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UA Social Work to Help Fill Gap in Mental Health Care Workforce

Nov 4, 2014 | Tags: [School of Social Work](#) | Posted in [Outreach](#), [Students](#) |



TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — The University of Alabama’s School of Social Work has received a \$945,337 grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration to help service the state of Alabama’s shortage of behavioral health care professionals.

Through the Transitional-Age Youth University of Alabama project, or TAY-UA, the UA School of Social Work will offer stipends to Master of Social Work students in an effort to produce 56 graduated Master of Social Work students trained in interprofessional settings that are integrated with primary care.

These graduates will be competent to work with transitional-age veterans and civilian youth, ages 16-25, who are at risk for developing or who have developed problems of mental illness, substance abuse, suicide and/or violent behavior.

The program aims to place these graduates in career positions serving such youth in behavioral health settings in Alabama and the Southeastern region.

According to the Health Resources and Services Administration, 67 of the 68 counties in Alabama are classified as full mental health care professional shortage areas. Fifty-nine of the 68 are classified as whole or partial Health Professional Shortage Areas.

“We have information from our field liaisons, field supervisors, and graduates that the population of at-risk youth, and those youth who are already in the system, continues to increase,” said Dr. Carol Drolen, UA associate professor of social work and project director for TAY-UA.

“There are many youth in need of behavioral intervention due to substance abuse, depression and or involvement with the justice department,” Drolen said. “Our schools are not equipped to manage this need, and often these clients are not seen until their situation worsens.”

TAY-UA Student Fellows will be offered stipends to cover the approximate cost of one year of in-state tuition with the expectation that they will complete a specialized curriculum.

Fellows will also complete a rigorous two-day orientation on working with transitional-age youth prior to entering a specially-designed, 500 clock-hour field education placement. There, fellows will train in providing behavioral health services in an interprofessional setting linked to primary care.

A requirement of the placement will be students’ participation in interprofessional teams and completion of an online course in interprofessional education.

“Just last week, there was a new report from SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration) about the projections of national expenditures for the treatment of mental health and substance use disorders,” Drolen said. “The projections are very clear – the demand for services continues to grow. With this demand will come attention to additional resources to help this special population group.”

The University of Alabama, a student-centered research university, is experiencing significant growth in both enrollment and academic quality. This growth, which is positively impacting the campus and the state's economy, is in keeping with UA's vision to be the university of choice for the best and brightest students. UA, the state's flagship university, is an academic community united in its commitment to enhancing the quality of life for all Alabamians.

- **CONTACT:** David Miller, UA media relations, 205/348-0825, dcmiller2@ur.ua.edu
- **SOURCE:** Dr. Karl Hamner, assistant dean, Office of Scholarly Affairs, 205/348-0129, khamner@ua.edu

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