SOCW 511: Contemporary Debates and Ethical Dilemmas in Social Work

THIS IS A SAMPLE OUTLINE.
ACTUAL COURSE OUTLINE MAY VARY IN STRUCTURE, REQUIRED READINGS, TEXTS AND ASSIGNMENTS

Course Description:

The course uses critical race, feminist, postmodern and Indigenous perspectives to introduce students to theoretical and philosophical engagements with the issue of ethics, and to encourage them to reflect on ethical dilemmas associated with social work practice, advocacy and research. The course begins with an overview of current debates in social work followed by an introduction to relevant traditions, theories and frameworks on ethics. Students are then exposed to ethical issues relevant to different social work fields. Throughout the course, students are invited to use the course material to explore their own ethical commitments as they engage with ideas and practice implications of differing views on social work ethics.

Course Objectives and outcomes:

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Goals:</th>
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<td>1. Developing a critical perspective on social work ethics through a focus on the ethics of ‘encounter with the other’</td>
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<td>2. Ethical challenges of neo-liberalism in social work practice</td>
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<td>3. Articulation of your own ethical responses and commitments</td>
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Key Understandings desired:

Goal 1:

1. Gaining insight into critical intellectual traditions on ethics
2. Familiarity with a diversity of intellectual traditions of ethics with an emphasis on feminist, recognition and post-modern theories of ethics

Goal 2:

1. Analyzing the ethical challenges that neo-liberalism poses to critical social work
2. Examining current debates on ethics within a neo-liberal context

Goal 3:

1. Applying difference-centered ethics when working with particular populations
2. Understanding your own ethical commitment

Assignments and grading

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Grade %</th>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly discussions</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comparison paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Group e- presentation</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final paper*</td>
<td>35%</td>
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Assignment 1: Weekly discussions  

15%

Seven postings at 2% for each posting, plus 1% for introduction (1st week).

Description: By the end of week 2 of the course, students will be put into groups that will constitute the environment for all discussions for the remainder of the course. Discussions are organized around a central question or questions identified by the instructor and take place each week on the site of the blog. Each group will make a decision on the seven weeks that they will participate in a discussion. You can let me know if your group is opting out at the start of a particular week.
Students are expected to post at least one substantive response to questions should include a response to at least one peer from your group, unless you are the facilitator for the week in which case you initiate the blog by referring to the readings/podcasts/utubes etc. for that week. Grading is based on the consistency and regularity of student’s participation. The group will choose a facilitator for each week (seven weeks) and the facilitator will post very close to the start of the week—Wednesday is the first day of each week. All postings must cease by Sunday of each week to allow for instructor response on each Monday/Tuesday.

**Grading criteria:** The instructor looks for postings that:

- Indicate critical thinking about the topic at hand
- Draws from the assigned readings
- Reflects on the postings of other learners – except when facilitating
- Doesn't place a burden on the rest of the group by including unnecessary information

**PLEASE KEEP IN MIND:** the idea of the forum is to engage with each other’s opinions and points of view. You are not required to write an essay-style posting, nor should you assume you are writing for the instructor to grade. You should consider your postings as part of a discussion with your classmates, a discussion in which the instructor is a hovering presence, but not the main interlocutor.

Please note that the instructor reads, responds and contributes to forum discussions on the following Mondays.

**Assignment 2: Comparison of two ethical frameworks**

Take the Canadian Association of Social Work Ethics, [http://www.casw-acts.ca/en/what-social-work/casw-code-ethics](http://www.casw-acts.ca/en/what-social-work/casw-code-ethics) and IASSW/IFSW code of ethics [http://www.casw-acts.ca/en/what-social-work/casw-code-ethics](http://www.casw-acts.ca/en/what-social-work/casw-code-ethics). Analyze the ethical traditions that inform each of these codes. Critique the two codes by comparing and contrasting the limitations and strengths of the codes. What does this tell you about the limitations and strengths of the ethical traditions that inform these codes? The paper should provide an overview of how each code defines ethics and ethical responsibility; compare and contrast how each code understands the ethical subject and ethical practice; and identify any limitations and possibilities in each approach. Please remember that the objective of this assignment is to compare and contrast two approaches to ethics through the codes of practice. This means that the paper should integrate the two approaches into one discussion rather than discuss them separately.

**Grading criteria:**

- Ability to comprehend readings in depth
• Ability to identify main arguments as well as explicit and implicit significance of each approach
• Ability to relate ideas and concepts to practice and/or personal life issues and experiences.
• Ability to critique and reflect on the ideas offered in the readings
• Ability to write clearly and succinctly

Submission:

• Papers are to be submitted in the Moodle drop-off box.
• Papers should be formatted in font Time New Romans 12 minimum, 1-inch border on all sides, double-spaced and should not exceed 6 pages excluding cover page and bibliography.

Assignment 3: Group e-presentation 25%

Pick a critical ethical tradition (Feminism, post-modernism, difference centered etc..) and apply it to a practice scenario to demonstrate socially just practice. Define the main tenets of the critical approach to ethics that you have chosen, describe the case scenario adequately and analyze how the critical approach to ethics that you have chosen would guide socially just practice.

Criteria for assessment of Assignment 3

• Clarity - as evidenced by a clear introduction, good flow of presentation, conclusion etc.
• Critical and in-depth analysis, ability to conceptualize
• Relevant and well researched
• Ability to conceptualize, as well as creativity.
• Clarity of the topic, case and/or situation that constitutes the basis for the ethical reflection

Assignment 4: Final Paper 35%

Please note that in order to pass this course, students must obtain a passing grade in the final paper in spite of the accumulated grade of other course work.

Identify two ethical frameworks that have most spoken to you in this course. Discuss their merits and limitations. Apply one or both to a practice situation where you have experienced an ethical dilemma demonstrating how this framework speaks to your understanding and commitment to social justice.
FORMAT

- This is a scholarly paper and **must** incorporate course readings in a meaningful manner. This means that the instructor will evaluate your capacity to incorporate the general arguments, theoretical and conceptual proposals, as well as the specific questions and suggestions proposed in the readings.
- Referencing style should be APA.
- Papers should be formatted in font Time New Romans 12 minimum, double spaced with 1-inch border on all sides and should **not exceed 12 pages** excluding cover page and bibliography.
- Include a bibliography
- Papers are to be submitted in the drop-off box on Moodle.

Criteria for Assignment 4:

- Comprehensive research
- Critical and in-depth grasp of ideas and concepts
- Relevant and clear definitions of concept used
- Grammar and spelling

Request for Accommodation:

Please feel free to share any accommodation needs that you may have and together we will arrive at an arrangement that is suitable. The School of Social Work’s Policy for People with Disabilities can be viewed at the following link: [http://socialwork.uvic.ca/policies/pwdis.htm](http://socialwork.uvic.ca/policies/pwdis.htm)

Course Texts

- Electronic articles available on Moodle and/or the Library’s database
Class Schedule

PART 1: Critical Understandings on ethics

Week 1 Introductions and review of course outline

Readings:

- Question of the week: Introduce yourselves by relating an incident that involves an encounter with the ‘other’. Consider its ethical implications.

Week 2 Utilitarian Ethics

Readings:

- Calculating Consequences: The Utilitarian Approach to Ethics Developed by Manuel Velasquez, Claire Andre, Thomas Shanks, S.J., and Michael J. Meyer

Watch


Question of the week: What are the strengths and limitations of this ethical approach?

Week 3 Kantian/rights based ethics

Readings:

- Richard Hugman: Professional ethics in social work: living with the legacy. *Australian Social Work, 56*:1, 5-15
- Introduction to ethics: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/duty_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/introduction/duty_1.shtml)
Watch:

**Question of the week:** Compare and contrast this approach to the utilitarian approach, what are some of its strengths and weaknesses?

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### Week 4  Virtue based ethics

**Readings:**

**Watch:**
- Author unknown [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHVuzec6s0c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PHVuzec6s0c)

**Question of the week:** What critique does virtue ethics level at Kantian ethics?

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### Week 5  The Ethics of Care: Feminist Approaches to Ethics

**Readings:**

**Watch:**
- Carol Giligan [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2W_9MozRoKE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2W_9MozRoKE)
Question of the week: What is distinct about a feminist ethic of care?

Week 6 Reading Week

Week 7 Postmodern Engagements with Ethics

Readings


Question of the week: What is the notion of the ethical self (subject) in post modern ethics?

Week 8 Ethics and the encounter with the other

Readings


Question of the week: What difference does difference make in the ethics of encounter with the other?
Week 9: The Face of the Other: Levinas and Ethics

Readings


Question of the week: How is the ‘self” defined in Levinisian ethics? What are the transformative possibilities of committing to the irrepresentability of the face in social work?

Week 10 Ethics of Resistance:

Reading:


Watch:

- Listen to some of the interviews and get the history of ACT UP [http://www.actuporalhistory.org/index1.html]

Question of the week: How does an ethic of resistance challenge normative Kantian/utilitarian/virtue ethics?

Week 11 Ethics on the basis of natural laws beyond human relationships:

Readings:

Watch:

• Caleen A. Sisk [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDat4-o6Jo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LDat4-o6Jo)
• Winona Laduke [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPJ3nrsCcrE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pPJ3nrsCcrE)

*Question of the week:* How does ethics as natural law overlap with Levinisian ethics?

**Week 11** The terrain of professional social work ethics: Paternalism, self-determination and professional regulation

**Readings**


**Upload your e-presentation**