The University of Kansas  
School of Social Welfare  

SW 623 Seminar in Professional Issues  

Master Syllabus  

Prerequisites: SW 220, 510, 530, 532, 540, 541, 555, 601 (first semester), 610, 611, 620  
Credit hours: 3  

I. COURSE RATIONALE  

SW 623 is the only course in the School’s BSW program that focuses primarily on the values and ethical dimensions of contemporary professional social welfare policy and practice. In its mission statement, our School makes explicit its ethical commitment to the empowerment and well-being of individuals and communities. The themes of our program also focus explicitly on respect for diversity, and on social and economic justice. Our profession has always been dedicated to value-guided practice, binding each social worker to professional standards of behavior, as set forth in the Code of Ethics (NASW).  

SW 623 represents the culmination of the School’s professional socialization process. As such, it is linked most explicitly to SW 220, the first course taken in the major, in which the student first learns about social work as one of the most consciously value-based professions in the U.S., and where they are first introduced to the Code of Ethics. However, its position in the final semester of the program allows for its consideration as a “capstone,” binding together elements of social policy (SW 620), practice (SW 510, 555, 610, 611, 612) and research (SW 540, 541). The students use this course as an opportunity to become more fully in touch with their own values and commitments, and to synthesize their own orientations with the Weltanschauung, the ethos, and the mission of the social work profession. Students present their knowledge, feelings, commitments, and their biases before their soon-to-be professional colleagues, as well as their professionally seasoned instructor, all of whom are given an opportunity to respond and counter-respond. The principal learning approach is each student’s own preparation for, and presentation of, an actual case, a hypothetical case, a policy, a proposed statute, or ordinance, in all of its dimensions. Student-led discussions follow: through this process (as well as the process of listening to and participating in the discussions of other student presentations), the student further socializes him/herself to the professional role, its attendant authority, and the accompanying dilemmas he/she is likely to face.  

II. EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES  

By the end of the semester, students will:  

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1. Identify and critique some major professional issues from a social work values-ethic perspective (relates to Objective 2,8).
2. Critique one’s own practice behavior from a values-ethics perspective (relates to Objectives 3,13).
3. Reach thoughtfully reasoned conclusions on ethical issues and dilemmas (relates to Objectives 2,13).
4. Clarify how one’s own moral values and moral aspirations are at work in their ongoing efforts to become responsible, culturally competent, ethical practitioners (relates to Objectives 2,3,13).
5. Use ethical knowledge as a means to enhance client self-determination with diverse client populations (relates to Objectives 2,3).
6. Use research knowledge to advance their positions on behalf of clients (relates to Objective 9).
7. Understand how ethics and values may be applied to laws, statutes, and social policies, and how social workers may ethically respond to those dilemmas which present themselves at this level (relates to Objective 8).
8. Articulate strengths and weaknesses of student’s own professional identity. (relates to Objective 13)

III. CURRICULUM THEMES

The themes of the School are reflected in this course in the following ways:

- The ethical dimensions of the strengths perspective are discussed. As a model for practice, the strengths perspective is inherently empowering and offers the maximum possibility for self-determination. This is explored more fully in class.
- The adoption of a critical perspective is essential to culturally competent social work; as competence is an ethical obligation in and of itself, so is expertise in the ability to understand issues from multiple subject positions.
- Social and economic justice: advocacy for social and economic justice is part of the ethical obligation of the social worker. In this course, students learn how this type of advocacy, integrated into our everyday professional lives, is an ongoing, required element of all professional practice.
- Diversity: respect for, and appreciation of diverse populations and lifestyles is emphasized through a thorough examination of the value base of the profession, the Code of Ethics, and through readings that illuminate the importance of understanding how human problems are differentially experienced, based upon our membership in different populations.

IV. THE LIBERAL ARTS PERSPECTIVE

Students are expected to draw upon their courses in the humanities in defining and analyzing the ethical dimension of professional issues. Oral communication skills are called upon in making the presentations and leading the discussions. Written communication skills are utilized in writing the papers.
V. **PROFESSIONAL PURPOSE AND VALUES**

Socialization to the profession requires profound understanding of social work’s purposes and values, and preparing students for the inevitable moment when the values and purposes of the profession either conflict with personal values, or two values exist in counter position to the other. Also, profoundly understanding the purposes of the profession allows students to educate the general public in their understanding of social work’s unique niche among helping professions.

VI. **PREPARATION FOR PRACTICE WITH DIVERSE POPULATIONS**

Commitment to diverse populations is an overarching theme of this School. Thus, students are expected to explore ethical issues related to age, ethnicity, sex, race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. Specifically, the influences of ageism, racism, homophobia, etc. that color our own practice, agency policy, or social policy, are examined fully. This is in keeping with both the Code and the School’s own mission statement.

VII. **TOPICS**

Topics which **must** be covered include:

- Hypothetical or real cases/ issues which require, in aggregate, interpretation of all elements of the Code of Ethics (ethical dilemmas)
- Models for ethical decision-making
- Social work values, and the juxtaposition of those with personal values
- Regulatory issues and professional licensing, particularly in the State of Kansas
- Use of supervision in the resolution of ethical dilemmas in practice

Topics which are recommended include:

- Codes of Ethics from other professions or professional social work organizations
- Legal regulations, by state, of a variety of social work ethical mandates
- The impact of the Internet on the regulation of practice by state law

VIII. **RECOMMENDED READINGS**

One of the following is recommended as a primary text:


**Recommended readings (include, but are not limited to):**


IX. **RECOMMENDED ASSIGNMENTS**

a. Debates between two classmates, of various professional issues reflecting ethical dilemmas, in the model of the “Controversial Issues” texts. (Course objectives 1, 3, 4, 6, 7)

b. Critiques of the fellow students’ respective arguments, based upon style of presentation (e.g. seamlessness), the quality of the arguments (e.g. are the arguments based upon logical or practice fallacies, or biases?). (Course objectives 3, 4)

c. An analysis of one’s own ethical practice dilemma using an established ethical problem-solving model (Course objectives 2, 3, 4, 5)

d. Preparation of legislative testimony on a bill to be advanced in the state legislature that is of importance to the profession and its clients (Course objectives 6, 7)

e. An “ethical journal” of the various ethical problems and dilemmas in the field, their resolution, and the means by which that resolution was arrived at (Course objectives 2, 3, 4, 5) An essay on “On Being an Ethical Practitioner,” in which the student writes an integrative essay on how one thinks and conducts one’s practice (both now, in placement, and in the future) based upon what one has learned in this class. (All course objectives)

f. Construct a professional portfolio, representing learning and growth as a professional social worker (Course Objective 8)

X. **GRADING**

**BSW GRADING SCALE**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90-93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>87-89</td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>73-76</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>60-69</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
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A. **Incomplete grades.** A temporary grade of Incomplete may be assigned to a student who, for a reason beyond the student’s control, has been unable to complete the required work in a course on time. It is the student’s responsibility to request an Incomplete from the instructor. A request signed by the student and the faculty member must be on file when grades are submitted. A student may not enroll in a course sequential to one in which he or she has an I or F letter grade. An incomplete not removed by the end of the next semester will be changed to an F.

**The Master syllabi should specify:**

B. **Attendance policies for BSW courses.** For example: Class attendance is very important. More than two absences could result in the loss of all your attendance points. More than four absences will result in failure in this class. If you have missed two classes, please arrange an appointment with me to discuss the reasons for the absence and to arrange for make-up work that will count toward your class participation points. Points are deducted for missing class and coming to class late (3 pts. for each absence/lateness).

**Individual instructors’ syllabi should specify the following:**

C. The weighting of each assignment in the course and the dates by which they are done.

D. For every assignment, explain the standards used for grading.

E. If class participation is part of the grade, indicate what this means. For example, if 10 points are awarded for class participation, one point will be deducted for every class missed.

F. Indicate the policy on late assignments, e.g., they are not accepted and treated as an “F” grade or the grade is reduced by ___ for each day, week, etc.

G. Indicate how final grades will be determined.

**XI. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Students who have special educational needs of any kind, including those related to learning disabilities, other disabilities, English as a second language should discuss necessary accommodations with the instructor within the first two sessions of the course. The university and School of Social Welfare are committed to provide supportive programs and accommodations to assist students who have special learning needs to successfully meet course expectations. In particular, students who feel that they have a disability that may require accommodation should advise the instructor of such disability and desired accommodation as soon as one obtains written documentation of the disability. The instructor will work
with the student and the office of Services for Students with Disabilities to provide reasonable accommodations.

Please notify the instructor if your religious observances conflict with class or due dates for class assignments so we can make appropriate arrangements.

XII. RECORDING AND SHARING RECORDINGS OF LECTURES

Course materials prepared by the instructor, together with the content of all lectures and review sessions presented by the instructor are the property of the instructor. Video and audio recording of lectures and review sessions without the consent of the instructor is prohibited. On request, the instructor will usually grant permission for students to audio tape lectures, on the condition that these audio tapes are only used as a study aid by the individual making the recording. Unless explicit permission is obtained from the instructor, recordings of lectures and review sessions may not be modified and must not be transferred or transmitted to any other person, whether or not that individual is enrolled in the course.

XIII. HIPAA REGULATIONS

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) requires that any personal information that may identify a person must be removed to protect confidentiality. Confidentiality applies to both classroom discussions and to written work. Please follow these simple, yet essential guidelines:

- Always disguise the name and other personal identifying information when you speak and write about a person, following the guidelines established by HIPAA.
- If writing in great detail about a client, ask permission from the client.
- Share nothing about specific clients, agencies or other students outside of the classroom. Any information shared with the class/instructor will be confidential, within the limits defined by the Code of Ethics and state guidelines.

Individual instructors’ syllabi should be exactly the same as in the master syllabus.

XIV. INSTRUCTOR AVAILABILITY

Provide students with information on how to see and/or reach you.

XV. INCLEMENT WEATHER POLICY

In the event of inclement weather students should call
Lawrence: the University (785) 864-SNOW, or if hearing impaired and have TTY/TDD equipment, (800) 766-3777
Edwards Campus: (913) 897-8499
KCKCC Campus: (913) 334-1100
to determine if classes have been cancelled. Class will be held if classes have not been cancelled, and students should contact the instructor if weather or driving conditions make it impossible for them to get to class.