



SOWK12014 *Ethical Professional Practice*

Term 2 - 2017

Profile information current as at 16/05/2024 03:53 pm

All details in this unit profile for SOWK12014 have been officially approved by CQUniversity and represent a learning partnership between the University and you (our student). The information will not be changed unless absolutely necessary and any change will be clearly indicated by an approved correction included in the profile.

General Information

Overview

This unit presents ethical theories and principles and their relationship to social work professional practice in human services. Students should be able to demonstrate knowledge of the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and the Australian Community Workers Association (ACWA) codes of ethics and explore ethical decision making in relation to different practice contexts. Students should also be able to analyse the role of personal and professional value systems and their place in various practice settings, and the legal and organisational context of social / welfare work. Students should be able to identify and engage appropriate use of self and self care strategies by students in the professional context as a component of devising an ethical professional framework for future practice. The students should be able to analyse the ethics of practice within differing cultural contexts and devise appropriate strategies of intervention.

Details

Career Level: *Undergraduate*

Unit Level: *Level 2*

Credit Points: 6

Student Contribution Band: 10

Fraction of Full-Time Student Load: 0.125

Pre-requisites or Co-requisites

Successful completion of 48 credit points in any course.

Important note: Students enrolled in a subsequent unit who failed their pre-requisite unit, should drop the subsequent unit before the census date or within 10 working days of Fail grade notification. Students who do not drop the unit in this timeframe cannot later drop the unit without academic and financial liability. See details in the [Assessment Policy and Procedure \(Higher Education Coursework\)](#).

Offerings For Term 2 - 2017

- Distance

Attendance Requirements

All on-campus students are expected to attend scheduled classes – in some units, these classes are identified as a mandatory (pass/fail) component and attendance is compulsory. International students, on a student visa, must maintain a full time study load and meet both attendance and academic progress requirements in each study period (satisfactory attendance for International students is defined as maintaining at least an 80% attendance record).

Website

[This unit has a website, within the Moodle system, which is available two weeks before the start of term. It is important that you visit your Moodle site throughout the term. Please visit Moodle for more information.](#)

Class and Assessment Overview

Recommended Student Time Commitment

Each 6-credit Undergraduate unit at CQUniversity requires an overall time commitment of an average of 12.5 hours of study per week, making a total of 150 hours for the unit.

Class Timetable

[Regional Campuses](#)

Bundaberg, Cairns, Emerald, Gladstone, Mackay, Rockhampton, Townsville

[Metropolitan Campuses](#)

Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne, Perth, Sydney

Assessment Overview

1. **Group Discussion**

Weighting: 30%

2. **Written Assessment**

Weighting: 30%

3. **Written Assessment**

Weighting: 40%

Assessment Grading

This is a graded unit: your overall grade will be calculated from the marks or grades for each assessment task, based on the relative weightings shown in the table above. You must obtain an overall mark for the unit of at least 50%, or an overall grade of 'pass' in order to pass the unit. If any 'pass/fail' tasks are shown in the table above they must also be completed successfully ('pass' grade). You must also meet any minimum mark requirements specified for a particular assessment task, as detailed in the 'assessment task' section (note that in some instances, the minimum mark for a task may be greater than 50%). Consult the [University's Grades and Results Policy](#) for more details of interim results and final grades.

CQUniversity Policies

All University policies are available on the [CQUniversity Policy site](#).

You may wish to view these policies:

- Grades and Results Policy
- Assessment Policy and Procedure (Higher Education Coursework)
- Review of Grade Procedure
- Student Academic Integrity Policy and Procedure
- Monitoring Academic Progress (MAP) Policy and Procedure – Domestic Students
- Monitoring Academic Progress (MAP) Policy and Procedure – International Students
- Student Refund and Credit Balance Policy and Procedure
- Student Feedback – Compliments and Complaints Policy and Procedure
- Information and Communications Technology Acceptable Use Policy and Procedure

This list is not an exhaustive list of all University policies. The full list of University policies are available on the [CQUniversity Policy site](#).

Previous Student Feedback

Feedback, Recommendations and Responses

Every unit is reviewed for enhancement each year. At the most recent review, the following staff and student feedback items were identified and recommendations were made.

Feedback from Student evaluation

Feedback

Students have indicated that the workload in the course is too high.

Recommendation

The course coordinator has provided a range of readings and resources to facilitate student learning. The course coordinator will provide further instructions on how to best utilise the readings and resources in the achievement of the learning outcomes in the course. The number of Assessment 1 topics were reduced in 2016. Given the centrality of ethics to the social work curriculum and practice there will be no further reduction in assessments at this time. However adjustments will be made to Assessment 1 to help ease student engagement.

Feedback from Student evaluation

Feedback

Students continue to evaluate the course Moodle site, resources and learning activities highly.

Recommendation

Continue with current structure and design of the course.

Unit Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you will be able to:

1. Identify the major principles inherent within the AASW or ACWA codes of ethics.
2. Apply the codes of ethics to professional practice contexts.
3. Critically analyse modernist and post modernist approaches to ethical dilemmas.
4. Analyse the ethical elements of cultural competence including working in Indigenous contexts and apply strategies to case study situations.
5. Analyse differing contexts for ethical practice and apply the ethical use of self and appropriate self care strategies within a range of these practice contexts.
6. Analyse your performance from feedback drawn from your involvement in professional learning contexts.

Alignment of Learning Outcomes, Assessment and Graduate Attributes



Alignment of Assessment Tasks to Learning Outcomes

| Assessment Tasks | Learning Outcomes | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 1 - Group Discussion - 30% | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| 2 - Written Assessment - 30% | • | • | • | • | • | |
| 3 - Written Assessment - 40% | • | • | • | | • | |

Alignment of Graduate Attributes to Learning Outcomes

| Graduate Attributes | Learning Outcomes | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 |
| 1 - Communication | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| 2 - Problem Solving | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| 3 - Critical Thinking | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| 4 - Information Literacy | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| 5 - Team Work | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| 6 - Information Technology Competence | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| 7 - Cross Cultural Competence | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| 8 - Ethical practice | • | • | • | • | • | • |
| 9 - Social Innovation | | | | | | |
| 10 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures | | | | | | |

Alignment of Assessment Tasks to Graduate Attributes

| Assessment Tasks | Graduate Attributes | | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 1 - Group Discussion - 30% | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | • | | |
| 2 - Written Assessment - 30% | • | • | • | • | | • | • | • | | |
| 3 - Written Assessment - 40% | • | • | • | • | | • | • | • | | |

Textbooks and Resources

Textbooks

SOWK12014

Prescribed

Ethical Practice in Social Work

(2007)

Authors: Bowles, W., Collingridge, M., Curry, S., & Valentine, B.

Allen & Unwin

Crows Nest, NSW, Australia

Binding: Paperback

Additional Textbook Information

The next edition of the prescribed text is due to be published late 2017, therefore students may want to consider purchasing the eBook (electronic version). The eBook generally retails at a lower price than the hard copy. The publisher has provided the following options for the purchase of the eBook:

Google:

https://play.google.com/store/books/details/Wendy_Bowles_Ethical_Practice_in_Social_Work?id=HaGcBQAAQBAJ

Kobo: <https://store.kobobooks.com/en-us/ebook/ethical-practice-in-social-work-an-applied-approach>

Ebooks.com:

<http://www.ebooks.com/283405/ethical-practice-in-social-work/bowles-wendy-collingridge-michael-curry-stev-en-val/>

[View textbooks at the CQUniversity Bookshop](#)

IT Resources

You will need access to the following IT resources:

- CQUniversity Student Email
- Internet
- Unit Website (Moodle)

Referencing Style

All submissions for this unit must use the referencing style: [Harvard \(author-date\)](#)

For further information, see the Assessment Tasks.

Teaching Contacts

Madonna Chesham Unit Coordinator

m.chesham@cqu.edu.au

Schedule

Week 1 - 10 Jul 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Introduction to ethics | Chapter 1 & 2 of prescribed text. Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 1 set readings and activities. | |

Week 2 - 17 Jul 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|--------------|---------|------------------------------|
|--------------|---------|------------------------------|

| | | |
|----------------|---|---|
| Code of ethics | Chapter 4 & 5 of prescribed text. Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 2 set readings and activities. | Online group discussion topic 1 post due end of week 2. |
|----------------|---|---|

Week 3 - 24 Jul 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Ethical theories and concepts | Chapter 3 of prescribed text. Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 3 set readings and activities. | On line group discussion topic 1 reflection due end of week 3. |

Week 4 - 31 Jul 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|--|---|---|
| Autonomy, paternalism and self determination | Chapter 6 of prescribed text. Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 4 set readings and activities. | Online group discussion topic 2 response due end of week 4. |

Week 5 - 07 Aug 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Truth telling - veracity | Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 5 set readings and activities. | Online group discussion topic 2 reflection due end of week 5. |

Vacation Week - 14 Aug 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|--------------|---------|------------------------------|
|--------------|---------|------------------------------|

Week 6 - 21 Aug 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Privacy and confidentiality | Chapter 7 of prescribed text. Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 6 set readings and activities. | Assessment 2 - Written Assessment Due: Week 6 Friday (25 Aug 2017) 11:45 pm AEST |

Week 7 - 28 Aug 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| Social work practice dilemmas | Chapter 9 of prescribed text. Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 7 set readings and activities. | Online group discussion topic 3 response due end of week 7. |

Week 8 - 04 Sep 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| Ethical decision making | Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 8 set readings and activities. | Online group discussion topic 3 reflection due end of week 8. |

Week 9 - 11 Sep 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|---------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Critical reflection | Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 9 set readings and activities. | |

Week 10 - 18 Sep 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|---------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Ethics, social control and toleration | Chapter 8 of prescribed text. Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 10 set readings and activities. | |

Week 11 - 25 Sep 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|--------------------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Indigenous and cross cultural issues | Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 11 set readings and activities. | |

Week 12 - 02 Oct 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| The source of power in social work | Chapter 10 of prescribed text. Visit the study week schedule on Moodle for Week 12 set readings and activities. | Assessment 3 - Written Assessment Due: Week 12 Friday (6 Oct 2017) 11:45 pm AEST |

Review/Exam Week - 09 Oct 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|--------------|---------|------------------------------|
|--------------|---------|------------------------------|

Exam Week - 16 Oct 2017

| Module/Topic | Chapter | Events and Submissions/Topic |
|--------------|---------|------------------------------|
|--------------|---------|------------------------------|

Assessment Tasks

1 Assessment 1 - Group Discussion

Assessment Type

Group Discussion

Task Description

The three online group discussions are intended to replicate a face to face tutorial to develop student knowledge of ethical practice and develop skills essential for social work practice. The activities will strengthen capacity to participate in informative discussion for ethical decision making and provide constructive feedback to peers.

Student role

You are yourself, a social work/human services student. These activities are to be viewed as learning opportunities rather than peer evaluation. Students should seek to expand their knowledge and understanding by accessing and participating in peer discussion.

Product

Three online discussion topic responses along with three responses to another student's discussion post, and a short reflection will be posted on Moodle by the due date for each respective topic.

You responses should demonstrate:

- An understanding of the content of the group discussion.
- Capacity to critically analyse and reflect on the unit and independent readings.
- Ability to discuss important issues relating to ethics in a human services context.
- The core ethical principles of social work practice making reference to the AASW Code of Ethics.

What's involved?

In weeks 2, 4, and 7 you will post an online response to a group discussion topic provided, make a considered response to another student's submission, and return to your original response and post a short reflection.

All three group discussion topic submissions will be assessed (10% weight each). A detailed schedule of dates, discussion topics and requirements for each topic will be provided under the *Assessment 1 - Group Discussion* heading on Moodle.

To pass this assessment you are required to post a response to the topic, respond to another student's discussion post, and provide a short reflection to **all** three group discussion topics.

You are expected to have completed the core readings before participating in the group discussion and your discussion should make reference to the core readings and be properly cited/referenced (Harvard). Additionally you are encouraged to undertake independent reading on the topic.

Please note: You are expected to adhere to acceptable netiquette protocols in all your communications on the Moodle site.

Word limit

- 500 words maximum for online response to group discussion topic.
- No word limit for response to student.
- 200 words maximum for online reflective practice post.

You must remain within 10% of the word limit (maximum 1% of the overall mark will be deducted for every 100 words over or under this range)

Penalties will apply for late submissions.

Assessment Due Date

Ongoing. Group discussion topics are due fortnightly for weeks 2, 4 and 7 of term. A detailed schedule of dates, discussion topics and requirements for each topic will be provided on Moodle.

Return Date to Students

Grades for each discussion topic will be made available the week following the reflective practice post.

Weighting

30%

Minimum mark or grade

In addition to students needing an overall mark for the unit of at least 50%, students must receive a pass or more in at least 2 of the 3 assessments to receive an overall pass for this unit.

Assessment Criteria

- Demonstrates an understanding of the content of the group discussion. Responds to **all** three group discussion topics by the required time.
- Demonstrates a capacity for critical analysis and reflection based on the unit and independent readings.
- Demonstrates an ability to interact and discuss important issues relating to ethics in a human services context.
- Identifies the core ethical principles of social work practice making reference to the AASW Code of Ethics.
- Demonstrates synthesis and integration of literature within postings, strength and logic in argument, clear expression and grammar, appropriate referencing and citation (Harvard), with correct spelling (Macquarie) and punctuation. Remains within word limit.

Referencing Style

- [Harvard \(author-date\)](#)

Submission

Online

Submission Instructions

Instructions can be found on the Moodle website.

Learning Outcomes Assessed

- Identify the major principles inherent within the AASW or ACWA codes of ethics.
- Apply the codes of ethics to professional practice contexts.
- Critically analyse modernist and post modernist approaches to ethical dilemmas.
- Analyse the ethical elements of cultural competence including working in Indigenous contexts and apply strategies to case study situations.
- Analyse differing contexts for ethical practice and apply the ethical use of self and appropriate self care strategies within a range of these practice contexts.
- Analyse your performance from feedback drawn from your involvement in professional learning contexts.

Graduate Attributes

- Communication
- Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking
- Information Literacy
- Team Work
- Information Technology Competence
- Cross Cultural Competence
- Ethical practice

2 Assessment 2 - Written Assessment

Assessment Type

Written Assessment

Task Description

Ethical decision making is the "systematic, reflective process by which dilemmas can be resolved" (AASW 2010, p. 14). Your task is to identify a field of practice (mental health, child protection, youth justice/work, health, aged care, etc) and

explore the ethical dilemmas that a social worker/human services worker would commonly encounter in that area, giving consideration to the AASW (2010) Code of Ethics. Additionally, you are required to identify how you might resolve the ethical dilemmas that you may encounter. You are also required to give consideration to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and communities, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in your chosen field of practice, and the ethical issues that you would need to consider when working with these groups. The essay must make reference to the literature. You are expected to refer to the unit readings and undertake independent reading.

Product

With reference to the chosen field of practice, a written essay that addresses the following:

- Identifies the ethical dilemmas a social worker/human service worker would commonly experience in the chosen field of practice, making reference to the literature relevant to this assignment topic.
- Identifies how the identified ethical dilemmas can be resolved, making reference to the relevant literature.
- Analyses the ethical elements of cultural competence when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Identifies the core ethical principles of social work practice making reference to the AASW Code of Ethics (2010).
- Demonstrates synthesis and integration of literature, strength and logic of argument, correct spelling (Macquarie) and punctuation, with appropriate citation and referencing (Harvard). Remains within word limit.

Length

- 1500 words (excluding references and appendices). You must remain within 10% of the word limit (maximum - 1% of the mark will be deducted for every 100 words over or under this range).

Penalties will apply for late submissions.

Assessment Due Date

Week 6 Friday (25 Aug 2017) 11:45 pm AEST

Return Date to Students

Week 8 Friday (8 Sept 2017)

Weighting

30%

Minimum mark or grade

In addition to students needing an overall mark for the unit of at least 50%, students must receive a pass or more in at least 2 of the 3 assessments to receive an overall pass for this unit.

Assessment Criteria

- Identifies the ethical dilemmas a human service worker could experience in the chosen field of practice, making reference to the literature relevant to this assignment topic.
- Identifies how ethical dilemmas discussed can be resolved, making reference to the relevant literature.
- Analyses the ethical elements of cultural competence including working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in the chosen field of practice.
- Identifies the core ethical principles of social work practice making reference to the AASW Code of Ethics.
- Demonstrates synthesis and integration of literature, strength and logic in argument, clear expression and grammar, correct spelling (Macquarie) and punctuation, and appropriate citation and referencing (Harvard). Remains within word limit.

Referencing Style

- [Harvard \(author-date\)](#)

Submission

Online

Learning Outcomes Assessed

- Identify the major principles inherent within the AASW or ACWA codes of ethics.
- Apply the codes of ethics to professional practice contexts.
- Critically analyse modernist and post modernist approaches to ethical dilemmas.
- Analyse the ethical elements of cultural competence including working in Indigenous contexts and apply strategies to case study situations.

- Analyse differing contexts for ethical practice and apply the ethical use of self and appropriate self care strategies within a range of these practice contexts.

Graduate Attributes

- Communication
- Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking
- Information Literacy
- Information Technology Competence
- Cross Cultural Competence
- Ethical practice

3 Assessment 3 - Written Assessment

Assessment Type

Written Assessment

Task Description

This assessment analyses an ethical dilemma in social work practice. It explores the complex ethical dilemmas that emerge when political, social and economic context impacts on client populations and social work practice. Ethical problem solving is therefore an important professional requirement for social work practice.

Product

A written essay that addresses the ethical dilemma (Vignette) outlined on Moodle under *Assessment 3 - Written Assessment*.

Your discussion needs to address the following:

- For each of the following course of actions listed below, provide a rationale for selecting and rejecting the action in Mrs Peterson's case.
 - Refer to the AASW Code of Ethics and identify the relevant ethical principles, values and responsibilities that apply to the scenario and courses of action.
 - Based on the options below or other, what course of action would you favour? (Be sure to explain your decision)
 - You are required to refer to the literature relevant to this assignment's topic.
1. The social worker decides to respect the principles of confidentiality and self determination and do nothing.
 2. The social worker assesses for involuntary placement due to Mrs Peterson's impaired judgement about her current life circumstances.
 3. The social worker decides that the least restrictive route is to contact Mrs Peterson's daughter Janice given she made the original referral, to discuss the family checking in regularly on Mrs Peterson.
 4. The social worker explains to Mrs Peterson that you are not convinced she can attend to her needs and present her with the options based on your assessment.

Length

- 2000 words (excluding references and appendices). You must remain within 10% of the word limit (maximum - 1% of the mark will be deducted for every 100 words over or under this range).

Penalties will apply for late submissions.

Assessment Due Date

Week 12 Friday (6 Oct 2017) 11:45 pm AEST

Return Date to Students

Exam Week Friday (20 Oct 2017)

Weighting

40%

Minimum mark or grade

In addition to students needing an overall mark for the unit of at least 50%, students must receive a pass or more in at least 2 of the 3 assessments to receive an overall pass for this unit.

Assessment Criteria

- Demonstrated ability to rationalise an ethical position, making reference to the literature relevant to this assignment topic.
- Demonstrated conceptual understanding of the ethical issues in relation to each course of action.
- Demonstrated knowledge and understanding of relevant sections of AASW Code of Ethics that apply to the course of actions argued.

- Demonstrates synthesis and integration of literature, strength and logic in argument, clear expression and grammar, correct spelling (Macquarie) and punctuation, and appropriate citation and referencing (Harvard). Remains within word limit.

Referencing Style

- [Harvard \(author-date\)](#)

Submission

Online

Learning Outcomes Assessed

- Identify the major principles inherent within the AASW or ACWA codes of ethics.
- Apply the codes of ethics to professional practice contexts.
- Critically analyse modernist and post modernist approaches to ethical dilemmas.
- Analyse differing contexts for ethical practice and apply the ethical use of self and appropriate self care strategies within a range of these practice contexts.

Graduate Attributes

- Communication
- Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking
- Information Literacy
- Information Technology Competence
- Cross Cultural Competence
- Ethical practice

Academic Integrity Statement

As a CQUniversity student you are expected to act honestly in all aspects of your academic work.

Any assessable work undertaken or submitted for review or assessment must be your own work. Assessable work is any type of work you do to meet the assessment requirements in the unit, including draft work submitted for review and feedback and final work to be assessed.

When you use the ideas, words or data of others in your assessment, you must thoroughly and clearly acknowledge the source of this information by using the correct referencing style for your unit. Using others' work without proper acknowledgement may be considered a form of intellectual dishonesty.

Participating honestly, respectfully, responsibly, and fairly in your university study ensures the CQUniversity qualification you earn will be valued as a true indication of your individual academic achievement and will continue to receive the respect and recognition it deserves.

As a student, you are responsible for reading and following CQUniversity's policies, including the [Student Academic Integrity Policy and Procedure](#). This policy sets out CQUniversity's expectations of you to act with integrity, examples of academic integrity breaches to avoid, the processes used to address alleged breaches of academic integrity, and potential penalties.

What is a breach of academic integrity?

A breach of academic integrity includes but is not limited to plagiarism, self-plagiarism, collusion, cheating, contract cheating, and academic misconduct. The Student Academic Integrity Policy and Procedure defines what these terms mean and gives examples.

Why is academic integrity important?

A breach of academic integrity may result in one or more penalties, including suspension or even expulsion from the University. It can also have negative implications for student visas and future enrolment at CQUniversity or elsewhere. Students who engage in contract cheating also risk being blackmailed by contract cheating services.

Where can I get assistance?

For academic advice and guidance, the [Academic Learning Centre \(ALC\)](#) can support you in becoming confident in completing assessments with integrity and of high standard.

What can you do to act with integrity?



Be Honest

If your assessment task is done by someone else, it would be dishonest of you to claim it as your own



Seek Help

If you are not sure about how to cite or reference in essays, reports etc, then seek help from your lecturer, the library or the Academic Learning Centre (ALC)



Produce Original Work

Originality comes from your ability to read widely, think critically, and apply your gained knowledge to address a question or problem