Background

Professional values and ethics are the core of social work. The NASW Code of Ethics includes five core values of professional social work. Often these core values contrast with real world practices and policies. All social workers routinely face value challenges and must grapple with choices and conflicts that affect the lives of clients, client families, agencies and communities. Oklahoma is ranked first in the nation for the per capita incarceration rate of women. This remains true, despite the fact that Oklahoma’s crime rate hovers around the average for the United States. Most of the incarcerated women in Oklahoma’s prison are imprisoned for non-violent crimes and experience high levels of social and economic vulnerability. Further, Oklahoma continues to imprison both men and women at one of the highest rates in the nation, approximately 650 per 100,000 residents. And while the number of incarcerated individuals has decreased nationally, Oklahoma’s rates continue to increase.

This year the Anne and Henry Zarrow School of Social Work has created the first Ethics Essay Contest. All social work students, undergraduate and graduate, are invited to submit entries. Essays will focus on the theme of incarceration in Oklahoma. Essays will consider the challenges to social work values and that the social problem of incarceration in Oklahoma creates (or has the potential to create).

Strong essays will

- From the NASW Code of Ethics, apply the six principles for ethical practice to the problem of incarceration in Oklahoma. In what ways might social workers encounter conflicts in this area?
- Address potential professional activities social workers can engage in that would better incorporate social work values and ethics: in what ways have social workers historically engaged in a similar issue?
- Demonstrate social work values, principles and self-awareness about ethical professional behavior
- Document facts in essay using published research and best practices
- Exhibit critical thinking and vision
- Will not exceed five pages including references

Cash prizes

A $250 cash prize will be awarded to one graduate student and one undergraduate student.