



Course Syllabus: Ethical Decision Making in Social Work  
**College of Health Sciences and Human Services**

SOWK 3707 x30

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**Contact Information**

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**Course Description**

This course is intended for the distance education learner. The course provides students with a comprehensive exploration of values and ethical issues as they apply to social work theory, research, policy, and practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

Although values and ethical issues pervade all social work studies, this course is intended to provide students interested in all helping professions with an opportunity to study these issues in greater depth than may be provided in other social work courses. This course will provide students with a basic understanding of professional ethical obligations, as well as a framework for analyzing and managing more complex ethical dilemmas that may arise in practice with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Students from fields other than social work will be asked to incorporate professional ethical principles that apply to their respective fields.

To master applied ethics, developing helping professionals need to engage in interactive styles of education. This course is taught through group discussions, didactic slides, and audiovisual presentations. The expectation is that students will have read the assigned reading to facilitate class discussions and interactions. The instructor will assign readings and discussions regarding key concepts and provide various frameworks for the resolution of ethical issues. Students are expected to actively participate in discussions and assignments in order to apply these concepts to practice situations. The instructor will provide case examples drawn from all levels of social work practice. Students will make use of both theoretical and applied ethics literature.

## Course Objectives

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

- Identify the differences between beliefs, morals, ethics, values, laws, human rights, social responsibilities, and freedoms;
- Reflect upon and clarify their own personal and professional values;
- Identify and articulate ethical issues that may arise in a variety of practice settings and organizational contexts;
- Identify and draw upon the help of supervisors, attorneys, professional associations, and other sources of assistance when faced challenging ethical issues.
- Locate and interpret social work standards, ethical principles, agency policies, and public laws that are relevant to an array of social work practice situations;
- Critically apply and analyze the values, ethical principles, and ethical standards of the National Association of Social Workers' Code of Ethics, with particular focus on the needs of socially and economically challenged clients from diverse backgrounds;
- Apply critical thinking skills (making use of deontological, teleological, and virtue ethics) to assist with the resolution of ethical issues.
- Present a comprehensive ethical analysis, orally and in writing.
- Apply conflict resolution strategies and skills to engage clients, coworkers, and others in collaborative discussions of ethical issues.

## Textbook & Instructional Materials

### Required:

Barsky, A. E. (2019). *Ethics and values in social work: an integrative approach to a comprehensive curriculum* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

National Association of Social Workers. (2017). [Code of ethics of the National Association of Social Workers.](#)

### Recommended:

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association* (7th ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000165-000>

## Writing Assistance

Begin drafting assignments as early as possible and take advantage of the [MSU Writing Center](#). The MSU Writing Center is committed to serving the university's academic mission. It provides trained writing tutors and facilitates writing workshops. Students are invited to bring any kind of writing to the Writing Center. They do not provide an editing service; instead, they offer feedback and support to help writers develop into more effective communicators.

## Student Handbook

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

### Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures

Academic Dishonesty: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work not the individual's to whom credit is given). Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the Office of Student Conduct.

### Grading

**Table 1:** Student achievement will be evaluated on the basis of written assignments, class exams, class participation, and class presentation.

Assignments	Percentage
Discussion Boards (6 averaged for total)	35%
Exams (4 averaged for total)	35%
Group Presentation	30%

Table 2: Weighted average will be used to calculate final grade.

Grade	Percentages
A	90-100
B	80 to 89
C	70 to 79
D	60 to 69
F	Less than 60

A grade less than C in this course is considered failing according to the Social Work Program Grade Policy and the course will have to be repeated to count towards Social Work Major Requirements.

### **Discussion Board Participation:**

For each week, the instructor will post question(s) on D2L for the class to respond. Unless specified otherwise, everyone should post an initial response to the question(s) and should also respond to at least one peer's post. The discussion board is a mandatory component. Students are expected to participate actively throughout the summer sessions. Students are expected to write formally (no shorthand or text messaging abbreviations) and use APA format and referencing where appropriate. There will be general questions relating to the chapter(s), case vignettes, current events, and/or watching a video and posting your response. Thoughtful responses, constructive critique of fellow students, and meaningful participation are expected. Please keep in mind the discussion board is a formal assignment and part of your grade.

### **Discussion Thread Participation:**

As stated earlier, the discussion board is a mandatory component. Discussion questions will be posted on the discussion board each week. Typically, your initial post to the discussion assignments are due by 11:30pm on Sundays and your responses to at least two peer's posts (you may respond to as many peers' posts as you want) are due by 11:30 pm on Mondays. Due dates will change at times during the semester (specifically for the introductory and final posts) so it is the responsibility of the student to follow the due dates listed in each post assignment.

If anyone fails to do the initial posts and fails to respond to peers' posts for any two discussion threads he or she may be dropped from the course.

I will review your posts and responses and give individual feedback when grading posts. I may respond in the discussion thread to a select few posts and/or responses or respond collectively to the class. This does not mean only the posts and/or responses of those to whom I respond are good and other posts and/or responses are not good.

Note: If needed, changes will be made in the syllabus while the sessions are on.

### **Exams**

Students will complete 4 exams by 11:30 pm on Sundays based on the required book chapters as indicated in the class schedule. The quizzes are open book and notes, but there will be only 60-80 minutes to complete them (depending on number of questions). **Quizzes cannot be made up if missed, and a grade of zero (0) will be recorded.** No requests for late access will be considered unless the student has submitted documentation through the Dean of Student's office proving incapacitation for the entire week that the quiz was available.

### **Final**

There will NOT be a final exam. The final project will be due in lieu of a final exam.

## Final Project

APA style formatting is required for all written work in this course. Be sure to use appropriate APA style citations for any information you take from the textbook, handouts, reference materials, websites, or other outside sources while completing written assignments.

**Description:** During the first week of classes, students will be asked to organize into groups of **2 to 3** members for the purpose of creating group presentations for the course final project. You will post the names of your group members and your case selection on the Group Presentation Selection Discussion Board for instructor approval of your case selection. Each group will select a different case study and will be responsible for submitting a PowerPoint presentation and supporting handout. You should prepare both just as you would if you were going to be presenting to a live classroom. You may use any of the cases on pages:

- **353-355 under exercise “3. Developing Policies”** [these cases relate to SW administration]
- **380-381 under exercise “5. Application”** [these cases relate to mental health]
- **402-404 under exercise “3. Managing Issues”** [these cases relate to child welfare]
- **457-459 under exercise “1. Analyze Elder Issues.”** [these cases relate to SW with elders]

The focus of the presentation is to identify the ethical issues raised by the case and present a critical analysis, including **AT LEAST ONE PRIMARY ETHICAL DILEMMA or ISSUE** that the group will analyze in its presentation. Groups may select among various forms for their presentation: traditional debate, a feminist-informed discussion, a dialogue, interest-based mediation, transformative mediation; professional review hearing, Socratic inquiry, a role play, student-produced video, panel discussion, skit, or other experiential exercise (cf., Barsky, 2010; *Journal of Small Group Exercises*). Students are strongly encouraged to present an outline to the professor and discuss their plans with her prior to their presentation in order to obtain advance feedback and suggestions.

**Each group will submit a three to five page “Handout” to the drop box and post on the discussion board** name, page, exercise number), Names of Group Members, Synopsis of Major Issues to be Covered, List of Sources that have been Consulted (3-6 sources); and at least two Questions for Class Discussion. While you may include a brief summary, do not simply repeat case facts from the scenarios in the textbook. Please indicate any changes or additions that you are making to the cases for the purposes of your presentation. Your handout should focus largely on the ethical issue(s) or dilemma(s) that you will address in your presentation and present multiple points, approaches, and/or considerations.

**Evaluation of Presentation:** PowerPoint Presentations will be submitted to the drop box and posted on the discussion board. They should include speaker notes to clarify slide content. In lieu of including speaker notes, groups who wish may choose to submit a video of all members presenting the slides.

Grading will be based on the following criteria: Selection of relevant, scholarly readings (include at least one classical ethicist or social philosopher – e.g., Hobbes, Kant, Hegel, Rawls, Philippa Ruth Foot, Simone de Beauvoir, John Stuart Mill, Joseph Fletcher, Joseph Soleveitchik, The Dalai Lama, Nozick, Confucius, Paulo Freire, or Lao Tzu – make sure you can show the relevance of this person’s theories/concepts to your case; if you cannot, then please select another ethicist); Preparation of Handout (described above); accurate identification of “ethical dilemmas” raised by the case; connections between case and readings; critical analysis; reflectiveness; engagement of class; linkages to social work values from varied sources; creativity (in process); originality (of argument); and effective use of time. When you identify ethical or legal rules, ensure that you cite original sources, and quote the most relevant sections. All members of a group will receive the same grade. If a group agrees to an alternative arrangement for grading, the group must submit this agreement in writing and signed by all the members prior to their presentation, subject to the approval of the professor.

**Equal Division of Responsibilities:** Please ensure that everyone contributes equally to the presentation, including organizing/planning, brainstorming ideas, researching, preparing the handout, critically thinking through the case, preparing PowerPoint or other audiovisual aids, and, if you elect to submit a video, participating in the presentation recording (you may divide responsibilities among group members, but ensure that there is approximately equal participation over the entire list of responsibilities).

***If a member of the group is not participating equally, then the group is responsible for letting the instructor know at least 5 days prior to the presentation.*** Please do not wait until just before the presentation is to be made. The instructor may ask that member to do a separate, individual assignment.

- If you have more than one ethical issue or question that you want the class to consider, make sure that you present the issues in a logical order (you may need to go through the analysis of each question separately).
- When you state an ethical issue (Stage 1 of the Framework for Managing Ethical Issues) make sure you provide some background facts, express the issue with an open-ended question that highlights the conflicting ethics/values/laws/policies/perspectives, and if there is some “unknown information” that it relevant to determining the ethical issue, describe what that type of information is.

**Alternative Presentation:** An alternative presentation is an "Ethics Audit" (see pp. 303 to 309 of the textbook). If interested in conducting and presenting an ethics audit, please meet with the professor for further instructions.

### **Late Work**

Students who fail to post required assignments on time will receive a lower grade, and those who do not complete the assignments will receive a grade of zero (please review the **time** submission criteria on the rubrics for each assignment). If anyone fails to post an original post or replies for 2 or more assignments, they will be dropped from the course or will be given a failing grade. There are no exceptions to this rule.

### **Make Up Work/Tests**

Make up work will only be considered in cases of university excused absences or verifiable emergencies. Students will not be allowed to take make up exams after the original exam has been given.

### **Important Dates**

**Last day for term schedule changes:** May 26-27

**Deadline for August graduates to file for graduation:** June 29<sup>th</sup>

**Last Day to drop with a grade of "W:"** June 18<sup>th</sup>

Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

### **Desire-to-Learn (D2L)**

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage. If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program or contact your instructor.

### **Attendance**

Students are responsible for checking emails and logging onto D2L regularly to ensure that messages from the instructor and fellow students are received in a timely manner. Students who wish to meet with me face to face should schedule an appointment in advance via email [catherine.earley@msutexas.edu](mailto:catherine.earley@msutexas.edu).

### **Online Computer Requirements**

Taking an online class requires you to have access to a computer (with Internet access) to complete and upload your assignments. It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer in this class. ***Assignments and tests are due by the due date, and personal computer technical difficulties will not be considered reason for the instructor to allow students extra time to submit assignments, tests, or discussion postings.*** Computers are available on campus in various areas of the buildings as well as the Academic Success Center. **Your computer being down is not an excuse for missing a deadline!** There are many places to access your class. Our online classes can be accessed from any computer in the world which is connected to the internet. Contact your instructor immediately upon having computer trouble. If you have technical difficulties in the course, there is also a student helpdesk available to you. The college cannot work directly on student computers due to both liability and resource limitations however they are able to help you get connected to our online services. For help, log into [D2L](#).

### **Instructor Class Policies**

All students registered for courses in the Social Work Department are expected to adhere to the responsibilities, and behavior as articulated in both the [Student Handbook](#) and the NASW (National Association of Social Workers) [Code of Ethics](#). An essential feature of these codes is a commitment to maintaining intellectual integrity and academic honesty. Students are expected to display professional decorum at all times. This includes, but is not limited to, respecting classmates and the instructor.

## **Professional Expectations of Student Behavior**

Midwestern State University Department of Social Work is mandated by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) to foster and evaluate professional behavioral development for all students in social work courses. The Department of Social Work also bears a responsibility to the community at large to produce fully trained professional social workers who consciously exhibit the knowledge, values, and skills of the profession of social work. The values of the profession are codified in the NASW Code of Ethics. Given this context, all students taking classes in the social work program will be expected to exhibit the following ethical standards of behavior.

- 1. Accountability:** Complete reading assignments, participate in class discussions, and submit assignments on time.  
*Participate in group activities and assignments at a comparable level to peers.*  
*Complete work in a timely fashion and according to directions provided.*
- 2. Respect:** Treat all your peers, your instructors and all those you come in contact with, with dignity and respect at all times.  
*Give feedback to peers in a constructive manner.*  
*Approach conflict with peers or instructors in a cooperative manner.*  
*Use positive and nonjudgmental language.*
- 3. Confidentiality:** Treat any personal information that you hear about a peer or an instructor as strictly confidential.  
*Maintain any information shared in class, dyads or smaller groups within that unit.*  
*Use judgment in self-disclosing information of a very personal nature in the class. (Class time should not be used as therapy or treatment. If students feel the need to talk about issues they are struggling with, they may consult with their instructor to receive a referral for counseling.)*  
*Never use names of clients or disclose other identifying information in the classroom.*
- 4. Competence:** Apply yourself to all your academic pursuits with seriousness and conscientiousness, meeting all deadlines as given by your instructors. Constantly strive to improve your abilities.  
*Seek out appropriate support when having difficulties to ensure success in completing course requirements.*  
*Take responsibility for the quality of completed tests and assignment.*  
*Strive to work toward greater awareness of personal issues that may impede your effectiveness with clients.*

5. **Integrity:** Practice honesty with yourself, your peers, and your instructors. Constantly strive to improve your abilities.  
*Academic: Commit yourself to learning the rules of citing other's work properly.*  
*Do your own work and take credit only for your own work.*  
*Acknowledge areas where improvement is needed.*  
*Accept and benefit from constructive feedback*  
  
*Submission of Papers: Students will submit their written assignments on paper and electronically. Electronic copies will be subject to plagiarism analysis and will be kept in electronic file for future reference. A student may not submit the same paper, or essentially the same, paper, project, assignment, or finished project to an instructor, which has been submitted to another instructor, unless specifically authorized by both instructors to do so.*
6. **Diversity:** Strive to become more open to people, ideas, and creeds that you are not familiar with. Embrace diversity.  
*Maintain speech free of racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, or stereotyping.*  
*Exhibit a willingness to serve diverse groups of persons.*  
*Demonstrate an understanding of how values and culture interact.*
7. **Communication:** Strive to improve both verbal and written communication skills as these skills are used heavily in interactions with clients and peers and also with creating client records.  
*Demonstrate assertive communication with peers and instructors.*  
*Practice positive, constructive, respectful, and professional communication skills with peers and instructor: (body language, empathy, listening)*
8. **Social Justice:** Strive to deepen your commitment to social justice for all populations at risk.  
*Demonstrate an understanding of how institutional and personal oppression impede the experience of social justice for individuals and groups.*  
*Strive to learn about methods of empowering populations and enhancing social justice at micro, mezzo, and macro levels.*

### **Change of Schedule**

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first four class days of a summer semester is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

### **Refund and Repayment Policy**

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. HOWEVER, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. Two formulas (federal and state) exist in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

### **Services for Students with Disabilities**

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities. After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Clark Student Center, Room 168, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

### **College Policies**

#### **Campus Carry Rules/Policies**

Senate Bill 11 passed by the 84th Texas Legislature allows licensed handgun holders to carry concealed handguns on campus, effective August 1, 2016. Areas excluded from concealed carry are appropriately marked, in accordance with state law. For more information regarding campus carry, please refer to the University's webpage [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

#### **Smoking/Tobacco Policy**

Midwestern State University seeks to provide a safe, healthy, pleasant environment for its faculty, staff, and students. To this end, the use of tobacco products, including smoke and smokeless tobacco, and the advertising, sale, free distribution, and discarding of tobacco products shall be prohibited in all indoor and outdoor facilities and in all university vehicles. The policy extends to faculty, staff, students, vendors, guests, and visitors.

## **Alcohol and Drug Policy**

To comply with the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibits the unlawful possession, use or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

## **Grade Appeal Process**

Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [Undergraduate Catalog](#)

## **Course Schedule:**

Online delivery with asynchronous interactions between students and students and teacher, interactive discussions, and assignments.

D2L will be used throughout the semester. The course materials (syllabus, discussion board, and other course items) will be posted onto D2L. Power points will consist of materials from the textbook and other sources.

## **Course Changes:**

Although much thought, study, and research has gone into designing the course and learning opportunities, often the most significant learning comes in unexpected moments. The instructor cannot predict these times but responds to them. Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the instructor.

## Ethical Decision Making Course Schedule

(The instructor reserves the right to adjust the syllabus schedule as needed.)

Week & Dates	Chapters/Readings	Assignments
Week 1 (Intro)  June 1 – 4	<p><b>Course Introduction</b></p> <p>Part I: Foundations of Values and Ethics (pp.1-11)</p> <p>NASW Code of Ethics  <a href="#">(2017 NASW Code of Ethics)</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discussion board 1 due June 3<sup>rd</sup></li> </ul>
Week 1 (continued)  June 1 – 8	<p>Chapter 1: Values – Mine, Theirs, and Ours</p> <p>Chapter 2: Theory, Values and Ethics – Macro Perspectives</p> <p>Chapter 3: Theory, Morals, and Ethics – Micro Perspectives</p> <p>Chapter 4: Research, Values, and Ethics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Selection of group member(s) and case for final project</li> <li>- Discussion board 2</li> <li>- Exam 1 (Part 1, Ch. 1, Ch. 2, Ch. 3, Ch. 4)</li> </ul>
Week 2  June 8 – 15	<p>Chapter 5: Practice, Values, &amp; Ethics- Social Work with Individuals</p> <p>Chapter 6: Practice, Values, &amp; Ethics- Social Work with Families</p> <p>Chapter 7: Practice, Values, &amp; Ethics- Social Work with Groups</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discussion board 3</li> <li>- Exam 2 (Ch. 5, Ch. 6, Ch. 7)</li> </ul>

Week & Dates	Chapters	Assignments
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 3 June 15 – 22</p>	<p>Chapter 8: Practice, Values, &amp; Ethics- Social Work with Organizations</p> <p>Chapter 9: Practice, Values, &amp; Ethics- Social Work with Communities</p> <p>Chapter 10: Policy, Values, and Ethics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discussion board 4</li> <li>- Exam 3 (Ch. 8, Ch. 9, Ch. 10)</li> <li>- (Optional) Final presentation handout due June 17<sup>th</sup></li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;">Week 4 June 22 – 29</p>	<p>Part II: Advanced Values and Ethics – Framework for Managing Ethical Issues</p> <p>Chapter 13: Psychopathology, Mental Health, Values, and Ethics</p> <p>Chapter 16: Elders, Values, and Ethics</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discussion board 5</li> <li>- Exam 4 (Part II, Ch. 13, Ch. 16)</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Finals Week</b> June 29 – July 2</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Discussion board 6 due June 30<sup>th</sup></li> <li>- Handout</li> <li>- PowerPoint Presentation</li> </ul>