

**SWK 597: Advanced Topics in Social Work  
Creating a High Performance Workforce in Child Welfare**

**Instructor:**

**Patricia L. Mosher, MSW, LCSW**

Phone Office Hours by appointment

Telephone: 321-278-6539

E-mail: trishmosher42@aol.com

**SWK 597: Creating a High Performance Workforce in Child Welfare**

**June 7, 8, 9 and August 3 & 4, 2006**

This course is geared towards leaders and future leaders in Child Welfare. Designed in a seminar style, the course content will focus on research and best practices to counter the 'Workforce Crisis' in Human Services. Current factors, which negatively impact recruitment, retention, and excellence in human services, include; a shrinking qualified labor pool, increasing and more complex workload, changing focus of the work, and diminished opportunities for flexibility and autonomy. This course will assess these factors in-depth while offering evidence based best practices, some of which are currently being implemented in Maine, along with a period of time for action research learning mid session in which small workgroups will be expected to develop and plan to implement one intervention to positively impact retention and recruitment factors in high performance in the agency. All students must come prepared to complete pre-course reading and surveys, complete nightly reading and writing assignments during the course, participate in a team project during the intersession, and present one team based in-class project during the final two days of the course.

**Educational Objectives:**

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

1. *Describe* the relationship between staff retention, recruitment, selection, and high performance in child welfare.
2. *Plan for and apply* means of hiring and selection, coaching and supervising staff;
3. *Assess and apply* theories of effective agency and organizational culture to enhance performance and staffing in Child Welfare.
4. *Assess and apply* theories integrating effective professional development opportunities and planning to assist in retention and effectiveness in child welfare.
5. *Identify and assess* current practice and effectiveness in supports to supervisors and workers in Child Welfare related to retention and performance.
6. *Develop and present a plan* for implementing one of five workgroup action research learning in the field of practice;

**Accessibility**

The School of Social Work at the University of Maine (Orono Campus) is committed to providing access to the school for people with disabilities. Students with disabilities have a right to ask for an accommodation and are encouraged to talk directly with the responsible faculty member. I will be happy to explore possible accommodations with any student who has a disability. For example, a student with a learning disability might need additional time to complete an exam or a student with a hearing impairment might need a note taker or qualified interpreter in class. When accommodations cannot be provided with existing School resources, the Director of the School will seek the resource necessary for the accommodation through the University Office of Equal Opportunity. Students with disabilities are also encouraged to contact Ann Smith, Counselor and Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities, Onward Building (581-2319). Additional information about University procedures for accommodating individuals with disabilities is available from the Office of Equal Opportunity, 318 Alumni Hall (581-1226).

**Required Texts:**

**Austin, Michael J. & Hopkins, Karen M., (2004)** *Supervision as Collaboration in the Human Services: Building a Learning Culture*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.\*\*\*

**Buckingham, Marcus & Coffman, Curt, (1999).** *First, Break All the Rules, What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*. New York: Simon and Schuster Press.\*\*\*

**Web Based Syllabus and Links to required and recommended articles and resources:**

[www.cwti.org/RR/MSWCourse.htm](http://www.cwti.org/RR/MSWCourse.htm)

## Course Outline

**Pre-work, assigned prior to class. Following you will find written, reading, and web based assignments. Each of the three has a different timeframe and accountability factor. Please complete all three assignments.**

### **1. Written Work (Due: May 24, 2006)**

Written Work: In one-to-three pages, write a brief description of your interest in the topics of this course, including current issues you are facing related to:

- Performance Issues in your unit/district
- Retention issues/turnover in your unit/district
- Recruitment issues in your unit/district

Please include the following points in your written work:

- Your perception of the Community viewpoint of your agency.
- Personal goals for this course

Preliminary ideas about your area of interest for the inter-session project in one or two of the following area: Agency Support in Retention of Staff; Professional Development as a Retention Approach; Supporting the Supervisory Role; Public and Community Relations

Creating a Supportive Culture for all Staff (This is only your initial thought about your interest: you are not expected to have a formal idea or plan for the activity as it will be team based and developed in class).

**Please e-mail this overview to the instructor at [trishmosher42@aol.com](mailto:trishmosher42@aol.com).**

### **2. Reading:**

Text: Read as much as possible in **Supervision as Collaboration**, as this is the primary textbook used in the course. See also Reading Assignment for Day 1.

### **3. Self Assessment:**

Using Gallup tool from **First Break All the Rules**, please go to [www.bucketbook.com](http://www.bucketbook.com) and complete the positive test. Take the survey once, anywhere from one week prior to class, and then again prior to class (different day).

**Wednesday, June 7, 2006:**

The first day of the course will include three class sessions to orient students to the course goals and foundations and to begin assessment of linkage between recruitment, retention, and performance.

**Session 1: Introduction and Overview:**

- Overview of course and logistics
- Background to workforce issues in Child Welfare
- Impact of turnover on outcomes

During Session 1, Instructor and Selected speakers from grant project will provide overview of course goals and logistics, including mapping out the relationship between the course and the current practice and workforce issues. At completion of this unit, students will be able to:

- Identify goals and plan for the course
- Identify and describe connection between course and field of practice
- Link course to current efforts in child welfare at state and national level.
- Describe the impact of worker turnover on outcomes for children and youth.

**Session 2: Workforce Issues in Child Welfare: The Context**

- Summary of Research- retention *versus* turnover.
- Overview of frameworks for approaches and outcomes in enhanced workforce selection, retention, and performance

Session 2 encompasses a more in-depth activity and presentation of the approaches and outcomes which form the framework and underpinning for the class. This includes review of frameworks from other national models and research projects. At the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Identify and discuss the multiple and interactive factors impacting recruitment and retention in terms of the person, work, agency, supervisor and community.
- Identify and analyze models for approaching workforce and performance issues.
- Link various approaches to current issues in Child Welfare workforce development.

**Session 3: Performance, Outcomes, and Leadership related to Workforce Issues**

- Agency Vision, Mission and Values (Agency Leader)
- Measures of Performance and Outcomes related to staffing factors

In Session 3, further definition and exploration of Performance and ‘High Performance’ will be explored through dialog with an agency leader, who will discuss the agency view and importance of retention and staffing issues as well as the important role that leaders (supervisors, specialists, and line staff with leadership roles) play in forwarding the agency mission, vision, and values. The dialog will incorporate use of experience within the group, national and state measures, goals, and outcomes review, linking performance to the supervisory/leadership role. At the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Link agency leadership and vision to the staffing issues discussed in the remainder of the course,
- Identify strengths and best practices from group and national research to influence desired areas of practice,
- Begin to identify personal/team goals and projects for intersession relating to performance issues.

### **Reading for Day 1:**

For Day 1, Sessions 1 and 2: Introduction to Workforce Issues and Context: Read/Scan the following:

- **Zlotnik, J. L. et al, (2005) *Factors Influencing Retention of Child Welfare Staff: A Systematic Review of Research*. Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Advancement of Social Work Research. \***
- **See website for additional background reading**

### **Day 1 Written Journal Assignment: (Due AM of Day 2)**

Based on the information presented, please write about your present performance as a work unit. Include the following:

- Reflect on your pre-work and the goals you have for your unit performance during the coming year.
  - What sparked your interest/focus in today's class?

Optional topics to write on:

- Do you believe you have 'the right team'?
- What strengths on the team are a good match for your goals?
- How can you help your team develop whatever is missing?

Written journal entries must be submitted at the start of the following morning.

*Thursday, June 8, 2006*

On Day Two we continue the focus on the agency, this time looking at retention through the lens of creating agency supports, clarifying the role of the supervisor and exploring approaches to recruitment of staff.

**Session 4: Agency Climate and Culture**

- Present and discuss results of statewide job satisfaction survey
- Using exit surveys and other data for continuous improvement
- Identify relationship between morale and current structures
- Creating and supporting structures to provide workers with a voice in agency operations

In this session we will discuss the impact of the agency's climate and culture on retention. This will include results of statewide surveys of job satisfaction conducted in November 2004 and 2005 along with exit questionnaire data for discussion and analysis by the class participants. In addition, we will assess the current structure and communication mechanisms as relates to agency/staff relationship and effectiveness. At the end of this session, students will be able to:

- Assess the factors in the agency impacting on employee morale and retention
- Discuss the relationship between morale and retention
- Identify role of leadership in creating a supportive work environment
- Make recommendations for next steps in enhanced agency culture and employee supports

**Session 5: Supervising Within the Organization: Creating a Learning Organization**

- Supervisory Standards, Roles, and Competencies
- Learning Organizations and Cultures
- Integrating the three supervisory roles into leader/supervision in this culture.
- Linking Learning Culture to retention

This session will build on knowledge and readings on the concept of a Learning Organization. The class will also look at the Supervisory Academy model as an example of a continuum of professional development from experienced worker through manager. At the end of the session, students will be able to:

- Identify the three roles of the supervisor and apply to supervision as well as leadership at the line level,
- Identify key factors in the Learning Organization literature
- Identify and describe their leadership and supervisory role in creating a learning culture
- Describe and specify actions they take to promote learning in the current agency environment.

## Session 6: HR and Agency Roles in Recruitment and Selection

- A strategic Human Resource Management approach to recruitment, selection and retention.
- Agency image and promotion of practice model and values as integral to recruitment and selection practices
- Supervision Performance Standards on recruitment, screening and selection
- Recruitment challenges and strategies

During session 6 the class will focus on the interaction between agency and human resource management to appreciate the systemic issues in hiring and selection as well as the impact of agency image and community relations. Innovative practices to broaden the applicant pool will be discussed. At the end of this session, students will be able to:

- Identify and describe effective strategies in recruitment and selection
- Assess the impact of agency image, values, and culture in attracting, maintaining, and optimizing the effectiveness of employees.
- Discuss environmental and systemic challenges in recruitment and selection
- Describe the importance of realistic recruitment and screening

### Readings for Day 2: Sessions 4, 5 & 6

Review the following chapters in **Austin, M. and Hopkins, K., (2004).** *Supervision as Collaboration in Human Services*, Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.

- Chapter 2. *Defining the Learning Organization*, Austin and Hopkins.
- Chapter 11, *Promoting a Learning Culture*, Rodriguez

**Graef, M.I., & Potter, M.E. (2002).** Alternative solutions to the child protective services staffing crisis: Innovations from Industrial/organizational psychology. *Protecting Children*, 17 (3), 18-31. \*

**Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare (Spring, 2005).** Human Resource Management's Role in Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining a Workforce Committed to a New Practice Model. *Safekeeping*. Washington, D.C.: Center for the Study of Social Policy. Retrieved April 24, 2006, from <http://www.cssp.org/uploadFiles/safekeeping-Spring05-v5.pdf> Please see page 8.\*

### Written Assignment for Day 3:

Building on the work to date, begin to identify your interest in joining a research action team during intersession. Areas for research include:

- Agency Support in Retention of Staff
- Professional Development as a Retention Approach
- Supporting the Supervisory Role
- Public and Community Relations
- Creating a Supportive Culture for all Staff

Using your unit analysis, the results of the survey, and the group discussions, please make note of your responses to the material and ideas you have about moving forward.

*Friday, June 9, 2006*

Day Three encompasses strategies for recruitment and selection in addressing the workforce crisis.

**Session 7: The Supervisor's Role in Selecting the Right People**

- Improving the person/job match
- Characteristics that predict retention
- Competency Based Screening
- Entrance Interview process

This session will build on what the class has identified as critical to performance and retention and turn now to selection and hiring, looking for both excellence in performance and longevity to better meet agency goals. At the end of this session, students will be able to:

- Identify predictive characteristics and competencies for both performance and retention
- Identify and discuss strategies for selection including using Maine's structured hiring process.
- Identify and strategize on continuous improvement of the recruitment, selection and entry process into the agency.

**Session 8: Setting Expectations and Developing Staff**

- Stages of Worker Development
- Looking at outcomes identified in Day One with a focus on using supervisory roles to improve results.
- Constructs for assessment including performance, Emotional Intelligence, and personality/learning styles.
- Supervisory Strategies to accommodate learning and performance expectations based on developmental practice

Session 8 is focused on the administrative as well as the educational and development role of the supervisor as well as the focus supervisors must maintain on performance. Discussion will begin with the learning and performance expectations realistic for each phase of worker development and expand to include strategies to lead a team with members in various stages in order to perform the work with a view to excellence. At the end of this session students will be able to:

- Apply stages of worker development to unit members
- Integrate multiple constructs for self- and supervisory-assessment
- Integrate the Learning Cycle with information on attaining results and desired outcomes in Child Welfare Practice.
- Strategize about integration of a learning culture with a high performance team.

## **Session 9: Team Approaches to Learning and Change**

Review models for team structures:

- Review Action Practice models for research and strategic planning
- Identify teams for intersession-practice

In the final classroom session prior to the intersession practice activities, the class will focus on methods for team development and will identify groupings, areas for focus, and initial planning for the work they will do in the intersession. At the end of this session, students will be able to:

- Describe various methods of team structure
- Describe the impact of supervisors and leaders on change and experimentation
- Set an initial structure for their intersession projects.

### **Readings for Day 3: Sessions 7 & 8**

Review the following chapters in **Austin, M. and Hopkins, K., (2004).** *Supervision as Collaboration in Human Services*, Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications.

- Chapter 15, *Creating a Culture that Supports the Development of Staff*, Krueger, Austin, Hopkins.
- Chapter 18, *Coaching Employees with Performance Problems*, Proehl

### **Intersession Team Assignments:**

The class will separate into small work groups, minimum of two participants, maximum of four. Groups can identify one of the following four topic areas to address and present upon recommencement of the course.

1. Agency Support in Retention of Staff
2. Professional Development as a Retention Approach
3. Supporting the Supervisory Role
4. Public and Community Relations
5. Creating a Supportive Culture for all Staff

Please review the overviews below for descriptions of these categories. Additional background readings and any other resources, which might assist the workgroup, are listed in the website.

Groups are responsible for a one-hour presentation upon the recommencement of the course. Each group will need to provide handouts and materials relating to the topic they have selected. The project should consist of the following:

- Identification of the current status of the issue in the agency including: data as available and appropriate.
- Application of materials provided in class and other theoretical or research pieces to support or suggest a new approach or area for study in the field.
- One activity related to your subject and presentation.

- Action planning and subsequent reporting on a new approach or refined effort to further the goals of retention and performance in work units or in product development.

For example, all members could attempt the same type of staff meeting or training to be held for all units supervised by that group. On an alternate focus, all members could decide to develop a curriculum or job aid that would assist staff and could then pilot it within their units. Another example: supervisors could identify a process for hiring and bringing on staff if they plan to work with new hires or new staff in the intersession, again trying the same approach in multiple units and settings.

Minutes of each group meeting or communication should be copied or forwarded to the instructor in place of personal journals. ***The intersession project comprises 50% of the final grade for the course.***

Written Work required by a date set one week prior to recommencement of the course, by e-mail:

- Workgroups should submit an overview of their work and their planned presentation, along with a list of any required materials (projector, VCR, etc.)

Individuals must submit a reaction paper to the workgroup process *upon return to the course.*

### **Session 10: Agency Support in Retention of Staff**

This session will include a presentation by the Agency Support Workgroup. Learning Objectives are to be identified by the project team. Some examples of Agency Support Related Approaches include:

- Action learning curriculum
- Management retreats
- Monthly staff dialogue
- Improved communication channels
- Expectations from Office Director

Structures for worker input into training and work design. Some examples of desired Agency Support related outcomes include:

- Unifying mission
- Open communication at all levels
- Climate promoting trust, autonomy, flexibility
- Worker input into training and decision making
- Learning, innovative organization
- Culturally competent workforce
- Manageable caseloads and workload
- Pleasant working conditions
- Recognition/celebration of successes

*Thursday, August 3, 2006*

**Session 11: Professional Development as a Retention Approach**

This session will include a presentation by the Professional Development Workgroup.

Some Examples of Professional Development Approaches include:

- On-site coaching and advising
- Tuition reimbursement
- On-site MSW classes
- In-agency graduate field placement
- Clinical unit for field placement
- Benefits to encourage tenure in job
- Reward system for MSW attainment
- In-office distance learning on release time

Some examples of Professional Development desired outcomes include:

- Expectations and support for individual development planning
- Career options for experienced caseworkers and supervisors
- Support for workers tailored to appropriate stage of development

Learning Objectives are to be identified by the project team.

Recommended texts can be found on the website.

**Session 12: Supporting the Supervisory Role**

This session will include a presentation by the Supervisory Support Workgroup. Some

Examples of Supervisory Support Approaches include:

- Competency-based development
- Supervisory Academy
- Supervisor support groups
- Graduate courses in supervision

Some examples of Supervisory Support desired outcomes include:

- Consistently competent supervision
- Effective feedback
- Performance management
- Effective communication
- Mentoring by experienced supervisors
- Team approaches to problem solving and case management

Learning Objectives are to be identified by the project team.

Recommended texts can be found on the website.

*Friday, August 4, 2006*

**Session 13: Public and Community Relations**

This session will include a presentation by the Community Support Workgroup. Some Examples of Community Support Approaches include:

- Public education on agency mission and purpose
- Cross agency training (e.g., Judicial Symposium)
- Image of agency in community
- Leaving the Agency: Staff Exits.
- Empowering and Nurturing Leavers
- State/University Partnerships

Some examples of Community Support desired outcomes include:

- Community understanding of mission and role of agency
- Interagency collaboration
- Expanding pools of applicants for positions
- Decreased turnover

Learning Objectives are to be identified by the project team.

Recommended texts can be found on the website.

**Session 14: Creating a Supportive Culture for all Staff**

This session will include a presentation by the Supportive Workplace Culture Workgroup. Some Examples of Workplace Support Approaches include:

- Team approaches
- Performance support systems
- Training for developmental stages
- Clinical case monitoring
- Seminar for experienced caseworkers

Some anticipated outcomes from Enhancing the Workplace Culture would include:

- Effective communication
- Mentoring by experienced caseworkers
- Support for transitions and developmental stages
- Team approaches to problem solving and case management

Learning Objectives are to be identified by the project team.

Recommended texts can be found on the website.

**Session 15: Reflective Practice**

- Group Reflection on workgroup process
- Group Reflection and input for ongoing agency/systems improvement
- Action planning for future implementation
- Group reflection on process and impact of the course

At the end of this session, students will be able to:

- Assess their understanding of retention, recruitment, and performance as linked processes
- Assess and build implementation plans for practice within their context of practice
- Assess and recommend agency and systems improvements towards integrating course learning to benefit the system
- Assess and inform the ongoing development of in-service training and graduate coursework at the middle manager and upper management level to promote improved retention strategies

### **Additional Reading Recommendations:**

#### **Books:**

**Dorman, Rebekah L. & Shapiro, Jeremy, (2004).** *Preventing Burnout in Your Staff and Yourself: A Survival Guide for Human Services Supervisors.* Washington, D.C.: CWLA Press.\*\*

**Rath, Tom and Clifton, Donald O. (2004).** *How Full is Your Bucket?* New York: Gallup Press.\*\*

**Senge, P., Kleiner, A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., & Smith, B. (1994).** *The Fifth Discipline Field Book,* New York: Doubleday Press.\*\*

**\* Please visit <http://docutek.ursus.maine.edu/coursepage.asp?cid=1546> to view, download and print all articles-required and recommended.**

**\*\* See your PA for District copy.**

**\*\*\* Copy will be sent to you via interoffice mail.**

## ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

### **Pre-work: Written Work and Reading**

*The Pre-work writing to the instructor will count for 10% of the course grade.*

The pre work for this class is crucial to your ability to do well in the class as well as your ability to get what you need from our work together. **The pre-work assignment is as follows:**

**In a minimum of one page, no limit beyond that, please submit a written self/unit assessment of the following:**

- Staff morale, satisfaction, and ‘staying power’ in the agency
- Unit accomplishment of outcomes and goals set forth by the agency.

Please also write a bit about your own leadership and your role, whether you are the supervisor or a member of the unit, in promoting a high performance workforce as well as any goals you have set for yourself for this course.

In assessing your current performance goals and plans, you may use any method that reflects your ‘real time’ process. I recommend that you speak directly with your staff colleagues and tell them that you are embarking on this experience and would like some input from them as well, getting ideas from them about the impact of turnover in the agency and how this relates to agency, team, and individual performance.

Reading the required text, *Supervision as Collaboration in Human Services* and *First, Break all the Rules*, is best done in the month or so prior to the actual course. If you can read the books ahead of time, annotating sections you liked or disagreed with, a simple scan during the compressed version of the class will suffice and it will ease your workload during the week. All reading is listed in order of priority, so you should start at the top and get as far as you can. Critical information from articles will be discussed in the course and reading is supplemented heavily with in-class presentation, but getting your grounding will set you in better stead for the inter-session project. As you will see in other assignments; the grading will be based on your commitment to this project and your thoughtfulness about the answers you give.

### **Daily Writing and Reaction Papers.**

*The daily writing and reaction papers in the second series of days will count for 20% of the course grade.*

The purpose for writing daily and a pre-return written assignment is to allow you another format in which to explore what you are investing in your own learning as you dedicate time and energy into your professional growth. As a result, this is an informal assignment; may be handwritten and introspective in nature without need of lengthy citations and theory unless that is important to you. I see my role in accessing your writing as another means to understand what this work means to you and to view, albeit briefly and in an artificial way, your reflective process. I may write back to you, or let you know about additional resources. I do not see this as a strictly graded experience, but

in order to ‘do well’ in the class, I expect to see that you have taken this task seriously and have done a more than cursory job of writing about your experience. I would communicate concerns on this matter with you directly, but will not intrude on your process by grading or critiquing you in your journal writing. I also believe that you have the right and responsibility to yourself to ensure that the material in your writing is material that you are comfortable entrusting to me. I will not quote or attribute what you discuss in that format with the larger class without permission, and would more likely encourage you to raise issues and points directly.

## **Project Presentations by Workgroup**

*The intersession project comprises 50% of the final grade for the course.*

### **The Group Project is in place of a Final Exam.**

The class requirement is that each student must participate in a workgroup in one of four areas that are critical to impacting recruitment and retention in Child Welfare. As long as we get some folks in each area, the design of project is up to you. As the projects have a team component, you will be working in concert with other students. We will explore the usefulness of face-to-face and virtual meetings of the workgroup and will also work together to refine how the projects should be structured. Prior to leaving for the intersession break, each group will meet to begin the process and each group will do a five-minute overview of their progress and plan prior to breaking for intersession.

Your expectation upon return is that you will work with your workgroup to provide approximately 2 hours of presentation and activities around the designated topic area. This can take any form that your team identifies and you can ask the rest of class to participate in any way that you believe would further your agenda. The project has the following major aspects:

Each workgroup will design and try out a new strategy related to the topic of the course in the area of focus. Working in concert, you will want to identify actions that your group will all try or perform during the break and you will report back to the class. If you choose something that is not easily done with work units, you would likely do something within your one-hour timeframe.

- Brief Outline of the Situation that you wish to address in practice within the unit.
- Problem/Strategy Identification: This is a description of practice you are hoping to change, innovation you want to make, etc. You will want to describe practice as it exists and as you would like to improve it. Include an overview of the 'problem', scope, and focus your group is taking.
- Methods: Identify range of methods you will use to solve the problem or try out a strategy: will you all do this or will some try it with others playing a different role?, etc.
- Connectivity: Set a schedule or plan for connecting with the group and put this in writing.
- Goal Identification: Identify the desired outcome, how you will measure it, etcetera. Each workgroup will share the most important features of information gleaned with the rest of the class and will assist other class members in applying the information in their work lives.

Upon completion of your project, you will get a group feedback sheet from all participants (you will see this prior to the intersession break) and you will also get written feedback from me related to this activity. This will afford each group an assessment on how your contributions and participation in class have assisted your peers.

## **Classroom Participation**

*Classroom Participation counts for 20% of the grade for the course.*

Grading on participation is always tricky, so we will do it collaboratively with your giving me your impression of your contribution and participation. As a grounding remark, with respect for the variety of types, the grade will not necessarily correlate with the 'quantity' of input you make, but rather the quality and your ability to respond to your peers' learning needs. This is an excellent example of how the class can give you a chance to practice those valuable supervisory skills: describing situations, reflecting on your role and other perspectives, and assessing/responding to educational needs!

### **Grading**

Pre Work	10%
Written Daily Reactions	20%
Project Presentation	50%
Class Participation	20%