National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics:
Summary of Major Principles

PLEASE NOTE:
Each social work major is required to acquire a copy of the Code of Ethics to use in classes by the beginning of the junior year sequence. They are available in the UWS Bookstore and on the Internet at www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp. This is the site for the National Association of Social Workers.

As adopted by the Delegate Assembly of August 1996

Preamble

The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession’s focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is attention to the environmental forces that create, contribute to, and address problems in living.

Social workers promote social justice and social change with an on behalf of clients. “Clients” is used inclusively to refer to individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities. Social workers are sensitive to cultural and ethnic diversity and strive to end discrimination, oppression, poverty, and other forms of social injustice. These activities may be in the form of direct practice, community organizing, supervision, consultation, administration, advocacy, social and political action, policy development and implementation, education, and research and evaluation. Social workers seek to enhance the capacity of people to address their own needs. Social workers also seek to promote the responsiveness of organizations, communities, and other social institutions to individuals’ needs and social problems.

The mission of the social work profession is rooted in set of core values.

Purpose of the NASW Code of Ethics

The NASW Code of Ethics serves six purposes:

• The Code identifies core values on which social work’s mission is based.
• The Code summarizes broad ethical principles that reflect the profession’s core values and establishes a set of specific ethical standards that should be used to guide social work practice.

• The Code is designed to help social workers identify relevant considerations when professional obligations conflict or ethical uncertainties arise.

• The Code provides ethical standards to which the general public can hold the social work profession accountable.

• The Code socializes practitioners new to the field to social work’s mission, values, ethical principles, and ethical standards.

• The Code articulates standards that the social work profession itself can use to assess whether social workers have engaged in unethical conduct. NASW has formal procedures to adjudicate ethics complaints filed against its members. In subscribing to this Code, social workers are required to cooperate in its implementation, participate in NASW adjudication proceeding, and abide by any NASW disciplinary rulings or sanctions based on it.

**Ethical Principles**

The following broad ethical principles are based on social work’s core values of service, social justice, dignity and worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity, and competence. These principles set forth ideals to which all social workers should aspire.

**VALUE:** Service  
**Ethical Principle:** Social workers’ primary goal is to help people in need and to address social problems.

**VALUE:** Social Justice  
**Ethical Principle:** Social workers challenge social injustice.

**VALUE:** Dignity and Worth of the Person  
**Ethical Principle:** Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.

**VALUE:** Importance of Human Relationships  
**Ethical Principle:** Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.

Revised and updated Summer 2014
VALUE: Integrity
Ethical Principle: Social workers behave in a trustworthy manner.

VALUE: Competence
Ethical Principle: Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.

Ethical Standards

The following ethical standards are relevant to the professional activities of all social workers. These standards concern:

Social workers’ ethical responsibilities to clients,
Commitment to Clients
Self-Determination
Informed Consent
Competence
Cultural Competence and Social Diversity
Conflicts of Interest
Privacy and confidentiality: Clients
Access to Records
Sexual Relationships
Physical Contact
Sexual Harassment
Derogatory Language
Payment for Services
Clients Who Lack Decision-Making Capacity
Interruption of Services
Termination of Services

1. Social workers’ ethical responsibilities to colleagues,
   Respect
   Confidentiality: Colleagues
   Interdisciplinary Collaboration
   Disputes Involving Colleagues
   Consultation
   Referral for Services
   Sexual Relationships
   Sexual Harassment
   Impairment of Colleagues
   Incompetence of Colleagues
   Unethical conduct of Colleagues

2. Social workers’ ethical responsibilities in practice settings, Supervision and Consultation
   Education and Training

Revised and updated Summer 2014
Performance and Evaluation
Client Records
Billing
Client Transfer
Administration
Continuing Education and Staff Development
Commitments to Employers
Labor-Management Disputes

3. Social work responsibilities as professional competence
Discrimination
Private conduct
Dishonesty, Fraud, and Deception
Impairment
Misrepresentation
Solicitations
Acknowledge Credit

4. Social work responsibilities to the profession
Integrity of the Profession
Evaluation and Research

5. Social work responsibilities to the broader society
Social Welfare
Public Participation
Public Emergencies
Social and Political Action
2008 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards

This material may be found at the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) website. It is the 2008 EPAS (Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards) which governs how a social work program is accredited. As such, it offers strict guidelines that each accredited program must follow in order to become and remain accredited. It covers all aspects of program functioning, from curriculum to student life.

It is an expectation of the accreditation process that you be provided with access to these standards. The website address is http://www.cswe.org/File.aspx?id=13780. If you have difficulty in accessing the EPAS this way, see your advisor to receive a printed copy.