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[Home](#) > [Awards and Recognition](#) > Georgia Southern School of Nursing receives \$1.6 million grant for behavioral health workforce education and training

Georgia Southern School of Nursing receives \$1.6 million grant for behavioral health workforce education and training

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The Georgia Southern School of Nursing has received a \$1.6 million grant to help better prepare students to work in the psychiatric/mental health care field through the new Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training (BHWET) Program.

The BHWET Program supports students in the Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) specialty track of the BSN-DNP program. BHWET aims to develop and expand the behavioral health workforce, and will increase the number of providers prepared to deliver team-based psychiatric/mental health services to rural and medically underserved populations in South Georgia.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Health Resources and Services Administration awarded the grant on behalf of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

"Primary care providers continue to be the most common portal of entry into our healthcare system. Area mental health providers are few, and mental health needs currently overwhelm area primary care settings, emergency rooms and communities," stated Melissa Garno, Ed.D., RN, professor, BSN program director, PMHNP project director, and the BHWET grant principal investigator. "This program will provide support over the next four years for the education of psychiatric/mental health nurse practitioner students in settings practicing an integrated model of mental health and primary care using a team approach."

Lee Broxton, scholarship and research specialist at the Center for Nursing Scholarship and Research, and Stephanie Broxton, administrative assistant for the PMHNP track, served as co-authors on the grant.

Support from this grant will enhance interdisciplinary educational partnerships between the PMHNP program and statewide Community Service Boards (CSBs) and Southeast Georgia Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) that implement interprofessional care.

BHWET will provide much needed subsistence stipends to BSN-DNP students choosing the PMHNP specialty track during their clinical education when placed in these or other approved agencies that provide interprofessional or team-based care, including primary care services.

"The program's clinical requirements often necessitate reducing professional practice schedules to a part time basis, thus severely impacting the students' financial resources during this year. Without this support, many students would have difficulty incurring the costs of graduate school," Garno said.

Clinical placements at qualified agencies will assist in closing the gap in access to mental health services.

"The project will not only create an avenue for PMHNP students to participate in interdisciplinary education at selected clinical partner sites, but will also create a pipeline for CSBs and FQHCs to recruit and hire additional PMH providers upon graduation," noted Garno.

All Georgia counties are served by one of 13 CSBs. Southeast Georgia FQHCs that provide comprehensive behavioral health and primary services include J.C. Lewis Primary Healthcare Center, Savannah; Curtis V. Cooper Primary Health Care, Savannah; and East Georgia Healthcare Center, which has ten satellite clinics throughout Southeast Georgia.

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