TO ACCOMPANY PROPOSAL FOR ADDITION OF COURSE TO AN EXISTING UNST CLUSTER

Name of proposing faculty member: Joan Shireman
Title of proposed course: Issues in Child Welfare
From which department(s): Graduate School of Social Work
For which cluster: Family Studies
Name of cluster coordinator: Kathleen Smith

**********

COURSE APPROVED FOR CLUSTER INCLUSION BY

DEPARTMENT CHAIR(S): James Ward DATE: 4/11/00

CLUSTER COORDINATOR: CATHERINE DATE: 4/12/00

CHAIR, CLUSTER COORDINATORS: DATE:

CHAIR, UNST COMMITTEE: DATE:

Copies of completed document are to be filed with appropriate cluster coordinator(s) as well as sent to appropriate department chair(s), UNST Scheduling, and Chair, Cluster Coordinators.

University Studies: March, 1999
A. COURSE DESCRIPTION

Issues in Child Welfare is proposed as an addition to the Focus on Families cluster as a course which describes ethical, legal, and practice issues involved in work with children and families in crisis. The course describes the community standards for the care of children that result in referral of families for child maltreatment, and the values which guide services. The delicate balance between the right of the state to intervene in family life, and the protection of the privacy of the family, is explored. Services available to families who have maltreated children are introduced, including family preservation services, foster care, institutional care, and adoption. Policy debates are examined.

B. COURSE DEVELOPMENT

This course is a revision of a course currently being offered as an advanced graduate course in Graduate School of Social Work. Prior to curriculum changes accompanying the conversion to a 4 credit hour format, the course in Social Work was an elective which was sometimes chosen by students in the Child and Family Studies program. It has been revised and is now an advanced policy course and is not available to undergraduates. The proposed course is a revision of the elective course, with the revisions dictated by the experiences which the preparer had in teaching the undergraduate students who were in the seminar.

C. GENERAL EDUCATION GOALS

Child welfare is a field in which interdisciplinary work is emphasized. The course uses speakers who are actively engaged in child welfare practice and are from different disciplines. Community resources for helping families will be identified, and students may do work in exploring some of these resources for one of their assignments.

There is little lecture material; the text contains basic material, and issues are drawn from it for class discussion. Students are guided in distinguishing empirically based knowledge in this area from the “myths” which develop from media reporting and casual experience. At the same time, they are encouraged to use their own experiences to ground their knowledge of the differences among families and the varied ways in which families respond to services. Emphasis is on the need to critically examine the many policy issues in the field, and make a reasoned decision about one’s own position.

The substance of this course is exploration of the human experience of families who are having difficulties in raising children in the current environment of fragmented families and communities. Thus the whole course is directed toward the human experience goal.

Examination of ethical issues is vital in working with families who are relatively powerless and vulnerable to exploitation. Relevant parts of the Code of Ethics that guides social work practice will be presented in class, and the implications for work with families discussed. Many of the controversial issues debated in the text of that name
have ethical dilemmas at their core, and the field of child welfare abounds with other ethical dilemmas.

Ethical issues are also addressed through discussion of ways of working with these families. Though this is not a course that teaches methods of practice, it does teach fundamental skills in working with people, particularly with involuntary families who are angry and afraid. Students learn the effectiveness of basic attitudes of respect; of making the assumption that all parents want to be good parents, even if they have failed at the moment; of meeting families on the common ground of assessing the needs of their children; and seeing and using family strengths in developing services to assist families in meeting children’s needs.

In another facet of the discussion of ethics, one of the themes of the class is that part of the student’s social responsibility is advocating for the families they know, bringing the poverty and desperate circumstances of some of these families to the attention of those who make policy, and participating in the development of services, policy, and legislation as appropriate.

Continual writing, through weekly journals and two short papers, helps students develop effective skills in written communication, as well as helping them become proficient in critical examination of ideas. Because class participation is emphasized in the discussion of ideas, oral communication skills are also enhanced.

Work in this course should help students evaluate their interest in working with children and families, and their interest in graduate study in social work or a related field.
I. Course Description

In recent years there has been rapid change in the goals and methods of those agencies serving children and their families. This course will examine some of the forces producing this change, and will look at the major issues facing child welfare services today. From a review of these issues, in selected areas, we will together try to frame some ideas about the parameters of good service to children and families.

II. Student Learning Objectives

By the end of the quarter, students should be able to:

1. Understand the ways in which the community directs the scope of child welfare services, and understand the ways in which the changing nature of the American family and community, the wide diversity of cultures in this country, and the extent of poverty impact child welfare services.

2. Examine the assumptions underlying child welfare practice, such as the value of the family, the rights of the child, the deterministic view of behavior.

3. Understand major concepts in the field, such as family preservation, permanency planning, and, in Oregon, strength/needs based services, and understand how these ideas are related to the way in which services are delivered.

4. Demonstrate the ability to analyze the consequence of child welfare policies on populations at risk.

5. Examine the relationship between the delivery of helping services to individuals and the development of policy in child welfare.

III. Vulnerable Populations

A multi-cultural perspective in thinking through issues of child welfare will be developed in this class. The necessary policy and practice response to the over-representation of minority children in some child welfare services (and under-representation in other services) must be examined. One of the recommended readings develops issues of child welfare from the
“Africentric” perspective; another focuses on an examination of what constitutes a family, while a third is a beautifully written ethnographic account of the cultural misunderstandings that haunt work with a Hmong family. From these readings, the class will develop ideas about work across cultural boundaries that can be applied to all such work in child welfare. Additionally, as child care is a traditional role for women, many of the issues in child welfare must be carefully examined to be sure that they are seen from a feminist, as well as a more traditional, perspective.

IV. Disabilities

Persons who need special consideration in completion of the work of the course should talk with the instructor, or contact Disability Services for Students, SMC 118, 725-5664

VI. Texts

Required:


Recommended


V. Course assignments and Grading

The course will be taught in a seminar format; thus student responsibility for preparation and contribution to the class is essential.

Weekly completion of a journal entry is expected. As you read each week's assignments, you will be asked to keep a journal in which you record your responses to the written material, class discussions, and your own life experiences as they pertain to course content. This is a place in