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Governors State Wins Grant to Stop Substance Abuse Early



When Shannon Dermer, Dean of the [College of Education](#) (COE) at [Governors State University](#), thinks of the impact of substance abuse, she sees the damage ripple through five branches of society: individuals, couples, families, the healthcare system, and the legal system.

Inspired by the need to help those struggling with Substance Use Disorder (SUD), Dr. Dermer decided to make a difference and get the College of Education involved.

"It is important for professionals in behavioral health, medical health, and allied health to understand addictions, substance use disorders, and how to assess for use of illegal drugs, misuse of medication or alcohol, and substance use disorders," explained Dermer whose COE offers a path for future mental health practitioners in the [Division of Psychology and Counseling](#).

Teaming up with the [College of Health and Human Services](#), the colleges led the way for Governors State's recent \$188,000 grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health & Human

Services. The grant will be used to create a Module-Based Substance Use Disorders Training for Behavioral, Medical, and Allied Health Practitioners.

The training will take the form of 10 web-based training modules that will be integrated into the curriculum across COE and CHHS to help students identify and address substance use disorders within their clinical practice settings.



While behavioral health, medical, and allied health professionals who do not focus on making substance use their specialty typically receive minimal training in assessing for drug use and misuse, understanding addiction, and the biopsychosocial impact of drug use. There is a high likelihood that these professionals will work with people with undiagnosed SUD.

Governors State Lecturer Nancy Burley, [Addictions Studies and Behavioral Health](#) notes that these health professionals might be some of the first to notice symptoms.

"When you think of disciplines like [Mental Health Counseling](#) (MHC), [Occupational Therapy](#) (OT), and [Physical Therapy](#) (PT), they work with individuals who can be caught up with the opioids they had prescribed to them," she explained. That's where the training modules come in. "So we're infusing Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT), into their disciplines."

Department Chair for Addictions Studies and Behavioral Health Cheryl Mejta, said this training will have an impact on patients' lives.



"Through this grant, allied health students will be prepared to address, through identification and brief interventions, substance use issues among clients. Early identification and intervention of substance use problems save lives," said Dr. Mejta

The additional training will assist the students in their prospective fields, and help them achieve better patient outcomes as well, Burley said. She views this training as a holistic approach to treating patients.

"We're not having students take on another role, we're just adding a few things to what they already do so they can get a better sense of the clients they're working with. If you have a patient with a substance use disorder, no matter what you're doing in your discipline, they're not going to have the same health outcomes as other patients because they have an underlying condition that alters their outcomes," she explained.

[Digital Learning and Media Design](#) (DLMD) will create the videos for the modules, and the curriculum to be infused in the programs is already in the works. Following a two-year assessment where the modules will be implemented at multiple universities across the United States, the Module-Based Substance Use Disorders Training for Behavioral, Medical, and Allied Health Practitioners will become a model for other universities across the world.