

Introduction

On April 27, 2012, Texas Tech University hosted an Arbor Day Celebration at Memorial Circle. As part of the celebration, the Texas Tech University Ethics Center set up blank chart tablets between 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. These chart tablets were accompanied by the prompt “My last ethical action was...” and the students were asked to complete the sentence in their own words.

At the end of the Celebration, the tablets filled with student responses were sent to the Texas Tech University Ethics Center for analysis. See appendix A for some of the photographs of the chart tablets.

Analysis

There were 748 student responses to the prompt “My last ethical activity was ...” Out of the 748 responses, 12 responses were removed because students either signed their names or wrote illegibly on the chart; an additional 44 were removed because responses could not be coded as an activity. This left 692 valid responses.

These 692 responses were coded into 11 different themes. Because photographs were taken of the tablets and not the participants, there is no information about respondents’ age, gender, classification, major, or ethnicity. The 11 themes and some examples of the response in each theme are as follows:

1. Volunteering and participating in charity events [community service]: autism walk, animal shelter, food bank, McDonald House, Literacy Lubbock, etc.
2. Showing love and kindness (to family, friends, and neighbors): sat with my friend in chemo, carried groceries for an elderly woman, gave values to friends, forgave a friend, etc.
3. Adhering to academic integrity: didn’t cheat, cited sources for a paper, stopped someone from plagiarizing, stopped cheater, reported cheating on a test, etc.
4. Showing heroic behavior: saved someone from drowning, saved a prairie dog, stopped someone from walking in front of a moving bus, etc.
5. Tutoring classmates & mentoring minors: mentoring underprivileged youth, taught special needs kids to dance, mentored 1st gen high school students, boys and girls club mentor, etc.
6. Being responsible for work and class: attended class/lab, didn't miss work to go party, picked up trash, etc.
7. Participating in the American Cancer Society’s fundraising event, Relay for Life.¹
8. Donating: donated clothes, food, money, and blood.²
9. Recycling and conservation: recycled, planted tree, double page printing, etc.
10. Being honest: returned lost ID, iPod, iPhone, car key, wallet, etc.
11. Learning about ethics: ethics class/paper, attended a conference on ethics, etc.
12. Miscellaneous responses: not cutting in line to get Arbor Day shirts, I joined army, etc.

The following table arranges the themes based on the frequency of response.

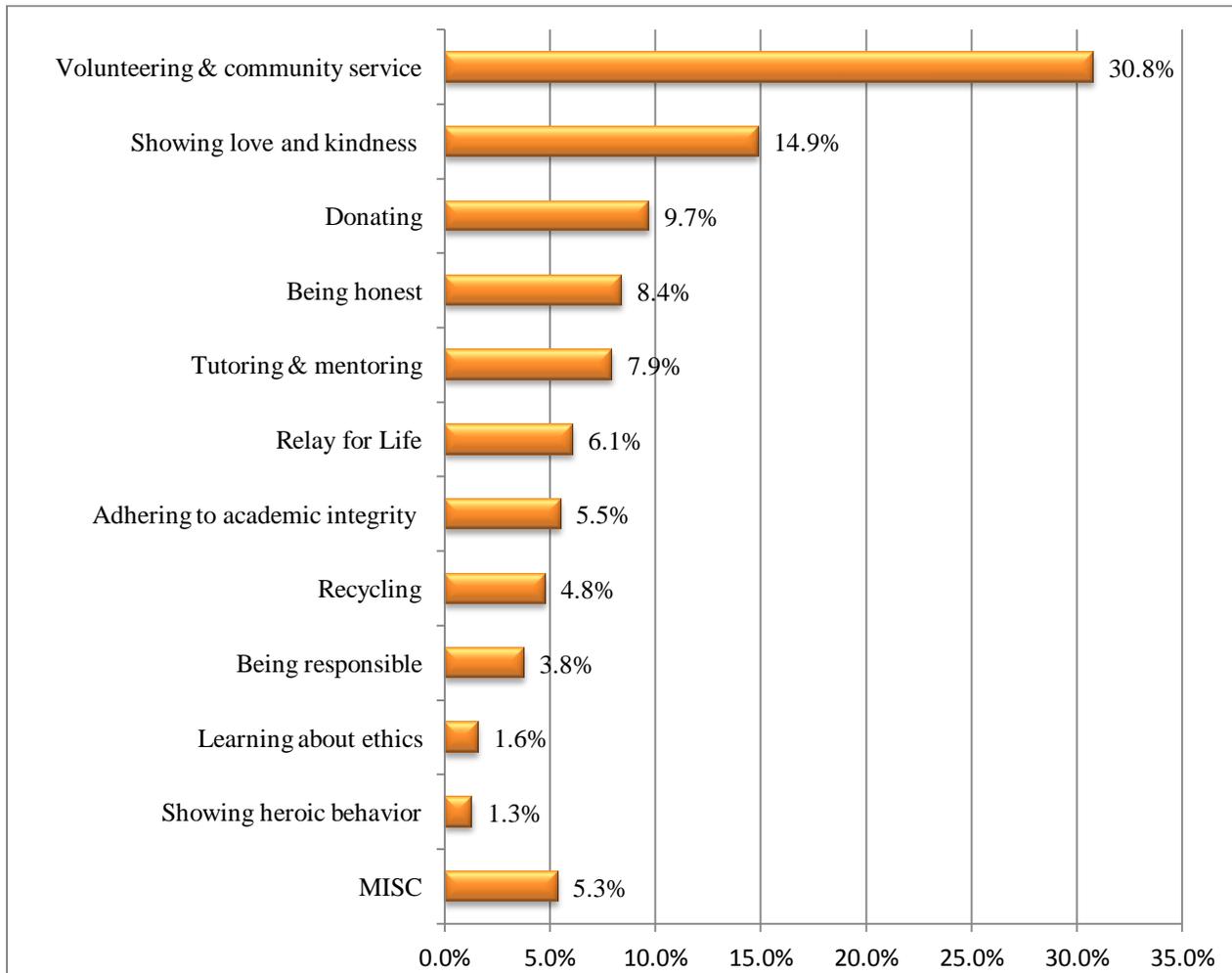
¹ “Relay for Life” could be included under the theme “community service,” but since there was a sizable response, it was significant enough to have its own category.

² “Donating” could also be under the theme “community service,” but since there was a sizable response, it was significant to be its own category.

“My Last Ethical Activity ...” – Arbor Day 2012

Theme	Frequency of response
Volunteering & community service	213
Showing love and kindness	103
Donating	67
Being honest	58
Tutoring & mentoring	55
Relay for Life	42
Adhering to academic integrity	38
Recycling	33
Being responsible	26
Learning about ethics	11
Showing heroic behavior	9
MISC	37
TOTAL	692

The following chart highlights the percentages of the response in each theme.



Comparison of 2011 and 2012

On 2011 Arbor Day, students completed the sentence, “I think of ethics when I see ...”, and there were 539 valid responses. Although the questions in 2011 and 2012 were different, the themes in respondents’ answers can be compared to assess students’ concept and application of ethics each year.

The following table presents the top ten responses from both years.³

Top 10	2011		2012	
	“I think of Ethics when I see...”		“My last ethical action...”	
1	Do the Right Thing	14.8%	Volunteering & community service	30.8%
2	Service to others	14.7%	Showing love and kindness	14.9%
3	Honesty	9.8%	Donating	9.7%
4	Integrity	8.9%	Being honest	8.4%
5	Respect	5.0%	Tutoring & mentoring	7.9%
6	Love, caring, kindness	4.8%	Relay for Life	6.1%
7	Good behavior	4.1%	Adhering to academic integrity	5.5%
8	Responsibility	3.5%	Recycling	4.8%
9	Moral, golden rule, belief	3.3%	Being responsible	3.8%
10	Green, earth, recycling	3.2%	Learning about ethics	1.6%

The table above reveals that *service to others* became more dominant in 2012. Although *volunteering* (30.8%), *donating* (9.7%), *tutoring & mentoring* (7.9%), and *Relay for Life* (6.1%) have been coded as separate themes in 2012, they are all various applications of *do the right thing* and *community service*. In 2011, the total percentage of *do the right thing* and *community service* was 29.5% (14.8% and 14.7% respectively). The year 2012 saw a dramatic increase to 54.5% when combining the percentages of all the *service* applications.

In addition, *love, caring, and kindness* received 4.8% of the overall response in 2011, and it increased to 14.9% in 2012; the 2012 respondents were able to describe what exactly they did for their immediate family and friends and sometimes strangers on the street.

The comparison of 2011 and 2012 themes shows that the 2012 respondents became more conscious of *service [through organized events]* and *caring [for individuals]* and acting on what they believe to be ethical.

Conclusion

Whereas the 2011 questions inquired about students’ concepts and thoughts, the 2012 question challenged the participants not only their understanding of ethics but also their action. This year’s respondents detailed what they did and/or where they volunteered. These results suggest that students highly value the ethical principle “community service” and also value applying this concept in their daily life.

Even though the sample size was small and may not represent the TTU student body as a whole, this initiative shows that students are integrating ethics into their life. Future ethics activities could encourage more student participation: students value engagement.

³ For the complete report of 2011 Arbor Day, please visit http://www.depts.ttu.edu/ethics/docs/2011_Arbor_Day_-_I_think_of_ethics_final.pdf

