



DEPARTMENT Humanities and Social Sciences

SW1010: Ethics in Social Work - 3 (3-0-0) 45 Hours for 15 Weeks

Northwestern Polytechnic acknowledges that our campuses are located on Treaty 8 territory, the ancestral and present-day home to many diverse First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people. We are grateful to work, live and learn on the traditional territory of Duncan's First Nation, Horse Lake First Nation and Sturgeon Lake Cree Nation, who are the original caretakers of this land.

We acknowledge the history of this land and we are thankful for the opportunity to walk together in friendship, where we will encourage and promote positive change for present and future generations.

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CALENDAR DESCRIPTION: In this introduction to the ethical principles of social work practice, students will explore the theoretical foundations of the codes and frameworks which inform social work professionals as they navigate ethical dilemmas and issues. Students will also reflect on the diverse value systems in Canadian society and the interactions between personal and professional values.

PREREQUISITE(S):

None

COREQUISITE(S):

None

Required Textbooks and Materials

Spencer, E., Massing, D., Gough, J. (2017) *Social Work Ethics: Progressive, Practical, and Relational Approaches*. Ontario: Oxford University Press

Supplementary Readings:

Alberta College of Social Workers. (2023). *Standards of practice*.

<https://acsw.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/ACSW-Standards-of-Practice-2023.pdf>

Canadian Association of Social Workers. (2024). *Code of ethics, values and guiding principles*.

https://www.casw-acts.ca/files/attachements/CASW_-_Code_of_Ethics_Values_Guiding_Principles_-_2024.pdf

Miller, P. (2007). *Ethical decision making in social work and counselling: A problem/inquiry-based approach*. Thomson Nelson.

DELIVERY MODE(S): Via Microsoft teams

LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- Explain the theoretical foundations, principles, and codes guiding ethical social work practice.
- Integrate ethical codes of conduct and apply ethical decision-making models to address complex dilemmas in social work
- Incorporate cultural humility and inclusion into ethical decision-making, with particular attention to marginalized communities.
- Examine the interplay between personal, cultural, and professional values in ethical practice.
- Assess how diverse value systems and cultural perspectives influence ethical decisions.
- Demonstrate ongoing ethical awareness, self-reflection, and professional development.

TRANSFERABILITY:

Please consult the Alberta Transfer Guide for more information. You may check to ensure the transferability of this course at the Alberta Transfer Guide main page <http://www.transferalberta.alberta.ca>

** For courses with alpha (letter) grading, a grade of D or D+ may not be acceptable for transfer to other post-secondary institutions. **Students are cautioned that it is their responsibility to contact the receiving institutions to ensure transferability**

Please note that most institutions will not accept your course for transfer credit **IF** your grade is **less than C-**.

Grading Chart

Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines		Alpha Grade	4-point Equivalent	Percentage Guidelines
A+	4.0	95-100		C+	2.3	67-69
A	4.0	85-94		C	2.0	63-66
A-	3.7	80-84		C-	1.7	60-62
B+	3.3	77-79		D+	1.3	55-59
B	3.0	73-76		D	1.0	50-54
B-	2.7	70-72		F	0.0	00-49

Assignment and Evaluation Schedule:

Assignment	Description	Grade Weight	Due Date
Quizzes (4)	Four quizzes	20%	Sept. 28, Oct. 19, Nov. 16, Dec. 7
Assignment One	Self-Assessment Paper	20%	Oct. 15
Assignment Two	Ethical Dilemma Analysis	30%	Nov. 26
Assignment Three	Group Discussions on Ethical Theories	30%	Oct. 8, Nov. 5, Dec. 3
Total		100%	

COURSE SCHEDULE/TENTATIVE TIMELINE:

Week	Date	Topics	Readings	Assignments/Quizzes Due
Week 1	Mon, Sept 7	—	—	Labor Day, no class
Week 2	Mon, Sept 14	History of Social Work Ethics; Course Introduction & Expectations; Reviewing the Syllabus; What is CASW?	Chapter 3	—
Week 3	Mon, Sept 21	Philosophy of Ethics	Chapters 1 & 13; CASW: Respect for the Inherent Dignity and Worth of Persons	—
Week 4	Mon, Sept 28	Values and Professional Ethics	Chapters 2 & 12; CASW: Pursuing Truth and Reconciliation	Quiz 1
Week 5	Mon, Oct 5	Law, Ethics, and Tools for Rational and Ethical Decision-Making	D2L Resource: Miller, Chapter 2; Chapter 14	Discussion #1 – Thurs, Oct 8
Week 6	Mon, Oct 12*	Professional Obligations, Duty to Clients, and Informed Consent	Chapters 4 & 9; CASW: Maintaining Privacy and Confidentiality	Self-Assessment Paper – Thurs, Oct 15
Week 7	Mon, Oct 19	Being the Change: Implications for Professional Practice and Ethics of Self-Care	Chapters 16 & 19	Quiz 2
Week 8	Mon, Oct 26	Providing Competent Professional Services	Informed Consent; Confidentiality in the Professional Relationship:	—

Week	Date	Topics	Readings	Assignments/Quizzes Due
			Protecting Clients' Privacy; Chapter 10	
Week 9	Mon, Nov 2	Informed Consent and Confidentiality in the Professional Relationship: Protecting Clients' Privacy	Chapter 10; CASW: Preserving Integrity in Professional Practice	Discussion #2 – Thurs, Nov 5
Fall Break	Nov 9–13	No Classes	—	—
Week 10	Mon, Nov 16	Social Justice as a Professional Ethical Responsibility	Chapter 8; CASW: Promoting Social Justice	Quiz 3
Week 11	Mon, Nov 23	Responsibilities to the Profession	Chapters 6 & 15; CASW: Respecting the Dignity and Worth of All People	Ethical Dilemma Analysis – Thurs, Nov 26
Week 12	Mon, Nov 30	Professional Relationships, Use of Power, and Boundaries	Chapters 5 & 18; CASW: Valuing Human Relationships	Discussion #3 – Thurs, Dec 3
Week 13	Mon, Dec 7	Ethics of Community Work	Chapters 7 & 11; CASW: Providing Competent Professional Services	Quiz 4
Week 14	Date TBD	Final Class/Course Wrap-Up	Review	—

Fall 2026 Assignments

Quizzes (4) – 20%

Dates

- **Quiz 1:** Monday, September 28, 2026
- **Quiz 2:** Monday, October 19, 2026
- **Quiz 3:** Monday, November 16, 2026
- **Quiz 4:** Monday, December 7, 2026

Format and Purpose

Four quizzes will be given throughout the semester to assess understanding of course readings, concepts, and key terms as the course progresses.

- **Quiz 1** covers:
 - History of Social Work Ethics
 - Philosophy of Ethics
 - Values and Professional Ethics
- **Quiz 2** covers:
 - Law, Ethics, and Decision-Making Tools
 - Professional Obligations and Informed Consent
 - Ethics of Self-Care
- **Quiz 3** covers:
 - Competent Professional Services
 - Confidentiality in Professional Relationship
 - Social Justice as a Professional Ethical Responsibility
- **Quiz 4** covers:
 - Responsibilities to the Profession
 - Professional Relationships and Boundaries
 - Ethics of Community Work

Assignment #1: Self-Assessment Paper – 20%

Due Date: Thursday, October 15, 2026

Objective

This assignment asks you to reflect on your personal beliefs, values, and ethical perspectives and consider how they may influence your future professional practice in social work and human services. The purpose of this assignment is to develop greater self-awareness and help you recognize how your personal experiences, identity, culture, family, and social environment may shape the way you understand and respond to ethical issues in practice.

Instructions

- 4-5 pages (not including the title page and reference page)
- Double-spaced
- Follow APA 7th edition formatting
- Organize your paper using clear headings and paragraphs
- Support your discussion with appropriate scholarly and course-related sources

Reflection and Critical Thinking

Reflect on the experiences and influences that have shaped your beliefs and values. Consider how these values may support your professional practice but also identify areas where your personal beliefs could create challenges, assumptions, or biases when working with clients.

Your paper should move beyond description and demonstrate critical reflection.

Guiding Questions

Use the following questions to guide your paper. Do not answer them one by one or in a list. Instead, integrate your responses into a well-organized paper.

Who You Are Today

- How have your family, culture, community, relationships, and life experiences shaped your beliefs and values?
- What experiences during childhood or adolescence have influenced who you are today?

Your Present Self

- What values are most important to you?
- How do these values influence the way you interact with others?
- What personal strengths do you bring to professional relationships?
- Are there beliefs, assumptions, or biases that you may need to remain aware of in professional practice?

Your Future Professional Practice

- What kind of social service or social work professional do you hope to become?

- How might your personal values influence your work with clients whose beliefs or experiences differ from your own?
- What steps can you take to ensure that your practice remains ethical, respectful, and client-centered?
- What challenges do you anticipate as you continue developing your professional identity?

Grading

Refer to the assignment grading rubric for detailed evaluation criteria.

Assignment #2: Ethical Dilemma Analysis – 30%

Due Date

Thursday, November 26, 2026

Objective

This assignment requires you to critically analyze an ethical dilemma using ethical theory, an ethical decision-making framework, and the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) Code of Ethics, Values, and Guiding Principles.

The purpose of the assignment is to demonstrate your ability to:

- Identify competing ethical responsibilities
- Examine the influence of personal and professional values
- Apply ethical reasoning
- Develop a well-supported course of action

Instructions

Length and Format

- 6-8 pages (not including the title page and reference page)
- Double-spaced
- Follow APA 7th edition formatting
- Use the course textbook, the CASW Code of Ethics, and a minimum of four scholarly sources

Choose an ethical dilemma that you have encountered or observed in your personal, educational, volunteer, or professional experience. The situation should involve competing values, responsibilities, rights, or ethical obligations rather than simply making a difficult decision.

If you do not have an appropriate personal example, speak with the instructor about using an approved case scenario.

Required Sections

Introduction

Briefly describe the ethical dilemma and explain why it represents an ethical issue.

Examination of Values

Identify the personal, social, cultural, organizational, and professional values that may influence the situation. Discuss how your own values or assumptions could affect your interpretation of the dilemma.

Ethical and Professional Responsibilities

Identify the ethical principles, professional responsibilities, or standards relevant to the situation. Refer directly to the CASW Code of Ethics where appropriate.

Ethical Theory and Decision-Making Model

Select at least one ethical theory or ethical decision-making model discussed in the course. Explain the theory or model and demonstrate how it can be applied to the dilemma.

Analysis and Application

Apply the theory or decision-making model systematically to the situation. Consider:

- The individuals affected by the decision
- Competing rights, values, and responsibilities
- Possible courses of action
- Potential benefits and harms
- Relevant CASW ethical principles
- Professional responsibilities and boundaries
- The possible consequences of each option

Based on your analysis, identify and justify the course of action you believe is most ethically appropriate.

Conclusion

Summarize your analysis and reflect on what you learned from examining the dilemma. Consider whether another ethical framework could have resulted in a different conclusion.

Confidentiality

Protect the privacy of all individuals discussed in your paper.

- Do not use real client names.
- Change identifying details where necessary.
- Do not include information that could reasonably identify a client, colleague, organization, or other individual.

Grading

Refer to the assignment grading rubric for detailed evaluation criteria.

Assignment #3: Group Discussions on Ethical Theories – 30%

Dates

- **Discussion #1:** Thursday, October 8, 2026
- **Discussion #2:** Thursday, November 5, 2026
- **Discussion #3:** Thursday, December 3, 2026

Objective

This assignment provides an opportunity to apply ethical theories and decision-making models to realistic social work and human services scenarios. Working in a small group, you will analyze an assigned ethical dilemma and demonstrate how ethical theory and the CASW Code of Ethics can be used to guide professional decision-making.

Instructions

Groups

You will be assigned to a group. All members are expected to participate in the preparation, discussion, and presentation of the group's analysis.

Each group will be assigned an ethical theory or ethical decision-making model covered in the course. Your group must demonstrate an understanding of the theory or model and apply it to the assigned case scenario.

Scenario Analysis

Your group will analyze an ethical dilemma using the assigned theory or model. Your analysis should consider:

- The main ethical issues
- Competing values and responsibilities
- Individuals or groups affected by the decision
- Strengths and limitations of the assigned theory or model
- Possible courses of action
- Relevant CASW ethical principles and professional responsibilities

Explain Key Concepts

Clearly explain the central concepts of your assigned theory or model and show how they apply to the ethical dilemma. Avoid simply defining the theory. Your presentation should demonstrate how it can be used to make an ethical decision.

CASW Code of Ethics

Identify and apply relevant values and guiding principles from the CASW Code of Ethics. Explain how these principles support or challenge the conclusions reached by your group.

Presentation

Each group will present its analysis to the class.

- All group members are expected to contribute.
- Presentations should be organized, clear, and professional.
- Groups should be prepared to respond to questions and discuss alternative perspectives.

Individual Reflection

Following each group discussion, each student will complete a brief individual reflection on D2L. The reflection should discuss:



- What you learned from the activity
- How the theory or model influenced your understanding of the dilemma
- Any challenges your group encountered
- Whether your own perspective changed during the discussion

Schedule

This assignment will take place three times during the Fall 2026 semester. Each activity will use a different ethical dilemma and may involve a different ethical theory or decision-making model.

Grading

Grades will be based on:

1. Understanding and application of the assigned ethical theory or decision-making model.
2. Application of the CASW Code of Ethics.
3. Quality and depth of ethical analysis.
4. Organization and quality of the presentation.
5. Participation and contribution of group members.
6. Completion of the individual reflection.

Note: Individual grades may be adjusted where there is a significant difference in group-member participation.

Student Responsibilities

Students are expected to attend all scheduled classes, arrive prepared, and participate actively in course activities and discussions.

Being prepared includes:

- Completing assigned readings
- Reviewing course materials
- Completing any required activities before class

Students are expected to contribute respectfully to discussions and engage with perspectives, experiences, and ideas that may differ from their own.

Students are also responsible for monitoring Brightspace regularly for:

- Course announcements
- Readings
- Assignment instructions
- Due dates
- Grades
- Other important course information

Late Assignments

Unless prior arrangements have been approved by the instructor, a **5% deduction** will be applied for each calendar day an assignment is submitted late.

Students experiencing circumstances that may affect their ability to meet a deadline are encouraged to contact the instructor as early as possible.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Students are not permitted to use generative artificial intelligence tools to write, rewrite, paraphrase, or substantially produce written assignments for this course unless the instructor has provided explicit permission for a specific activity.

Examples of generative AI tools include:

- ChatGPT
- Microsoft Copilot
- Gemini
- Claude
- Similar technologies

Written assignments must reflect the student's own thinking, analysis, and writing. Submitting AI-generated or substantially AI-produced work as one's own may be addressed as an academic integrity concern in accordance with Northwestern Polytechnic policies.

If students are unsure whether a particular use of AI is permitted, they should ask the instructor before using the tool or submitting the assignment.

Statement on Academic Misconduct

Academic integrity is an important part of the learning environment. Students are expected to complete their academic work honestly and in accordance with Northwestern Polytechnic policies.

Academic misconduct may include, but is not limited to:

- Plagiarism
- Cheating
- Unauthorized collaboration
- Submitting work completed by another person
- Unauthorized use of artificial intelligence
- Using other unauthorized materials or technologies

For definitions of academic misconduct, procedures, and possible consequences, students should refer to Northwestern Polytechnic's Student Rights and Responsibilities Policy and related academic policies available through the Polytechnic's Policy Directory:

<https://www.nwpolytech.ca/about/polytechnic-leadership/policies-directory>

Note: Academic and administrative policies are available through the same Policy Directory.

Additional Information

Students are responsible for reviewing the course syllabus, assignment instructions, grading rubrics, and information posted on Brightspace throughout the semester.

If clarification is needed regarding:

- Course expectations
- Assignments

- Other course policies

Students are encouraged to contact the instructor before the applicable deadline.