Century.” He spoke on the topic of “Memory, History, and Forgetting in Germany: Apologetic and Redemptive Memory of World War II and the Holocaust in Contemporary Germany” and taught a class for those interested in the topic titled “Coming to Terms with the Nazi Past in Germany: Memorials, Films, and the Politics of Memory in Postwar Germany.”

Undergraduate Fellows

The ASU Chautauqua Fellowship enables undergraduate students to attend a week of immersive summer programming at the Chautauqua Institution in the countryside of southwestern New York, where the Chautauqua experience originated.

Five undergraduate students attended the 2018 summer programming during Week 5 on the theme “The Ethics of Dissent.” Those students included Anthony Bonfiglio (History and Classical Civilization), Amanda Mitchell (American Indian Studies), Chloe Robertson (Business Sustainability), Jakob Salazar (Sociology), and Daritza Villalobos (Public Policy Sustainability). They were exposed to social justice-related educational and religious programming throughout the week and particularly enjoyed hearing Shaun King, Tamika Mallory, and Edwin Long speak on the Black Lives Matter movement. Fellows attended nightly fine arts performances including ballet, the symphony, acrobats, and the opera Candide. They also rented kayaks to explore Lake Chautauqua.
Research

In addition to supporting the research programs of the Lincoln Professors, the center coordinates and pursues research projects in the following areas.

Research Integrity

Under the leadership of Senior Research Fellow Gaymon Bennett, we are developing a model of ethics education for lab-based research that brings technical dimensions of professional work into a more integral and generative relation with its ethical dimensions. It does this by reconceiving technical work as more than the scene of potential misconduct, casting it instead as the very means by which practitioners can pursue growth in ethical capacity. To do this, we adopt well-established strategies, developed in non-science settings, by which “craft work” is reimagined as “soul work”—the idea that daily labor can be a means of ethical enrichment. Such an approach invites not only a different view of ethics, but a different view of science, one in which researchers seek to ‘sanctify’ science by imbuing laboratory work with purpose and intention to create a space of ethical formation.

Ethics must become more than simply a supplement to technical training in which the goal is to avoid bad behavior. It must be about growth in capacity leading to ethical resilience. The dominant social ethos shaping researchers today no longer favors integrity. The resources needed to maintain a competitive advantage, coupled with the complexity of scientific work and the drive to translate even preliminary findings, generates a situation in which small ethical compromises accrue to the overall deterioration of science. Ethics education, we believe, must work against these forces by reimagining the ethical culture of laboratory life as one that partially buffers aspiring researchers against the broader social forces and inner inclinations that might compromise scientific integrity.

Gaymon and Lincoln Center Director Jason Robert have presented preliminary results at national and international conferences, and we have applied for external funding to continue this important work.

Moral Fitness

Building on Director Jason Robert’s work in the philosophy of biology, we are pursuing scholarship that explores the role of morality in evolutionary fitness, how well an organism is adapted to its environment—what we are calling moral fitness. Moral fitness is fitness because, at a human-individual or a human-community level, it confers evolutionary advantage in terms of survival and/or reproduction. Moral fitness is moral because the relevant traits, dispositions, and properties are ones that confer fitness within the socio-normative niche in which the phenotype exists.

Moral fitness, like all fitness, is dependent and intertwined in the environment in which it is expressed. The more we ourselves have transformed our ecology, the more questionable it becomes whether we will continue to enjoy the high levels of moral fitness that we have in our evolutionary past. Much like the anthropocene has challenged the fitness of our bodies (with the rise of obesity, depression, and diabetes), so too is it challenging the fitness of our moral systems. For the long-term survival of the species, it becomes critical to understand the dimensions of moral fitness, how it was shaped by our evolutionary past and what it might look like in our evolutionary future—a future in which we must survive and perhaps even thrive in a world largely of our own making.

Moral Capital

Our education initiatives are guided by scholarship on moral capital. Drawing from research in fields such as economics, political science, evolutionary psychology and others we are interested in shifting focus from morality as an individual phenomenon to morality as a feature of a healthy moral system. Functioning moral communities are moral systems. What becomes important is not so much the characteristics of moral individuals and how to develop them but the characteristics of healthy moral systems and how to sustain them. Moral capital becomes a vital resource in maintaining healthy communities in which we all thrive.

For our purposes, broadly speaking, moral capital represents a stock of shared understanding about how we should treat each other as expressed in norms, rituals, laws, institutions, texts and traditions. The particulars of that understanding may be debated, often vigorously, and the manner and the outcomes of those debates may deplete or increase our moral capital, both individually and collectively. In this way, moral capital is a capital asset of a community or a nation that needs to be sustained for future generations. Providing students with educational opportunities through which they can learn the knowledge and skills that would make them effective stewards of the moral capital of their communities is an educational priority for the Lincoln Center.
Integrity, Identity, and Pluralistic Ignorance: When Scientific Vocation Impedes the Reporting of Wrongdoing

One of the most recently funded research projects in the Center brings social psychology into contact with research ethics to examine how even ethically minded researchers may still be susceptible to research integrity violations. Co-PIs Jason Robert, Gaymon Bennett, and Don Lange received funding through the federal Office of Research Integrity to conduct this work. In their words:

“Significant research has been devoted to how those extrinsic, instrumental gains of the research enterprise can motivate ethical misbehavior, but fewer scholars have examined how intrinsic motivations can lead to ethical malfeasance. Additionally, ethics research has assumed that identifying with intrinsic motivations can help to inoculate researchers against misconduct, as investigators becomes virtuous by identifying with the altruistic motivations of discovery in the sciences. Our research seeks to challenge that narrative with the driving question: does personal identification with intrinsic value of the scientific enterprise paradoxically leave researchers more at risk of ethical misbehavior? We predict that despite the virtuous intentions of researchers who identify strongly with the intrinsic motivations of the scientific enterprise, the socio-psychological phenomenon of pluralistic ignorance can lead to an increase in unethical decision making on research teams. We propose to empirically test this using both traditional social science survey methodologies and q-method survey methodologies to examine the explicit and implicit motivation of researchers, their perceptions of colleagues’ potential for ethical misconduct, and how likely they are to speak up when encountering ethical misbehavior. Working closely with experts in both ethical formation and organizational identity formation, we will develop recommendations for how to address pluralistic ignorance, group cohesion, and diffusion of responsibility in a way that attends to both the explicit and implicit motivating factors of research misconduct and ethical formation.”