

INTENT TO PLAN MASTER OF ARTS MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING

Dr. DeRochi will present this proposal fully to the Committee.

Section I: Overall Concept of Program

Introduction

Shepherd University seeks approval to develop a Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling in direct response to the urgent workforce need for licensed mental health professionals in West Virginia and the surrounding region. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects counseling to be one of the fastest-growing occupations nationally, with regional data underscoring severe shortages in accessible mental health care. At present, Shepherd does not offer a graduate program that leads to licensure in this field. The proposed degree will fill this critical gap by preparing students with the skills, competencies, and clinical training necessary to achieve licensure and provide high-quality mental health services. We are intending to develop this program in a 100% online modality, which will provide unmitigated access to adult learners in our region seeking this professional licensure. In doing so, the program will not only expand opportunities for Shepherd graduates but also strengthen the University's role as a regional leader in meeting pressing community and workforce needs.

Program Objectives

The proposed Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling will:

1. **Prepare graduates for licensure** by meeting West Virginia state requirements and equipping students for success on the National Counselor Examination.
2. **Foster ethical practice** through the development of professional identity and adherence to established standards of mental health counseling.
3. **Cultivate cultural competence** by training students to work effectively with diverse populations and understand how mental health challenges intersect with individual client experiences.
4. **Develop advanced counseling skills** to prepare students for clinical practice with individuals, groups, and in crisis intervention settings.
5. **Strengthen research and assessment proficiency** by providing instruction in program evaluation, client assessment, and evidence-based practices.

6. **Promote community wellness** by guiding students in delivering services that support well-being in West Virginia communities and contribute to positive social impact.

Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of the program, graduates will be able to:

- **Licensure & Professional Readiness**
 - Demonstrate mastery of knowledge and skills required to successfully pass the National Counselor Examination and meet licensure requirements in West Virginia and other states.
- **Professional Counseling Orientation & Ethical Practice**
 - Apply ethical decision-making models, professional codes of ethics, and legal standards in counseling practice.
 - Articulate a clear professional identity as a clinical mental health counselor.
- **Social & Cultural Diversity**
 - Integrate cultural competence into clinical practice by demonstrating the ability to work effectively with clients from diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences.
 - Analyze how systemic issues and cultural contexts influence mental health and access to care.
- **Human Growth & Development**
 - Apply theories of human development to counseling interventions across the lifespan.
 - Demonstrate the ability to recognize and address developmental crises and transitions.
- **Career Development**
 - Employ career development theories, assessments, and interventions to support clients' vocational and personal goals.
- **Counseling & Helping Relationships**
 - Demonstrate effective counseling skills in individual, group, and crisis intervention settings.
 - Employ evidence-based approaches to build therapeutic alliances and promote client well-being.
- **Group Counseling & Group Work**
 - Design, facilitate, and evaluate group counseling sessions that address a variety of client needs.
 - Apply group dynamics theories and leadership techniques in therapeutic settings.
- **Assessment & Testing**
 - Select, administer, and interpret appropriate assessment tools for diagnosis, treatment planning, and evaluation.
 - Critically evaluate the reliability, validity, and cultural fairness of assessments used in counseling.
- **Research & Program Evaluation**

- Critically analyze research literature to inform evidence-based counseling practice.
- Design and implement basic program evaluation strategies to assess client outcomes and improve counseling services.
- **Community Engagement & Advocacy**
 - Develop and implement strategies for promoting mental health awareness, wellness, and access to services in West Virginia communities and beyond.
 - Advocate for policies and practices that support mental health equity and reduce barriers to care.

Section II: Market Analysis & Financial Pro Forma

Shepherd University subscribes to Lightcast Market Research which allows academic leaders research concrete market data, including labor trends, regional competitors, etc. These data are proprietary to Lightcast, and program specific data will therefore be sent to the Shepherd University Board of Governors separately and outside the public documents.

About Lightcast

Lightcast is a labor market analytics firm that is passionate about providing meaningful data for colleges and their students.

Our data is trusted by a breadth of users including researchers at colleges and universities, economic development organizations, and Fortune 500 companies.

Lightcast data offers a three-pronged approach to labor market information:

1. Our traditional LMI combines dozens of government sources from agencies like the Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Census Bureau, and Bureau of Labor Statistics into one dataset that details industries, occupations, demographics, academic programs, and more.
2. Lightcast's job posting analytics give a real-time look into the needs of employers in today's labor market. Each month, millions of postings are scraped from employer sites and job boards, de-duplicated, and compiled into an actionable dataset.
3. Lightcast also leverages workforce profiles—an innovative database of more than 100 million resumés and professional profiles that are aggregated from the open web. These profiles unify information for workers—such as education, employment history, skills, and more—to reveal robust detail on what is happening in today's workforce.

Together, these data related to labor market demand, relevant skills, and the competitive landscape help colleges and universities make informed decisions about their program offerings.

Preliminary P&L for Proposed Master of Arts Mental Health Counseling

| | | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
|--|-----|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | 2026-2027 | 2027-2028 | 2028-2029 | 2029-2030 | 2030-2031 |
| START-UP FUNDING (If applicable) | | 0 | 0 | | | |
| TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION- Degree | | 25 | 61 | 89 | 112 | 130 |
| TOTAL REVENUE | | \$189,375 | \$923,344 | \$1,341,675 | \$1,684,631 | \$1,963,519 |
| EXPENSES | | | | | | |
| Total New Instructional Costs (Adjuncts, Overloads, FT Faculty) | | \$18,000 | \$99,000 | \$93,000 | \$99,000 | \$93,000 |
| Total New Administrative Costs (e.g. Program Director, inst. Des.) | | \$46,000 | \$92,000 | \$65,000 | \$74,000 | \$74,000 |
| Employee Benefits | 35% | \$22,400 | \$66,850 | \$55,300 | \$60,550 | \$58,450 |
| Total New Equipment or Materials | | | | | | |
| TOTAL EXPENSES | | \$86,400 | \$257,850 | \$213,300 | \$233,550 | \$225,450 |
| Net Revenue | | \$102,975 | \$665,494 | \$1,128,375 | \$1,451,081 | \$1,738,069 |
| Net Revenue Margin | | 54% | 72% | 84% | 86% | 89% |

Enrollment and Revenue Projections for Proposed Master of Arts Mental Health Counseling

| | | | Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 | Year 4 | Year 5 |
|--------------------------------|----------|------------------------|-----------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | | 2026-2027 | 2027-2028 | 2028-2029 | 2029-2030 | 2030-2031 |
| Retention Rate | 85% | New Students | 25 | 40 | 55 | 65 | 75 |
| Net Tuition/Credit Hour | \$500 | 2nd Year Students | | 21 | 34 | 47 | 55 |
| Average Annual Credits | 30 | Total Enrollment | 25 | 61 | 89 | 112 | 130 |
| Average Annual Tuition | \$15,000 | Total Credits | 375 | 1,838 | 2,670 | 3,353 | 3,908 |
| Total Program Credits | 60 | Tuition/Credit Hour | \$500 | \$500 | \$500 | \$500 | \$500 |
| Total Years of Program | 2 | Additional Fees (\$75) | 1875 | 4593.75 | 6675 | 8381.25 | 9768.75 |
| Total Program Cost | \$30,000 | Total Revenue | \$189,375 | \$923,344 | \$1,341,675 | \$1,684,631 | \$1,963,519 |

Section III: Timeline & Contingency Planning

Timeline for Implementation

| | |
|----------------|--|
| September 2025 | Submit Intent to Plan |
| October 2025 | Curricular development through the faculty governance processes |
| November 2025 | Development of marketing plan and materials (Admissions, University Communications) |
| January 2026 | Launch marketing and enrollment campaign; Course development for first-year courses. |
| April 2026 | Final approvals; program added to university catalog; courses included in Fall 2026 schedule |
| August 2026 | Enroll first cohort of students; Continue development of second-year courses. |
| December 2026 | Assess student outcomes; Continued enrollment drive; Continue course development |
| August 2027 | Enroll second cohort of students |

Contingency Planning

Should the proposed Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling program exceed enrollment projections, Shepherd University will ensure that program quality, student support, and accreditation standards are maintained while responsibly managing growth:

1. Faculty and Instructional Capacity

- Expand instructional capacity through the strategic hiring of additional full-time and adjunct faculty with expertise in clinical mental health counseling.
- Utilize instructional designers and online teaching specialists to maintain course quality and ensure compliance with best practices for online learning.

2. Clinical Placement and Supervision

- Strengthen partnerships with regional and national mental health agencies to expand practicum and internship opportunities.
- Increase the pool of qualified clinical supervisors to ensure all students receive appropriate supervision and placement support.

3. Student Support and Resources

- Scale advising, tutoring, and career services tailored to online graduate students to ensure retention and timely degree completion.
- Invest in technology infrastructure, online library resources, and virtual counseling tools to support a larger student body.

4. Financial and Strategic Planning

- Reinvest additional tuition revenue into program development, faculty support, and student services.
- Evaluate opportunities to expand the program with new concentrations, advanced certificates, or dual-degree pathways in response to student demand and workforce needs.

Should the proposed Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling fail to meet enrollment projections after three years, Shepherd University will take the following steps to ensure responsible use of institutional resources:

1. Program Review and Assessment

- Conduct a comprehensive review of admissions trends, marketing strategies, curriculum design, and online delivery methods.
- Collect feedback from students, faculty, alumni, and employer partners to determine barriers to enrollment or retention.

2. Strategic Program Adjustments

- Expand digital marketing and recruitment efforts to reach broader national and international audiences while strengthening partnerships with community colleges, healthcare systems, and social service agencies.

- Pursue cost efficiencies such as adjusting course rotations, further optimizing and adjusting faculty loads, and sharing instructional resources.
- Seek external funding and collaborative opportunities with regional and national mental health organizations to support program sustainability.

3. Sunset Procedures (if necessary)

- If the program remains unsustainable after adjustments, implement a structured teach-out plan to ensure all enrolled students complete their degree online without interruption.
- Reallocate faculty expertise and instructional design resources to other fully online programs within Shepherd Online that demonstrate stronger market demand.

The following resolution is recommended for adoption by the Board:

RESOLVED, That the Shepherd University Board of Governors approves the Intent to Plan for Master of Arts in Mental Health Counseling and directs the Provost to oversee completion of the program development for final Board approval.