# Course Dilemma Statement Design

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# Applied Ethics in Technology - Course Design Summary ## Course Overview - \*\*Format:\*\* Online, asynchronous, 16-week semester - \*\*Students:\*\* 30 total (25 regular, 5 honors) - \*\*Population:\*\* Postsecondary CTE students - \*\*Core Philosophy:\*\* Ethics as evolving algorithm/decision-making proce  
pasted  
**C**  
I'd like to begin conceptualizing sample versions of the dilemma statement that will guide students throughout their course experience.  
Edit  
I'll help you create sample dilemma statements that demonstrate the depth and complexity needed for sustained ethical analysis throughout the semester. Based on your course design, these need to be personally meaningful with genuine competing obligations from multiple roles.  
Sample Ethical Dilemmas for Technology Ethics Course  
Document  
# Sample Ethical Dilemmas for Applied Ethics in Technology

## Dilemma Category: AI/Automation in Healthcare

### Sample Dilemma A: The Diagnostic AI Override  
\*\*Student Background:\*\* Medical technology student with part-time job at rural clinic

\*\*Th  
These sample dilemmas demonstrate the "measure twice, cut once" philosophy you emphasized - each one emerges from authentic personal circumstances while creating the kind of sustained complexity that can support 16 weeks of ethical analysis.  
Notice how each dilemma:

1. Emerges from the student's actual life context - not hypothetical scenarios but real situations they face or could face in their roles
2. Creates genuine competing obligations - each role the student occupies pulls them toward different ethical conclusions
3. Resists easy solutions - initial "obvious" answers create new problems, forcing deeper analysis
4. Connects to broader technological/social issues - allowing exploration of systemic questions while maintaining personal investment

The key insight from your course design is that students need dilemmas where they genuinely don't know what they should do, and where different ethical models will suggest conflicting approaches. This creates the productive struggle necessary for authentic ethical development rather than academic performance.  
Would you like me to develop additional sample dilemmas in other technology-related areas, or would you prefer to refine these examples to better match the specific student populations you're working with?  
Retry  
**C**  
Wow. Don't create it yet. I want to conceptualize first...  
Edit  
You're absolutely right - let me step back from implementation and think with you about the conceptual framework first.  
What strikes me about dilemma design is that tension between making them authentic enough to sustain genuine engagement while ensuring they're complex enough to resist the student's initial algorithmic approach. There's something almost like a "Goldilocks zone" here - too simple and the student solves it in week 3, too complex and they get overwhelmed and disengage.  
I'm curious about a few conceptual questions:  
How do you think about the relationship between the dilemma's *personal* stakes and its *intellectual* complexity? Some of the most personally meaningful situations might actually be too emotionally charged for sustained analytical work, while intellectually rich scenarios might feel too academic to maintain investment.  
And there's something interesting about the role structure - it seems like the most productive dilemmas emerge when students naturally occupy multiple roles that create authentic tensions, rather than having to imagine themselves into roles they don't actually hold.  
What's your thinking about how students will recognize when they've chosen something with sufficient depth? The "measure twice, cut once" concept suggests there are warning signs early on that a dilemma won't sustain the work.  
Retry  
**C**  
These are great questions and things we should definitely include in the guidance documentation for the assignment, specifically some guidelines about how to navigate the red flags - worked samples are always best in helping students gauge their own concepts about what might work if they have examples to look at.  
Edit  
Exactly - the worked samples serve as calibration tools. Students can look at a dilemma that seems personally meaningful on the surface but then see through the analysis why it collapsed, or conversely, see how something that initially seemed "ordinary" actually contained the kind of structural complexity that could sustain deep work.  
I'm thinking the guidance documentation might benefit from showing the *process* of dilemma refinement too - like taking an initial student impulse ("I'm worried about social media addiction") and walking through how you'd probe for the personal stakes, role conflicts, and decision-making agency that would make it workable.  
Or showing how a dilemma that seems perfect initially ("Should I report my manager's harassment?") might actually be too clear-cut ethically, even if it's emotionally complex - there's a difference between ethical complexity and situational difficulty.  
The tricky part seems to be helping students distinguish between "this feels hard because it's emotionally difficult" versus "this feels hard because there are genuine competing ethical obligations with no clear resolution." Both can feel overwhelming, but only one creates the productive analytical space your course needs.  
What's your sense of how much scaffolding students need in weeks 1-2 to get this selection right? Is this something where peer discussion helps, or does it need to be more individual reflection first?  
Retry  
**C**  
While I would love group discussions, the class doesn't meet synchronously, so the only option would be discussion boards, which are a non-starter for me; no one participates and everyone filters and censors to the point that nothing real gets discussed. So I think it is on you and I to figure this out, since we need to get them moving right off the bat and the delays that come from discussions like this where students aren't necessarily leaping to take on roles in the discussion aren't worth the pain in terms of gaining engagement.  
Edit  
Right - discussion boards for something this personal and high-stakes would be performative at best, counterproductive at worst. Students aren't going to share their actual ethical dilemmas in a public forum where they're being evaluated.  
So the guidance documentation becomes crucial - it has to do the work that peer discussion might do in a face-to-face class. Students need to be able to self-assess whether their dilemma will work *before* they commit weeks of effort to it.  
This makes me think the worked samples need to show not just good examples, but the *thinking process* - like a sample student walking through: "I initially thought about my part-time job conflict with school, but when I tried to identify the roles, I realized I only had two (student/employee) and the ethical tension was pretty straightforward - just time management, not competing moral obligations."  
Or showing how someone refined from "Should companies use facial recognition?" (too abstract, no personal agency) to "My retail job wants me to help implement facial recognition for loss prevention, but I'm uncomfortable with the privacy implications and the technology's bias issues" (personal stakes, role conflicts, genuine ethical complexity).  
The key seems to be giving them enough scaffolding to recognize the difference between a situation that *feels* ethically complex and one that *is* structurally complex enough for sustained analysis. What do you think - should this be front-loaded in week 1, or spread across the first two weeks as they're developing their selection?  
Retry  
**C**  
I am envisioning some kind of written narrative with annotated comments that explain like what you just mentioned. Track the brainstorming process and add in common pitfalls and errors, explaining what went wrong with each idea, which would roughly align with the same timing that students would experience as they do the same thing.  
Edit  
Yes - a brainstorming narrative that mirrors the student experience in real time. Like following a fictional student through their actual thought process over several days, complete with false starts, dead ends, and gradual refinement.  
Something like: "Day 1: I immediately thought about my internship where my supervisor asked me to fudge some data. But when I started mapping out the roles, I realized this was pretty straightforward - lying is wrong, and reporting violations is required. There's emotional difficulty here, but not ethical complexity."  
Then showing the pivot: "Day 3: I kept thinking about that internship, though, and realized the real dilemma isn't about the data fudging incident - it's about the broader pattern I've noticed where our environmental compliance reports consistently present the most favorable interpretation of ambiguous data. Nothing technically false, but..."  
The annotations could flag things like: "Notice how the student moved from a clear violation (fudging data) to a genuinely ambiguous situation (interpretive reporting). This is the kind of refinement that leads to sustainable dilemmas."  
And maybe show the role development too - how they identify "environmental science student," "future professional," "intern dependent on supervisor recommendation," "community member affected by environmental impacts," "employee of company supporting my education."  
The narrative format lets you show the messiness and non-linearity of the process, while the annotations provide the analytical framework they need to evaluate their own brainstorming. What kind of timeline are you imagining - a week's worth of thinking, or longer?  
Retry  
**C**  
With annotations about what emotional difficulty is and why it isn't really relevant to what we are trying to accomplish, and where ambiguity really does hit at what we are trying to accomplish. Timelines are artificial, so I wouldn't worry about trying for that level of detail. Just identifying the common steps of the brainstorming process as it relates to identifying a meaningful dilemma with common missteps as they are likely to pop up in the drafting process.  
Edit  
Perfect - so the narrative becomes a cognitive map of the brainstorming process itself, showing the predictable stages and missteps without artificial time constraints.  
The key distinction you're highlighting - emotional difficulty versus ethical ambiguity - seems central to the whole thing. Students will naturally gravitate toward situations that *feel* hard (relationship conflicts, financial pressures, workplace drama) but miss that emotional intensity doesn't automatically create the kind of structural complexity your course requires.  
I'm imagining annotations that catch moments like: "The student is focusing on how *upset* this situation makes them, rather than examining whether there are genuinely competing ethical obligations. Emotional stakes can indicate personal investment, but don't guarantee intellectual complexity."  
Or: "Notice how the student initially framed this as 'What should I do?' but that's actually the wrong question. The better question is 'What are the different ethical frameworks that different aspects of my identity/roles would suggest, and how do I navigate when they conflict?'"  
The brainstorming stages might be something like: initial emotional trigger → identifying personal stakes → mapping actual roles/obligations → testing for genuine conflicts → checking for decision-making agency → refining for sustainability. With common derailments at each stage that the annotations could flag.  
This approach lets students see the thinking process rather than just good/bad examples, which seems much more useful for self-assessment.  
Retry  
**C**  
Ok. Based on this perspective, let's try drafting a guidance document that hits at the core process of what students are going to need to do. Include the suggested annotations at the end of the document; I'd like to format them as callout boxes that fit contextually where they are most likely to show up in the process.  
Edit  
Finding Your Ethical Dilemma: A Brainstorming Guide  
Document  
# Finding Your Ethical Dilemma: A Brainstorming Guide

## Following Alex Through the Discovery Process

Alex is a cybersecurity student working part-time at a local credit union while finishing their degree. Like you, they need to identify an ethical  
This guidance document shows the messy, non-linear process of dilemma discovery while providing the analytical tools students need to self-assess their choices. The narrative format lets them see how someone works through the common pitfalls, while the callout boxes provide the conceptual framework to evaluate their own brainstorming.  
The key insight is showing Alex's progression from external issues → personal grievances → genuine ethical complexity, with each stage revealing why the previous approach wouldn't sustain deep analysis. Students can use this roadmap to recognize their own thinking patterns and catch themselves before investing time in unworkable dilemmas.  
Retry  
**C**  
Hmmm...not quite. Is it an authentic issue? Yes. But does it sound pretty low-stakes? Definitely not something someone would really spend a lot of time pondering over, or worrying about if they were to get the answer "wrong." I agree that emotional stakes can really cloud the issue, but since these students will be working almost entirely on their own, motivation to keep working if they don't feel an investment, it just feels like an assignment and loses the urgency. Could we come up with a similar format, but a more urgent issue? I like the cyber-security spin (nice CTE element there, I would love to keep that aspect, even if it isn't the same industry in a new version...)  
Edit  
You're absolutely right - the Mrs. Chen situation feels more like "good customer service" than a genuine ethical dilemma that would keep someone up at night. It lacks the urgency and personal stakes that would sustain 16 weeks of wrestling with it.  
Let me think about cybersecurity scenarios with real bite - situations where getting it wrong has serious consequences the student would actually lose sleep over.  
What about something like: Alex discovers their employer (maybe a small tech company or local government office) has been breached, but management wants to cover it up to avoid bad publicity/legal costs. Alex has the technical evidence, knows people's personal data is compromised, but also knows that going public could destroy the company and cost everyone their jobs - including Alex's path through school.  
Or: Alex is doing cybersecurity for a school district and discovers another employee is accessing student records inappropriately - but that employee is helping undocumented students navigate services their families desperately need, technically violating privacy policies to provide crucial support.  
These have the "what do I do and how do I live with the consequences" quality that would actually drive sustained analysis. The stakes are high enough that different ethical frameworks would create genuinely agonizing conflicts.  
What kind of scenario do you think would hit that sweet spot of authentic CTE context but with real urgency and personal investment?  
Retry  
**C**  
The first one seems a little too "staged" even though it is a possibility that students might face. It has disaster movie or rom-com vibes. 2)Closer, but the political overtones to helping undocumented workers is way too sensitive. I know I am Goldilocks here, but we have to get this right if we are going to be able to help students find that same bandwidth with their own work.  
Edit  
You're not being Goldilocks - you're identifying the real challenge here. The first one does feel like a plot device, and the second opens political cans of worms that would derail the ethical analysis.  
I think the issue is I'm reaching for dramatic scenarios when the most sustainable dilemmas might be more... quietly urgent? Things that feel mundane from the outside but create genuine internal conflict for the person living them.  
What about something closer to: Alex works IT support while in school and has administrative access to company systems. They've noticed their supervisor consistently accessing personal information about employees - not for malicious purposes, but out of curiosity/gossip. Reading personal emails, checking browsing history, looking at salary information they shouldn't have access to. It's not technically illegal, the supervisor has the access rights, but it's clearly an abuse of privilege. Alex knows because they see the access logs, and they're the only one who would notice this pattern.  
The urgency comes from: Alex sees colleagues as friends, knows this violation is ongoing, has unique knowledge/responsibility, but also depends on this supervisor for references, job security, future opportunities. And it forces questions about complicity - by not acting, is Alex enabling the behavior?  
Still cybersecurity-focused, personally consequential, but less "movie plot" dramatic. Does that direction feel more authentic to you?  
Retry  
**C**  
I know I am asking a lot, but we need to keep thinking. This example seems, while the possible power differential is compelling, it isn't enough to really build a lot of questions, or at least enough to warrant 16 weeks of analysis. I am beginning to see that this is likely going to be a much harder activity for my students than I might have previously anticipated. I am not going to abandon it just yet, but I had better take the complexity seriously, especially if I am not going to be able to judge student reactions through non-verbals, etc.  
Edit  
You're absolutely right to take this complexity seriously - and I think we're hitting on why the "measure twice, cut once" principle is so crucial. If we're struggling to craft one compelling example with full awareness of what the dilemma needs to accomplish, students working alone will face an even steeper challenge.  
The pattern I'm noticing in my attempts is that I keep reaching for either:

* High-drama situations that feel artificial, or
* Everyday conflicts that don't have enough depth for sustained analysis

The sweet spot seems to be situations that are personally consequential enough to create genuine urgency, structurally complex enough to resist easy solutions, and authentic enough to feel real - but that's a very narrow target.  
Maybe the issue is that authentic dilemmas can't be "designed" - they emerge from the specific intersection of a person's roles, relationships, and circumstances. Which means your guidance document might need to be less about showing the "right" kind of dilemma and more about helping students recognize when their own situations have the necessary complexity.  
Are you thinking we might need a different approach to the guidance entirely? Or should we keep pushing on this example format but acknowledge that finding the right scenario is genuinely difficult work that students will need significant support with?  
Retry  
**C**  
Well, we've only tried three different versions over about 10 minutes. that's a low bar for cutting bait just yet. Try another?  
Edit  
You're right - let me push harder on this.  
What about: Alex is a cybersecurity student doing an internship at a mid-size company. They discover that the company's main client - a healthcare system that processes medical records for several rural hospitals - has been running massively outdated security protocols for over a year. Alex knows this creates serious vulnerabilities for patient data, potentially affecting thousands of people in medically underserved communities.  
Here's the complexity: Alex's internship supervisor is aware of the problem but says the client can't afford the upgrades and will likely drop the service entirely if pushed, leaving those rural hospitals with no IT support at all. The supervisor has been gradually implementing partial fixes without telling the client, hoping to patch things quietly over time. Alex could report this to regulatory authorities, but that would almost certainly end the service relationship, potentially leaving vulnerable populations without electronic health records systems they now depend on.  
Alex is also discovering that their supervisor - who they've come to respect and who has been mentoring them - has been carrying this ethical burden alone, trying to balance patient privacy against healthcare access for underserved communities.  
The urgency: Alex has to decide whether to stay complicit in a system they know is compromised, knowing that their silence affects real patients, while also knowing that "doing the right thing" might cause more harm than good.  
Does that hit closer to the sustained complexity and genuine stakes we need?  
Retry  
**C**  
I think let's take a step back and reconsider dilemma. We seem to automatically assume it is always a negative situation. This isn't always the case. Let's try a different tact - a situation where I have to choose between two compelling but mutually exclusive goods. For example, I can give a bonus to one person in my department, but there are three very different but equally compelling individuals. There is no way to make an apples to apples comparison between the three; they all have different jobs that require different skills with different reporting structures, expectations, etc.  
Edit  
Brilliant reframe - you're absolutely right that I've been defaulting to "crisis/wrongdoing" scenarios when the most sustainable dilemmas might be about competing goods rather than avoiding harms.  
The bonus example is perfect because it shows how different ethical frameworks would genuinely conflict: utilitarian thinking might focus on which bonus would create the most overall good, deontological ethics might emphasize fair procedures or equal treatment, virtue ethics might ask what a good manager would do, care ethics might consider relationships and individual circumstances.  
Let me try the cybersecurity angle with this approach:  
Alex is a cybersecurity student who's been offered three different paths forward, each representing something they genuinely want but can't pursue simultaneously:

1. A prestigious internship with a major tech company working on cutting-edge security research - great for career advancement and intellectual challenge
2. A position with a local nonprofit that provides cybersecurity services to small businesses and community organizations - meaningful community impact but less prestigious/lucrative
3. An opportunity to join a startup founded by a mentor, working on security tools for developing countries - innovative work with global impact but high risk and uncertain future

Each choice forecloses the others, each aligns with different aspects of Alex's values and identity, and each would be defended by different ethical frameworks. The "problem" isn't that any choice is wrong - it's navigating between competing goods with limited information about long-term consequences.  
Does this direction feel more sustainable and authentic?  
Retry  
**C**  
Kind of, but if we look at the goal of the course being to help a student analyze their ethical algorithms, to identify "limited" existing code, and how to expand their algorithms to anticipate unforseen or unaddressed questions, it seems as though this immediately defaults, to a degree, to a matter of preference, more complex than chocolate vs. strawberry ice cream, but still just a matter of opinion, isn't it?  
Edit  
You're exactly right - and that's a crucial insight. Career choice scenarios, even complex ones, ultimately come down to personal preference and values alignment rather than ethical reasoning. A student could easily say "I value community impact over prestige" and be done with it, rather than wrestling with genuine ethical obligations that create internal conflict.  
The ethical algorithm development you're describing needs situations where the student's existing decision-making process breaks down because they face genuine competing *obligations* - not just competing preferences or values, but actual duties they owe to different people or principles that cannot be simultaneously satisfied.  
So we need scenarios where the student genuinely doesn't know what they *should* do (ethically), not just what they *want* to do (personally). Where their current algorithm produces contradictory outputs when they try to honor all their legitimate obligations.  
Back to the drawing board with this lens: we need a situation where Alex has clear ethical duties pulling in different directions - maybe something like having made commitments they can't simultaneously fulfill, or having information that creates conflicting obligations to different people they're responsible to.  
The dilemma has to be about right vs. right in terms of moral obligations, not just good vs. good in terms of personal preferences. Does that distinction help clarify what we're looking for?  
Retry  
**C**  
Yes, to a degree. It can be right vs. right, or lesser of two equal evils, or lesser good for many vs. significant evil for some, etc.  
Edit  
Ah, that opens up much more nuanced territory. Not just "I have two good options" but genuine ethical trade-offs where any action creates moral costs that need to be weighed.  
Let me try again with this broader understanding:  
Alex works part-time in IT support while finishing their cybersecurity degree. The small company where they work has been family-owned for decades, and Alex has become close with both the aging owner (who's been like a mentor) and the employees (many of whom are supporting families and have limited job prospects elsewhere).  
The owner has asked Alex to implement a new employee monitoring system - not for malicious reasons, but because the company is struggling financially and needs to demonstrate productivity improvements to keep a major contract that employs most of the staff. The monitoring would track keystrokes, screen time, website usage, and email activity.  
Alex knows this level of surveillance will create a hostile work environment and violate the trust-based culture that makes this workplace special. Several employees have confided personal struggles (health issues, family problems) that they've been able to navigate because of the flexible, supportive environment. The monitoring would end that.  
But Alex also knows that without this contract, the company will likely close within six months, putting 20+ people out of work in a town with limited opportunities.  
The ethical tension: Alex's technical skills could preserve jobs for people they care about, but only by implementing a system that undermines the human dignity and workplace relationships that make those jobs meaningful. Either choice involves a genuine moral cost that Alex would have to live with.  
Does this better capture the "lesser good vs. significant evil" complexity you're describing?  
Retry  
**C**  
OK, you've got me thinking now. How about something along these lines: Alex is a newly promoted manager within a larger corporation where he has been working for several years. The promotion comes at an ideal time for Alex, as he has outgrown his current assignment and duties, and the pay increase is also not a hardship. However, soon after his promotion, Alex is asked by his manager to reinstitute an old policy that is still on the books regarding in-office work. Over the past few years, individuals have been given a lot of liberty in terms of when they come and go in the office space, and there really haven't been a lot of issues, even though the policy is clear about office hours. Alex personally disagrees with the policy and his manager's insistence on reinstituting it, but the boss is the boss. Alex tries to convince them to change their minds in private, but the manager is unmoved. They report to higher ups and are concerned about the public image of darkened offices during regular business hours. There isn't any ambiguity in the policy and the manager has every reason to do so, especially since budgets are tight and there is always the hovering threat of layoffs, though everyone in the department is fully engaged and industrious. Alex knows exactly how this is going to be received by the rank and file, but he has received his marching orders and they aren't ambiguous. No one will be directly harmed by the implementation of the policy, but it will have a very negative impact on morale and Alex will be the face of the issue. At the same time, he knows that if he doesn't execute this policy with intent, it will strain an already tenuous relationship with his supervisor. Again, not to the point of firing, but making an already uncomfortable relationship even more problematic. But on the other hand, his employees are hard workers who don't necessarily feel valued or appreciated; this policy can only put more stress in the workplace.  
Edit  
Now THIS feels like it has the right complexity and authenticity. This is the kind of situation that would genuinely keep someone up at night, not because it's dramatic, but because there's no clear "right" answer and real relationships are at stake.  
What makes this work:  
Genuine competing obligations:

* As a manager: responsible for team morale and supporting his people
* As an employee: owes loyalty and compliance to his supervisor
* As a newly promoted person: needs to establish credibility in both directions
* As someone who benefited from the informal culture: has personal investment in preserving what worked

No clear villain: The upper manager isn't being malicious - they have legitimate concerns about budget pressures and public perception. The policy itself isn't unreasonable on paper.  
Real consequences for real people: Alex's team members aren't abstractions - they're people he's worked alongside, whose personal situations he knows, who will see him as the face of this change.  
Ethical complexity that resists simple solutions: Different frameworks would genuinely conflict. Utilitarian analysis might weigh team happiness against organizational stability. Deontological thinking might focus on duty to follow legitimate orders. Virtue ethics might ask what kind of leader Alex wants to be.  
Personal stakes: Alex's own position, relationships, and future are directly affected by how he handles this.  
This feels like something that could sustain 16 weeks of analysis because the student would keep discovering new layers of complexity as they apply different ethical models.  
Does this hit the mark you were looking for?  
Retry  
**C**  
Well, it is based on true events that kept me up for more than one night, I can tell you, and like you said, I still don't know the exact right answer. So that is probably the best indicator that it is heading in the right direction. And any student, whether they have a lot of work history or not, could easily comprehend the tensions and roles related to the event. But I don't want to use my personal example; it hits a little too close to home, even though the individuals in question aren't here any more. But, as a working example, could you extrapolate a similar type of situation, not with any of these details or ones like them?  
Edit  
Absolutely - I can see why that would feel too close to home, even with changed details. But it's a perfect template for the kind of authentic complexity we need.  
Let me try a structurally similar situation in a different context:  
Alex is a newly promoted team lead at a mid-size marketing firm where they've worked for three years. The promotion came with much-needed financial relief and represents real career growth. However, shortly after the promotion, Alex's manager asks them to implement a new client reporting system that requires significantly more detailed tracking and documentation of billable hours.  
Currently, the team operates on a trust-based system where people generally hit their targets and deliver quality work, but the time tracking is fairly loose. The new system would require logging activities in 15-minute increments and providing detailed justifications for any non-billable time. Alex's manager explains that their biggest client has been questioning whether they're getting full value, and this documentation would help justify their fees and potentially prevent the loss of a contract that represents 40% of the company's revenue.  
Alex knows this level of micromanagement will fundamentally change the collaborative, creative culture that makes their team effective. Several team members have mentioned that the flexibility has been crucial for managing personal situations - medical appointments, family obligations, mental health needs. The new system would end that accommodation.  
But Alex also understands that losing the major client could mean layoffs, and in a creative industry where good positions are competitive, team members might struggle to find equivalent work elsewhere.  
Does this capture the same structural tensions without hitting too close to your actual experience?  
Retry  
**C**  
The more I think about it, let's stick with the one I detailed, because the stakes are real, but it isn't an end of business or layoffs situation, which always seems to be too much of an escalation.  
But, here's another one, so we might be able to triangulate? Diane is a supervisor in a small department of a larger university. She oversees several different groups of faculty members, all of whom have their own internal group leads. These individuals don't have supervisory status, but just act as team leads for their own groups. One of these groups is suffering from intense internal strife; personality conflicts between two of the group members has spilled over from inter-office disputes to almost open warfare, to the point that students are aware of the tension and are beginning to take sides. Diane has tried her best to intervene and seek reconciliation, but has had no success. Both sides are adamant about their positions and lay all blame at the feet of the other. Diane has appealed to their sense of professionalism, tried leveraging her personal friendships with both groups, tried group interventions, but nothing works. She has taken the issue to her manager, who provides no guidance or assistance in resolving the issue, but it is getting to the point where classes are being disrupted, students are acting out, and things are reaching a breaking point. However, Diane does not have the authority to fire anyone, there are no discernable policies being broken that would warrant disciplinary action, and the faculty in question cannot be transferred elsewhere due to their subject matter expertise. And if Diane has to take one more Tums antiacid before going to work, she might just want to quit herself.  
Edit  
Yes! This triangulates perfectly with the office policy scenario. Both have that grinding, real-world quality where you're caught between legitimate competing interests with no clean solutions.  
What I love about this second example:  
Similar structural elements to your office policy scenario:

* Middle management caught between competing loyalties
* Personal relationships complicate professional obligations
* Limited formal authority to solve the problem
* Real consequences for people you care about (students vs. employees)
* Your own wellbeing and effectiveness are suffering

But different enough to show the pattern:

* This is about managing conflict rather than enforcing policy
* The "harm" is more diffuse (disrupted learning environment) vs. direct (loss of workplace flexibility)
* Authority limitations are structural (can't fire) vs. hierarchical (must follow orders)

Both scenarios share that awful middle-management reality where you're responsible for outcomes you can't fully control, where relationships matter as much as policies, and where every potential solution creates new problems.  
Having two worked examples like this would really help students see that we're not looking for one specific type of dilemma, but rather that structural complexity of competing obligations with real stakes and limited good options.  
Should we develop the brainstorming narrative using the office policy scenario, since it has that personal authenticity that came from lived experience, even if we change identifying details?  
Retry  
**C**  
Well, the concern is that, like you said, both of these examples come from a middle management perspective that most, if not all, students would have little familiarity or compassion for; they are all likely entry-level workers who think their managers have soft, cushy jobs that are way too easy for the pay they get, so this is unlikely to strike a positive chord or echo in them. But the kind of tension, the personal elements without emotionality, the lack of clear solutions or outcomes, the sense of competing obligations and duties that are all honorable, reasonable, that is what I am looking for.  
Edit  
Absolutely right - students would likely roll their eyes at management dilemmas and think "just make a decision, that's what you get paid for." We need the same structural complexity but from a position they can authentically inhabit.  
So we need scenarios where someone in an entry-level or student position faces genuine competing obligations with real stakes and no clear resolution. The challenge is finding situations where younger workers actually have enough agency and responsibility to create those ethical tensions, rather than just "should I quit this terrible job" decisions.  
Maybe something like:

* A student worker who has access to information that creates competing loyalties
* Someone in a peer leadership role (RA, tutor, team lead) caught between institutional expectations and peer relationships
* An intern or entry-level worker whose specialized knowledge (like cybersecurity skills) creates unique responsibilities
* Someone whose part-time job intersects with their personal community in ways that create conflicts

The key seems to be finding situations where their position gives them just enough responsibility and agency to face genuine ethical dilemmas, but not so much authority that it feels foreign to their experience.  
What kinds of roles do your students typically occupy that might generate these competing obligations? Work-study positions, internships, part-time jobs in their field of study?  
Retry  
**C**  
Truthfully, many of them are employed full time outside of school, though usually in service-oriented positions that do not align with their future career plans. The majority of my students are non-traditional, so they do often have familial relationships and roles that could be introduced, like the stresses between spouses working full-time, studying full-time and trying to find time to maintain their own relationships.  
Edit  
Ah, that completely changes the landscape - non-traditional students juggling full-time work, school, and family relationships would have much richer sources of genuine ethical complexity than I was imagining.  
The competing obligations between spouse, parent, student, employee, and community member roles could create exactly the kind of tensions we need. Someone might face situations like:

* Having information from work that affects their family/community but creates loyalty conflicts
* Being caught between family financial needs and educational/career goals in ways that force difficult choices
* Workplace situations where their student knowledge creates responsibilities their coworkers don't have
* Family situations where their growing expertise creates new obligations or expectations
* Community roles that conflict with work or school commitments in meaningful ways

These students would likely have much more authentic access to the kind of sustained ethical complexity we're looking for, precisely because they're managing multiple significant life roles simultaneously.  
Maybe the guidance document should help them recognize that some of their most challenging current life situations - the ones that feel like "just life being hard" - might actually contain the kind of ethical complexity that could sustain deep analysis. The challenge would be helping them distinguish between practical problems (not enough time/money) and genuine ethical dilemmas (competing obligations to people/principles they value).  
Does that seem like a more promising direction for this population?  
Retry  
**C**  
Yes. Let's try to roll out three brief general case situations that could be used for the dilemma analysis without going into the weeds of the process like we did with Alex. We can do that later once we have the examples that work.  
Edit  
Finding Your Ethical Dilemma: A Brainstorming Guide  
Document ∙ Version 2  
# Finding Your Ethical Dilemma: Sample Scenarios

## Three Brief Example Dilemmas

### Scenario 1: The Family Financial Crisis  
Maria works full-time as a medical billing clerk while studying healthcare administration. Her mother, who helps care for M  
These three scenarios capture the kind of ethical complexity your non-traditional students would actually face - where their multiple life roles create genuine competing obligations with real stakes. Each one shows how their educational experience creates new knowledge that complicates rather than simplifies their existing relationships and responsibilities.  
The key insight is that for this population, some of their most challenging "life situations" are actually rich ethical dilemmas in disguise - they just need help recognizing the ethical dimensions beyond the practical stress.  
Retry  
**C**  
Scenario 1 is a definite yes, Scenarios 2 and 3 seem to be slipping back into the same patterns as our previous examples. We aren't working in situations where a group of teens are sluething out the corrupt manager here. Keep 1 and let's retry with 2 and 3  
Edit  
You're absolutely right - scenarios 2 and 3 are sliding back into "exposing wrongdoing" territory rather than genuine competing goods/obligations. Let me try two new scenarios that follow scenario 1's pattern.  
Finding Your Ethical Dilemma: A Brainstorming Guide  
Document ∙ Version 3  
### Scenario 2: The Sibling Support Decision  
James works full-time in retail management while studying business administration. His younger brother, who has struggled with addiction but has been clean for eight months, asks James to cosign a loan for  
These revised scenarios focus on the authentic tension between competing obligations that non-traditional students actually face - family loyalty vs. financial responsibility, care for others vs. personal safety/goals. No villains, no corruption to expose, just genuine competing goods where any choice involves real moral costs.  
Retry  
**C**  
Oh, now 2 is AWESOME!!!! And a very real dilemma for a lot of people! Nice!!!! 3 might need some work, but it is a plausible. Maybe change the assistance is coming from her mother in law, Janet, and the offer is compelling and financially necessary. However, Janet also has political or religious beliefs that conflict with Patricia's own and she is worried about the impact exposure might have on her daughter, but there is also a family bond there that if Patricia were to decline the offer could create family drama that could be challenging to navigate in the future. Patricia's wife, Janet's daughter, doesn't seem to perceive the conflict and is unsure why Patricia is reluctant to accept. It hasn't gotten to arguments yet, but there is strain growing as Patricia wrestles with the decision.  
Edit  
Finding Your Ethical Dilemma: A Brainstorming Guide  
Document ∙ Version 4  
### Scenario 3: The Family Childcare Values Conflict  
Patricia works full-time as a nursing assistant while studying to become an RN. Her mother-in-law Janet has offered to provide free childcare for Patricia's 6-year-old daughter while Patricia atten  
Perfect! Now scenario 3 has that same authentic complexity - no villains, just genuine competing obligations between family harmony, financial necessity, parenting values, and relationship preservation. The added layer of Patricia's wife not understanding the conflict makes it even more realistic and emotionally complex without being dramatic.  
All three scenarios now show the kind of sustained ethical tension that emerges naturally from the multiple roles non-traditional students juggle - where being a good parent might conflict with being a good family member, or where financial survival creates tensions with personal values. These feel like situations that would genuinely keep someone up at night wrestling with what the right thing to do actually is.  
Retry  
**C**  
OK. Let's keep these three, but they all seem to focus on family, not work, and CTE might need a little more of that. Perhaps the two I already introduced for a collection of 5 worked examples?  
Edit  
Absolutely - having 5 examples would give students a better range to see the pattern, and including the work-focused ones would better serve your CTE population. The office policy scenario and the faculty conflict scenario both show how workplace responsibilities create genuine ethical complexity.  
So we'd have:  
Family-focused dilemmas:

1. Maria's financial crisis (family needs vs. educational goals)
2. James's brother loan decision (family support vs. financial security)
3. Patricia's childcare values conflict (family relationships vs. parenting values)

Workplace-focused dilemmas: 4. The office policy enforcement (employee loyalty vs. management duties) 5. Diane's faculty conflict management (professional obligations vs. relationship preservation)  
This collection would show students that ethical complexity can emerge from any of their major life roles - family member, employee, student, manager, community member - and that the common thread isn't the specific context but the structure of competing obligations with real stakes and no clear resolution.  
The variety would also help students recognize that they don't need to look for dramatic situations - some of their most challenging "ordinary" life circumstances might contain exactly the ethical richness the course requires.  
Should we integrate all five into the document, or would you prefer to develop the brainstorming narrative around one of them first?  
Retry  
**C**  
Maybe we need to cut one family element and replace it with something more community, but not personal? Civic or local government conflict-ish?  
Edit  
Good point - having three family scenarios might make students think this course is only about family relationships. A civic/community conflict would show that ethical complexity can emerge from their roles as citizens or community members too.  
Maybe something like:  
A school board or city council scenario where someone serves as a volunteer member while also being affected by the decisions? Like being on a school board while having kids in the district, or serving on a planning commission while living in an area affected by proposed development?  
Or a community organization conflict - maybe someone who volunteers with a local nonprofit that's facing a decision about accepting funding from a source that conflicts with their mission, but declining would mean cutting services the community desperately needs?  
Or a neighborhood/HOA situation where someone has informal leadership role but faces competing obligations to different neighbors or community needs?  
The key would be finding something where the student has genuine agency and decision-making power (not just "should I vote for X") but isn't so formal that it feels removed from typical student experience.  
What kind of community roles do your students typically have? Are they more likely to be involved in formal civic positions, volunteer organizations, neighborhood groups, or something else?  
Retry  
**C**  
Oh, that is perfect. The local school board just decided to close one of the local elementaries because of maintenance costs, questions of ADA access and the cost to upgrade accessibility, declining enrollments and the question of whether allocating students in that neighborhood to other schools could bolster waning enrollments elsewhere, in conflict with local desire for their own school, a 100+ year history of that school in operation, questions about cost and transparency of the decision-making process, the rejection of local ballot initiatives to "save our school."  
Edit  
That's perfect! It has all the complexity we need - legitimate competing interests with no clear villains and real consequences for different groups.  
Let me think about how to position someone in a decision-making role without making it feel too formal or remote from student experience. Maybe:  
The student as a relatively new city council member who won their seat partly on promises of fiscal responsibility, but now faces this school closure decision. They have kids who don't attend that particular school but live in the broader district. They campaigned on being responsive to constituents, but different constituencies want opposite things. The financial arguments are sound, but they're seeing firsthand how devastating this is to that neighborhood. They have to vote, and whatever they decide, they'll be betraying some group of people who trusted them.  
Competing roles:

* Elected official responsible for fiscal stewardship
* Parent concerned about educational quality district-wide
* Campaign promise keeper who pledged both fiscal responsibility AND community responsiveness
* Neighbor who has to live with the consequences of their vote
* Community member who values both practical governance and historical preservation

The beauty is that both sides have legitimate arguments, there are real trade-offs either way, and the decision has lasting consequences the person has to live with in their own community.  
Does that capture the right level of agency and complexity?  
Retry  
**C**  
And that is exactly what happened in this situation. A city council member resigned unexpectedly about a week after the final decision was issued to close the school; the mayor looked at a wide variety of candidates and selected the lead opponent to the school closure as the new city councilman, perhaps as a means of inviting opponents into the circle to appease public outcry. But how he has to navigate those he just worked with, who are going to expect his active support for their perspectives, along with those who agreed with the closure decision, in a highly-charged political atmosphere? Yeah, I get it, and I can appreciate his willingness to serve, but would I trade places? Not in a million years.  
Edit  
Oh wow - so this person is walking into a situation where they're expected to be the champion for the anti-closure faction, but now they're actually responsible for governing and working with the very people who made the decision they opposed. That's brutal.  
The ethical complexity is incredible:

* Campaign activist role: People supported them because they opposed the closure - they expect continued advocacy
* City council member: Now responsible for effective governance and working relationships with colleagues
* Community representative: Has to represent ALL constituents, not just the faction that supported them
* Public official: Bound by fiduciary duties and legal obligations that might conflict with campaign promises
* Neighbor: Still has to live in this community long after the political drama fades

And every decision becomes a test of whether they're "selling out" to their former opponents or being irresponsibly oppositional to their new colleagues.  
This is perfect because it shows how accepting responsibility can fundamentally change your ethical obligations - what you could rightfully do as an activist becomes problematic when you're governing. And there's no way to satisfy everyone's expectations.  
Should we make this our fifth scenario - the community/civic one - to replace one of the family examples? It definitely brings that CTE-relevant element of professional decision-making under public scrutiny.  
Retry  
**C**  
Let's just make it six, because all the others really are good ones that illustrate the complexity of adult living, which is either where these students are or are headed, or have been in for a while, depending on the student. But they are all good, resonant examples, I think.  
Edit  
Perfect - six examples gives students a really rich range to understand the pattern while seeing how it applies across all their major life roles. The collection shows that ethical complexity isn't limited to one domain but emerges wherever you have genuine competing obligations with real stakes.  
So we'd have:  
Family-focused:

1. Maria's financial crisis
2. James's brother loan decision
3. Patricia's childcare values conflict

Work-focused: 4. The office policy enforcement 5. Diane's faculty conflict management  
Community/civic-focused: 6. The new council member navigating post-appointment expectations  
This range would help students recognize that they don't need to hunt for exotic scenarios - the ethical dilemmas that will sustain deep analysis are often hiding in plain sight within the complex adult lives they're already living. Whether it's juggling family responsibilities, navigating workplace dynamics, or accepting community leadership roles, the same structural tensions emerge.  
Having six examples also gives us flexibility in the guidance document - we could show the full brainstorming process with one, then reference the others as comparison points, or use different ones to illustrate different aspects of dilemma development.  
Should we now work on crafting that sixth scenario with the same level of detail as the others?  
Retry  
**C**  
Yes, create a summary similar to what you have in Scenarios 1 and 3, and create a markdown version that I could download of all the scenarios for offline review. Also, could you draft a summary of our decision-making conversation for future reference, also in markdown?  
Edit  
Finding Your Ethical Dilemma: A Brainstorming Guide  
Document ∙ Version 5  
# Finding Your Ethical Dilemma: Sample Scenarios

## Six Brief Example Dilemmas

### Scenario 1: The Family Financial Crisis  
Maria works full-time as a medical billing clerk while studying healthcare administration. Her mother, who helps care for Mar  
Dilemma Design Process: Conversation Summary  
Document  
# Dilemma Design Process: Conversation Summary

## Context and Challenge  
We were developing guidance to help students in an Applied Ethics in Technology course identify authentic ethical dilemmas that could sustain 16 weeks of analysis. The course se  
Perfect! Now you have both documents ready for offline review. The scenarios show the range of authentic complexity your students need, and the conversation summary captures our learning process about what makes dilemmas sustainable for deep ethical analysis.  
The key insight we arrived at - that non-traditional students' most challenging life situations often contain sophisticated ethical complexity disguised as practical problems - should really inform how you frame the dilemma selection process in your course materials.  
Retry  
[Claude can make mistakes. Please double-check responses.](https://support.anthropic.com/en/articles/8525154-claude-is-providing-incorrect-or-misleading-responses-what-s-going-on)  
Sonnet 4  
Claude

**C**  
Clayn  
Free plan