

Introduction

On April 26, 2013, Texas Tech University hosted the annual 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 12:30 p.m. These chart tablets were accompanied by the prompt “I act ethically because ...” and the students were asked to complete the sentence in their own words.

Upon conclusion of the Arbor Day Celebration, the tablets, filled with student responses, were sent to the Texas Tech University Ethics Center for analysis. See appendix A for photographs of the chart tablets.

Analysis

A total of 681 student responses to the prompt “I act ethically because ...” were collected. Out of the 681 responses, 56 responses were removed because students either signed their names or wrote illegibly on the chart, or because responses could not be coded as a reason that answered the question. This removal left a total of 625 valid responses.

The 625 responses were coded into 15 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 15 emerging themes and examples of the response in each theme are listed below:

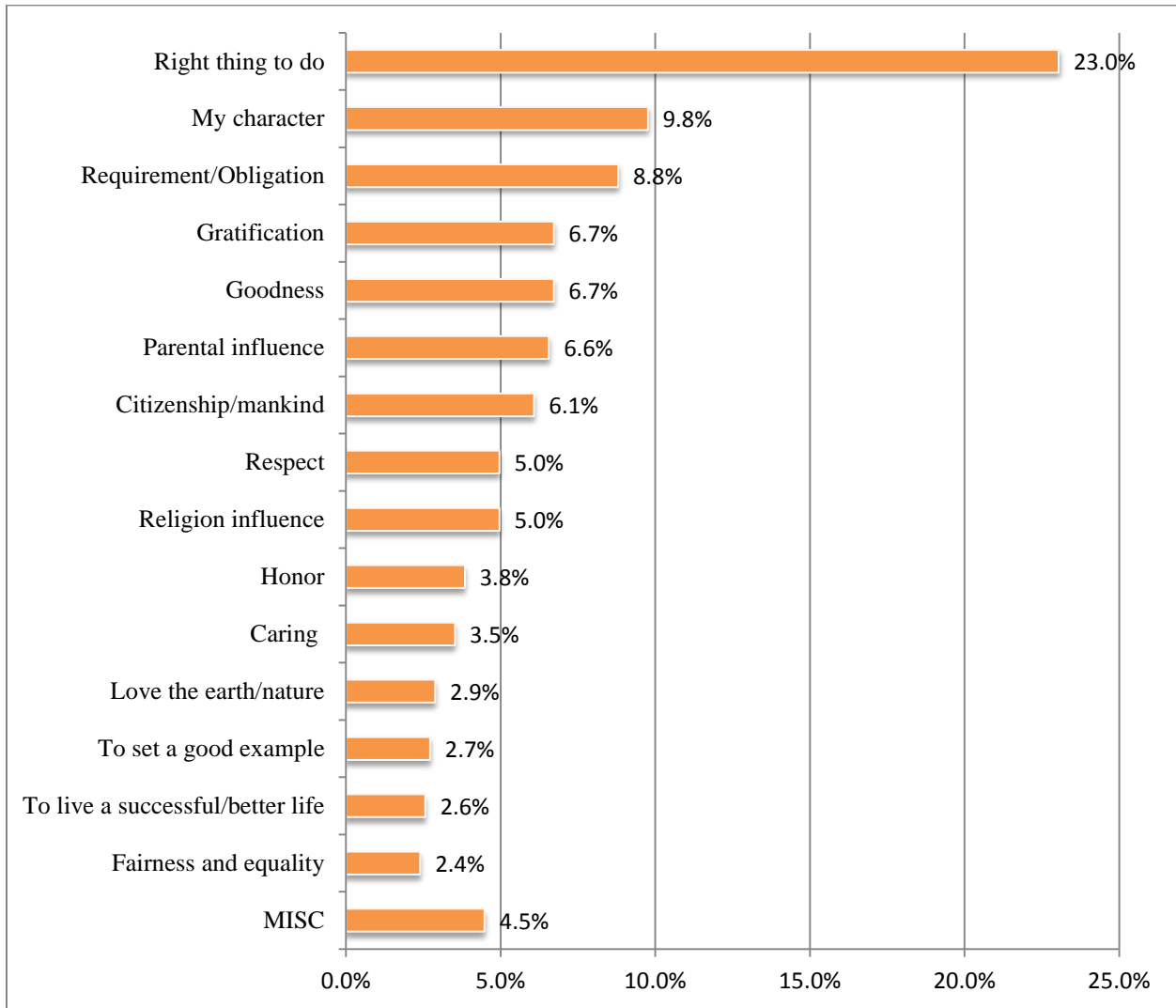
1. It's the right thing to do.
2. My character: It's who I am, I have integrity, personal choice/value, etc.
3. Requirement/Obligation/responsibility: professional, academic, or personal duty.
4. Gratification: it makes me feel good, it brings joy, etc.
5. Goodness: makes you a better person, it's good for you and others, etc.
6. Parental influence/Family education.
7. Citizenship/mankind (for the society and world): it furthers the humanity, it serves for a functional society, it make the world a better place, etc.
8. Respect: respect others, treat others the way I want to be treated, etc.
9. Religion influence: faith, God is watching, etc.
10. Honor: I strive for Honor.
11. Caring: I show love, I care about life. etc.
12. Love the earth/nature.
13. To set a good example: set standard, be a role model, etc.
14. To live a successful or good (better) life.
15. Fairness and equality: to treat and be treated fairly and equally.
16. Miscellaneous responses: I have morals, it is crucial, etc.

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

Theme	Frequency of response
It's the Right thing to do.	144
My character	61
Requirement/Obligation	55
Gratification	42
Goodness	42

Parental influence	42
Citizenship/mankind	38
Respect	31
Religion	31
Honor	24
Caring	22
Love the earth/nature	18
To set a good example	17
To live a successful/better life	16
Fairness and equality	15
MISC	28
TOTAL	625

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



Comparison of 2012 and 2013

On 2012 Arbor Day, students completed the sentence, “My last ethical action ...”, and there were 692 valid responses. Although the question in 2012 was different from the one in 2013, the themes in respondents’ answers can be compared to assess students’ concept and understanding of ethics each year.

The following table presents the top ten responses from both years.¹

Top 10	2012		2013	
	“My last ethical action . . .”		“I act ethically because . . .”	
1	Volunteering & community service	30.8%	It’s the Right thing to do.	23.0%
2	Showing love and kindness	14.9%	My character	9.8%
3	Donating	9.7%	Requirement/Obligation	8.8%
4	Being honest	8.4%	Gratification	6.7%
5	Tutoring & mentoring	7.9%	Goodness	6.7%
6	Relay for Life	6.1%	Parental influence	6.6%
7	Adhering to academic integrity	5.5%	Citizenship/mankind	6.1%
8	Recycling	4.8%	Respect	5.0%
9	Being responsible	3.8%	Religion	5.0%
10	Learning about ethics	1.6%	Honor	3.8%

In 2012, the prompt asked for applications of ethics. As a result, respondents wrote down specific actions relative to ethical behaviors. Among the results in 2012, *volunteering* (30.8%), *donating* (9.7%), *tutoring & mentoring* (7.9%), and *Relay for Life* (6.1%) had been coded as separate themes; however, they were all various applications of *community service*. The combined percentage of *community service* was thus 54.5%.

On the other hand, the question in 2013 was more philosophical in nature and the emerging dominant theme was “*It’s the Right Thing to do*”. Texas Tech University launched a Quality Enhancement Plan on ‘ethics’ in 2005 and incorporated the slogan “Do the Right Thing” into the Statement of Ethical Principles. While “do the right thing” is a popular expression, the high incidence of “it’s the right thing to do” responses in 2013 could be an indication that the slogan is engrained in the student body at TTU and has a positive influence on the TTU community in general.

Conclusion

Whereas the 2012 question inquired about students’ ethical actions, the 2013 question challenged the respondents to think philosophically and to contemplate the reasons or forces behind their behaviors. The 2013 results suggest that students, in general, believed that acting ethically is the right thing to do; they took pride and felt satisfaction in exhibiting ethical behaviors.

Even though the small sample size may not represent the entire TTU student body, this initiative shows that the Statement of Ethical Principles and the slogan “Do the Right Thing” positively influence students and help integrate ethics into their thoughts and behaviors.

¹ For the complete report of 2012 Arbor Day, please visit http://www.depts.ttu.edu/ethics/docs/2012_Arbor_Day_-_My_Last_Ethical_Activity.pdf

Appendix A
Selected photographs of the chart tablets

