Sample Outline - Actual course outline may vary in structure, required readings, texts and assignments

SOCW 475: CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE (1.5)

Course Description

An opportunity to explore all aspects of child welfare practice with a particular focus on balancing the issues of power and authority with helping approaches, identifying and resolving ethical dilemmas, and developing community based approaches to serving families and children. Students will explore their own conceptual and philosophical orientation to child welfare practice.

This course addresses child welfare practice across the range of services that are or could be associated with Canadian child welfare legislation and policy. Two important assumptions underlie the construction of this course. One is that an understanding of the socio-political and historical context of child welfare is essential to effective practice, and thus race, class, gender and related issues are integrated throughout the course. The other is that constant critical examination of the influence of one’s own positionality (intersected social locators such as race, class, ability, gender, sexual orientation) is necessary for ethical social work practice.

Course Objectives: The course will provide you with the basics of a socially just approach to child welfare practice. This is an immense area and it is not possible to cover all relevant material in one course. While certain critical areas have been selected for examination, students should understand that effective practice in this area requires knowledge acquisition, personal work and skill development beyond what is offered in this course. The intention of this course is to provide a solid foundation for beginning practice and further learning.

The goals of the course are:

1. To develop and apply an understanding of the historical and current role and function of social workers in child welfare;

2. To explore and apply Indigenous, feminist and anti-oppressive approaches
and models of practice;

3. To critically examine current approaches to practice in child welfare and to consider alternative methods and models that might address current limitations.

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

**At a personal level:**

1. Clarify and explain your beliefs and values as they relate to child welfare;

2. Critically reflect on the influence of your positionality and personal life history (with special attention to your family and professional experiences) on your perceptions, beliefs and attitudes towards child welfare;

3. Critically reflect on your knowledge base about child welfare, your ability to understand, critique and use relevant literature and research and your need for additional training.

**At a theoretical level:**

4. Identify and articulate, at a beginning level, how socio-political inequities and therefore intersections of race, class, gender, ability, sexual orientation, etc. influence this area of practice;

5. Identify and articulate, at a beginning level, how colonization, present-day colonialism, and anti-Indigenous racism influence this area of practice.

**At a practice level:**

7. Articulate and begin to apply strategies and skills in a variety of child welfare practice situations;

8. Articulate an understanding of how positionality, both yours and that of client(s), impacts practice;

9. Demonstrate an awareness of issues related to transference, counter-transference and the emotional challenges of practice;
10. Use your developing skills in ways that minimise the influence of inequities, so as to work *with* rather than for or against clients.

**ASSIGNMENTS and LEARNING ACTIVITIES**

**Assignment Basics:** While each assignment has specific grading criteria, all your work must demonstrate that: you are familiar with and able to integrate course materials; you are able to critically analyse materials and learning experiences; you are able to critically reflect on your positionality (intersected social locators such as class, race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, etc.); and that you are able to address the individual components of the assignments with intellectual honesty. Students who intend to achieve grades in the “A” range should be prepared to make use of resources beyond the required course materials in preparing their assignments.

- Papers should be thoroughly proof read and corrected before submission. Grammar, style (organization, flow, cogency and coherency), spelling and referencing are considered in grading.
- Papers must be typed in no less than 12-point font, double-spaced and fall within or very close to length specifications.
- Correct APA style and referencing system is required for all in-text and bibliographical references. If you are not familiar with APA referencing and style, please consult the APA guide on the UVIC library website.
- Please review the *Writing Expectations* document on the course site. Resources to support writing and critical reflection are provided or linked on the course site. Additional resources and support are available through the Centre for Academic Communication: [http://www.uvic.ca/learningandteaching/home/home/centre/](http://www.uvic.ca/learningandteaching/home/home/centre/)
- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Students are welcome to draw from their own discussion posts (including “cut-and-paste”) when completing any course assignment.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment and Description</th>
<th>Due Date and Time</th>
<th>Percent of Total Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1 – Learning activities/Discussion postings</td>
<td>Ongoing – Assessed each week, marks sent after Unit 5 and at the end of the course</td>
<td>20% (10% each half)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2 – Assessment (Safety Plan)</td>
<td></td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3 – Case study (Group)</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4 – My practice guide</td>
<td></td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Submitting Assignments:** All assignments including Learning Activities must be completed in order to pass the course. Students are welcome to submit assignments in advance of the due date. Assignments #2 and 4 must be submitted electronically to the appropriate Assignment Dropbox on the course site as Word document files. Assignments submitted using file formats other than WORD will be returned for resubmission and late penalties will be assessed. Please use the assignment number and your last name as the name of the file. For example, when I submit Assignment 2 (Assessment), the file name would be: 2 Strega.doc.

**Late Assignments (School of Social Work Policy):** A student who is unable to meet an assignment deadline due to illness, accident, or family affliction may be eligible for an extension. Extensions must be negotiated prior to the assignment due date or the late penalty will be applied: a grade level penalty during the first week of lateness (e.g. from A- to a B+, or B+ to a B) and a further grade level penalty during the second week of lateness. Assignments (including Learning Activities) are not accepted two weeks after the due date (hence a failing grade of N assigned for the course).

- Please note that extensions cannot be given for the final assignment due to university deadlines for instructors to submit marks. If you are unable to complete the final assignment by the due date, you will need to apply for an academic concession and provide the appropriate supporting paperwork prior to the assignment due date. Information about requesting an academic concession: [https://www.uvic.ca/registrar/students/policies/appeals/rac-request.php](https://www.uvic.ca/registrar/students/policies/appeals/rac-request.php)
**Accommodation for students with a disability:** If you have a disability that may affect your ability to submit assignments (aside from weekly Learning Activities) by the posted due dates, please discuss this with me at the outset of the course. My expectation is that all students in this situation will submit documentation from the Resource Centre for Students with a Disability very early on in the course; if for any reason you are not yet registered with the RCSD, please do so immediately: http://www.uvic.ca/services/rcsd/

- Just as it would be impossible in an on-campus class to accommodate a student who was often unable to attend class, in this course it is impossible to accommodate students who are unable to regularly participate in weekly Learning Activities.

**Plagiarism and Academic Integrity:** Plagiarism involves using other people’s work without due acknowledgement, irrespective of the site where the author’s work is published or posted. Plagiarism may be done deliberately or unwittingly. Either way, it constitutes a serious act of academic misconduct and will result in failure in the course – NO EXCEPTIONS. Students at this level of study should understand this very well. If you are unclear about what constitutes plagiarism and how you might prevent it from occurring, consult the most recent edition of the university calendar.

- **Multiple submission:** Students cannot submit work that they have previously used in identical or similar form in other courses to fulfill any assignment in this course.

**Assignment #1: Learning activities: Discussion postings (20%)**

**Why this assignment?** In an on-campus course, students are expected to come to class each week, having read/viewed the assigned materials, prepared to discuss them, and to learn from their colleagues in the course. This assignment attempts to replicate that experience, with one key difference: in an on-campus course, students rarely receive marks for attendance and participation.

**What skills am I learning and how do they apply to child welfare practice?**

**Timeliness:** Almost all social work is “time sensitive”, and child welfare workers more than most must routinely work to externally imposed deadlines. Tasks like preparing court documents or completing initial safety
assessments or case plans have to be done within practice standard time limits, and accurately.

**Knowledge synthesis:** Child welfare workers routinely review, analyse and synthesize large amounts of information from a variety of sources (written and oral) to inform preparation of assessments, case plans, court documents and referrals.

**Knowledge translation:** In order to communicate clearly with various constituent groups (clients, team members, supervisor, lawyers and judges, allied agencies and professionals), workers must be able to succinctly summarize and highlight key points drawn from their knowledge synthesis.

**Team/group work:** All child welfare practice takes place in team settings, as does almost all social work practice (even clinical social workers in private practice rely on clinical supervision or consultation groups). Learning activities provide you with many opportunities to learn from others, as well as to practice respectful engagement skills, including communicating clearly and respectfully across difference.

**What do I need to know about this assignment?** Discussion contributions comprise 20% of your total grade, assessed after Unit 5 and at the end of the course. Because there are many students in the class, students are divided into separate small discussion groups by the end of Week 2, and work in these groups throughout the remainder of the course. While discussion forums are open so that you can “drop in” to other groups, initial posts and one response post must be made within your assigned group. Unless students specifically request otherwise (which it is fine to do! But be sure to let me know), the instructor will from time to time participate in discussions.

**What is expected of me?** Post at least one substantive original contribution to your group’s weekly discussion. “Substantive” = critical analysis and reflection on the week’s required course materials (readings, lecture notes, podcasts and videos), including any questions you wish to discuss or clarify. Your postings should draw attention to what you find useful, intriguing or challenging in course materials. In some weeks, specific discussion questions are provided.

- Post at least one brief (= 150 words maximum) substantive response to another student’s post within your group discussion - though you are welcome to post more than one response.

- Exceptions: No discussion postings are required in Unit 7, though active participation in the Case Study group assignment is required (and assessed).

**How will my work be assessed?** *(Grading Criteria)*
• Active use of course materials in posts – relevant and contextualized use of materials is more important than including all the materials. Please do not use direct quotes unless the quote is essential to your argument or comment.
• Evidence of critical thinking and analysis applied to course materials and relevant life and work experiences.
• Engagement with, and respect for, other students’ discussion contributions and perspectives. The expectation is that, just as in a child welfare team, you build on the contributions of others by respectfully raising questions or making constructive comments, including offering different perspectives.
• Participation within the assigned time frames. Late posts receive 0 marks unless the requirements of the School’s Lateness Policy have been met.

Assignment #2: Assessment (Safety Plan) (25%)

Why this assignment? Assessment is a core social work practice skill, and excellent assessment skills are essential in child welfare. Child protection social workers routinely assess in order to produce safety plans, assessments, and referral/discharge summaries. This assignment provides you with an opportunity to apply theory (materials from this and other courses) to practice, as you experience the process that a child protection worker goes through in assessing immediate safety, completing an assessment, and planning for children and families.

What skills am I learning and how do they apply to practice?

Timeliness: In every Canadian jurisdiction, legislative and policy frameworks specify timeframes for the completion of safety plans and assessments. For example, safety decisions often have to be made “on the spot”, and immediate safety plans generally have to be written up within 24 hours of meeting/interviewing children and families.

Managing my “internal process”: Child maltreatment can be “activating”: even if one has no direct personal experience of neglect, abuse or violence, exposure to these experiences through our work with children and families can precipitate strong feelings, thoughts and judgments. While these reactions are important (they can be a useful source of information, for example), we must never allow them to cloud our abilities to engage respectfully with families, to collect and exchange information, and to collaboratively arrive at socially just assessments. Successful management requires:

• Critical self-reflection: How is my positionality implicated in my reactions and judgments, how might it be clouding other, more socially just ways of assessing the situation, and what do I need to do
about this?

- Separation of facts from opinions: Core social work skill, essential for child welfare practice, especially relevant for assessment processes. Facts = concrete, observable phenomena.

**Applying child maltreatment definitions and categories contextually:** We must as workers be able to explain and describe (to ourselves, to parents, to children, to the communities in which we work, to other members of our child protection team, to our supervisor) what constitutes “neglect” and/or “abuse”, with due regard for family and community context.

**Constructing clear, convincing and compelling arguments:** All social workers must be able to explain and justify their decisions, recommendations and assessments; so far as possible, these should always be based on facts. Child protection workers often have to “make a case” for their recommendations and assessments to others (families, team members, supervisors, judges and lawyers) who have decision-making power over whether, and how, to enact them.

**Effective writing:** Even in this technological age, social work is a profession that “runs on paper” (though that paper might often be electronic rather than from trees). This is especially true in child welfare, where written documents produced by workers impact legal decisions and access to services and resources for children and families.

**Assignment Instructions**

- Watch *Protection* (DVD included in your course materials), keeping in mind that this movie is the sole source for information on which you will base your assessment and arrive at your decision.
- You can use all the information in the DVD in formulating your assessment, including information that is not seen or heard by the actual workers in the DVD.
- You cannot create any information – for example, you cannot imagine that there is a responsible relative available to step in and care for the children.
- Answer the assessment questions listed. In doing so, you are to act as if you were the child protection worker assigned to the family shown in the DVD.
  - This assignment is not about what Jane did or did not do, but about what you think and would do – and why.

**Length:** 10-14 double-spaced pages (approximately 2500-3500 words)
Format: Point form. Just as in a “real” child protection assessment, no formal referencing or in-text citations are required, nor should you provide them.

What is expected of me? Assignment Outline
1. Identify current, significant, and observable concerns about the safety of the child(ren) or youth. Your purpose here is to determine the degree/extent to which the child(ren) or youth has recently experienced maltreatment or is likely to experience maltreatment in the immediate future.
   • Specify the form(s) of maltreatment about which you are concerned as these are defined in the legislation currently in force in your jurisdiction (or in the jurisdiction in which you expect to complete your practicum).
   • If no definitions are provided in the legislation, specify which definitions from course materials you have applied.
   • Ensure that you list facts that illustrate your concern(s).
   • If you are concerned about more than one form of maltreatment, rank order your concerns from most concerning to least concerning.
2. Identify and illustrate the strengths, protective capacities and resources of parents/caregivers and explain how these affect the child(ren)'s/youth’s safety and well-being.
3. Identify and illustrate the strengths, protective capacities and resources of the child(ren) or youth and explain how these affect your assessment of their safety and well-being.
4. Identify and illustrate the needs and challenges of parents/caregivers and explain how these affect the child(ren)'s/youth’s safety and well-being.
5. Identify and illustrate the broader socio-political (macro level) factors that are impacting this family. Indicate whether (and how) these concerns are impacting the family as a unit or as individual family members.
6. Make a decision: Based on your assessment, are either or both of these children in need of protection as defined in the legislation in your jurisdiction? Keep in mind that you might reach a different decision for each child/youth. Provide a rationale: explain how you weighed out the various factors in your answers to questions 1-5 to arrive at this decision.
7. Of the various choices available to you under the legislation (e.g. one or both children remain in the home; one or both children remain in the home under a supervision order; remove one or both children from the home (voluntary out-of-home placement or removal by order)), clearly indicate which choice you would make and provide a brief rationale for your choice.
How will my work be assessed? (Grading Criteria)

- Clarity with which you answered each question as specified in the outline.
- Extent to which your assessment “makes sense”:
  - Are your illustrations a good fit for the questions where you put them?
  - Do the rationales you provided relate to the evidence (illustrations/observations)?
- Clarity with which you took account of the legislation in answering #1, 6 & 7.
- Evidence of your application of relevant course materials.
- Writing, spelling, style and grammar: please use “Writing Standards for Assignments” doc on course site as a guide.

Assignment #3: Group Case Study (Learning Activity 7.1) (20%)

Why this assignment? The vast majority of child protection social workers are White, female (cis-gendered), middle (or upper middle) class, able-bodied and heterosexual. The vast majority of child protection clients are Indigenous or otherwise racialized and poor; many are disabled. Workers have to know how to work successfully across difference; this requires knowledge and critical analysis of the socio-political context, including the history of colonization and effects of present-day colonialism.

What skills am I learning and how do they apply to practice?

Working in a team environment: This assignment requires that you negotiate and agree on the responsibilities and contributions of various group members; write collaboratively; and work through any difficulties that arise.

Critical self-reflection: Anti-Indigenous racism is endemic in Canada: we have all been raised with (or, if not born here, repeatedly exposed to) ideas that Indigenous families and communities are inherently deficient and inferior. Even when we are consciously committed to anti-colonialism and anti-racism, colonialism and racism are so deeply embedded in the Canadian nation state that we often do not see how they factor into how (non-Indigenous) workers and (Indigenous) clients behave. Critically reflecting on intersected social locators (ours and those of clients) is essential for socially just practice.

Applying knowledge and critical analysis of the socio-political context: Knowledge and critical analysis are beginning places; socially just practice requires the application of knowledge and analysis.
**What is expected of me (us)? Assignment Instructions**

- Read the Case Study on the course site.
- Discuss the case study, and the listed questions, within your group in the forum provided for this purpose.
  - Come to agreement (hopefully through consensus) on how the group will divide the work required: specify deadlines by which various aspects of the work must be completed. Post this agreement to the case study prep forum.
  - Come to agreement (hopefully through a consensus-building process) on the group’s answers to the questions listed below.
  - Group discussions should be visible to the instructor; if your group discusses its work in a non-textual format (e.g. Skype, conference call or in person), please record these and post the recording(s) in your group’s prep forum.
- Use course materials to arrive at and support your answers.
- Consolidate answers (including supporting materials, cited and referenced in correct APA format) into one WORD document.
  - Group work should be visible to the instructor: Drafts of responses to each question, and/or drafts of the final assignment, can be posted in the prep forum, with authors/editors specified.
- Post the completed document to the “Completed case studies” forum in Unit 7.

**Assignment Outline**

1. **Assessment: what is occurring in this family?** Approaching this case from a protection perspective, come to a group consensus on whether you have any specific safety concerns regarding this family. If so, list these and explain. If you do not, explain that assessment. Relevant child welfare legislation should be considered, with particular attention to any sections of the legislation that are specific to Indigenous peoples (likely only in a few jurisdictions).

2. **Socio-political inequities:** In what ways are the personal struggles of this family political? Identify the socio-political inequities that may be causing and/or compounding the family's troubles, including their past and present experiences with child protection authorities. Describe some concrete ways in which you (the group) as the worker might address these inequities, immediately and in the longer term, with the family or with others.
3. **Practice principles**: Drawing from the course materials in this and previous units, describe and provide a clear rationale for at least three intervention strategies that you (the group) as the worker would use to move towards a respectful helping alliance with this family. Your response should consider both the practical and relational aspects of safety planning and intervention.

Please note: You do not need to accept any parts of previous plans made by previous workers, though your discussion can include consideration of these initial plans.

**Length**: 6-8 double-spaced pages (approximately 1500-2000 words), exclusive of reference list.

**Format**: Point form OR paragraphs. Provide in-text citations and reference list in APA format.

**How will our work be assessed? (Grading Criteria)**
- Clarity and focus with which each question was answered as specified in the outline.
- Depth and extent of critical analysis evident in responses to #2.
- Useful application of relevant course materials.
- Writing, spelling, style, grammar and referencing.

Please note: The case study itself will be marked out of 15 and all group members will receive the same mark out of 15. The contributions of individual students to the group work will be assessed out of 5, and this mark will be added to the group mark to provide an overall grade out of 20 for each student. Individual assessment relies on the “show your work” steps outlined above, which have been included as steps in assignment preparation in response to concerns of past students about group work difficulties.

**Assignment #4: My Practice Guide (35%)**

**Why this assignment?** The course is packed with materials and learning activities specific to child welfare/child protection social work. It can be very challenging to keep track of relevant practice recommendations, strategies, and suggestions as you go forward into practicum (and eventually into practice). It can also be challenging to remember how and why you found some practice tips and ideas particularly applicable to your own situation (i.e. taking into account your positionality and previous life/work experiences). This assignment provides you with a means by which you can
do so. The intention is that you will produce for yourself a go-to document that you will use and refer to on a regular basis.

What skills am I learning and how do they apply to practice? In this assignment, you have the opportunity to describe and explain the skills you learned through the course and their specific applications to practice, as well as where you might be challenged and how you intend to address those challenges.

What is expected of me? Assignment instructions
For each of the child welfare practice areas covered in Units 6 through 11:

- List and very briefly describe concrete practice skills and strategies you intend to apply.
  - Include here details about how, where, when and why you want to apply them.
- Also note how, in each of these areas of practice, you may be challenged to apply these skills and strategies, given your positionality and life/work experiences.
  - Indicate, for each challenge, at least one strategy you will employ to address a particular challenge.
- In preparing this guide, you are welcome to “cut-and-paste” from your own postings (or your other work) in Units 6-11.
  - Do not cut-and-paste from the work of others without crediting them.
- Provide in-text citations and reference list in APA format.

Length: 14-16 double-spaced pages (approximately 3500-4000 words), exclusive of reference list.
Format: Your choice: point form, paragraphs or other format of your choosing.

How will my work be assessed? (Grading Criteria)

- Evidence of engagement with course materials, Learning Activities and discussions in your work on each section specified in the outline.
- Depth and extent of the critical analysis and critical self-reflection underlying your work related to your challenges.
- Writing, spelling, style, grammar and referencing.