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New Program Proposal

The following must be submitted to complete a new program request:

Submission Checklist:

- ☒ New Program Proposal
- ☐ Business Plan (<https://www.ache.edu/index.php/forms/>)
- ☒ Undergraduate or Graduate Curriculum Plan (<https://www.ache.edu/index.php/forms/>)

Primary Contact Information

Institution: Athens State University
Contact: C. David (Dave) Ragsdale, DMA
Title: Dean of Colleges/Chief Academic Officer
Email: Dave.Ragsdale@athens.edu
Telephone: 256-233-6502

Program Information

Date of Proposal Submission: 9/11/2026
Award Level: Master's Degree
Award Nomenclature (e.g., BS, MBA): MS
Field of Study/Program Title: Clinical Mental Health Counseling
CIP Code (6-digit): 51.1508, Mental Health Counseling/Counselor

Administration of the Program

Name of Dean: Katia Maxwell, Ph.D.
Name of College/School: College of Arts & Sciences
Name of Chairperson: Joseph F. (Joe) Chandler, Ph.D.
Name of Department/Division: Behavioral Science Division

Implementation Information

Proposed Program Implementation Date: 8/16/2027
Anticipated Date of Approval from Institutional Governing Board: 10/16/2026
Anticipated Date of ACHE Meeting to Vote on Proposal: 12/11/2026
SACSCOC Sub Change Requirement (Notification, Approval, or NA): Approval
Other Considerations for Timing and Approval (e.g., upcoming SACSCOC review): N/A



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

I. Program Description

A. Concise Program Summary (one paragraph) to be included in ACHE Agenda:

Athens State University proposes a 60-semester-hour Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling designed to prepare clinically competent, ethical professional counselors to serve diverse patients across a range of mental health, healthcare, community, and private-practice settings. Delivered online with periodic on-campus residency requirements, the full-time program is designed for completion in approximately three years (8–10 semesters) and will emphasize assessment and diagnosis, treatment planning, evidence-based counseling interventions, ethical and professional practice, multicultural competence, interdisciplinary collaboration, advocacy, and supervised clinical experiences. The program will prepare graduates to pursue professional counselor licensure in Alabama and support graduates who may seek licensure in other U.S. jurisdictions, while educating students about interstate professional practice and opportunities available through the Counseling Compact, administered by the national Counseling Compact Commission. The program will be designed from its inception in alignment with CACREP standards, with the intention of pursuing CACREP accreditation at the earliest appropriate point in the program's development.

B. Specific Rationale (Strengths) for the Program

List three (3) to five (5) strengths of the proposed program as specific rationale for recommending approval of this proposal.

1. Documented Workforce and Community Need: The proposed program responds to a documented need for additional qualified mental health professionals in Alabama and North Alabama. Regional workforce and industry data support the need for additional counselor preparation capacity, while healthcare, mental health, education, nonprofit, veteran-serving, and community partners have expressed support for expanding the mental health workforce and access to services in the region. (*See Section N and external letters of support for additional evidence.*)
2. Demonstrated Student Demand and Expanded Educational Access: Preliminary student survey data demonstrate favorable interest in an Athens State graduate program in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (*see Section P*). The proposed online delivery model, supplemented by periodic on-campus residency requirements, will expand access to graduate counselor education for working and geographically mobile students while preserving appropriate in-person clinical and professional training experiences. This



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

model provides a distinct alternative to primarily campus-based CMHC programs in the North Alabama region.

3. **Strong Institutional Foundation and Regional Connections:** Athens State's existing Behavioral Sciences programs, undergraduate student pipeline, faculty expertise, online educational infrastructure, and established relationships within the North Alabama community provide a strong foundation for development of the proposed graduate program. The program will build upon these existing resources while creating an advanced educational pathway for students interested in professional counseling and behavioral healthcare.
4. **Rigorous, Professionally Aligned Clinical Preparation:** The 60-semester-hour curriculum will emphasize clinical competency, assessment and diagnosis, treatment planning, evidence-based counseling interventions, ethical and professional practice, multicultural competence, interdisciplinary collaboration, advocacy, and substantial supervised clinical experiences. The program will be designed from its inception in alignment with CACREP standards, with the intention of pursuing CACREP accreditation at the earliest appropriate point in the program's development and will prepare graduates for professional counselor licensure and contemporary clinical practice.
5. **Community Partnerships and Clinical Training Capacity:** Early program-development efforts have already resulted in exploratory collaboration with regional healthcare, behavioral health, disability/community-service, and child-advocacy organizations regarding future practicum and internship opportunities. These emerging partnerships demonstrate community engagement with the proposed program and provide a foundation for developing high-quality supervised clinical experiences across diverse settings and patient populations. *(See Section G and external letters of support for additional details.)*

C. External Support (Recommended)

List external entities (more may be added) that may have supplied letters of support attesting to the program's strengths and attach letters with the proposal at the end of this document.

1. Madison Hospital, Huntsville Hospital Health System - Mary Lynne Wright, President
2. Lighthouse Psychiatry & Behavioral Health Clinic - Katy Cousart, PMHNP-BC, Co-Owner
3. Solutions 4 Success LLC - Marcy Watkins, LPC, CEO/Co-Founder



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

4. City of Owens Cross Roads - Jennifer Liddle, Councilwoman, Place 5
5. Addie's Place: Child Advocacy Center - Diane Watson, LMSW, Owner
6. Athens High School, Athens City Schools - Willie Moore, Executive Principal (pending)

D. Student Learning Outcomes

List four (4) to seven (7) of the student learning outcomes of the program.

1. Clinical Assessment and Diagnosis: Conduct comprehensive, culturally responsive clinical assessments; formulate appropriate diagnoses and case conceptualizations; and develop individualized treatment plans that integrate patient needs, strengths, experiences, and presenting concerns.
2. Evidence-Based Counseling Practice: Select, implement, and evaluate developmentally and culturally responsive, evidence-based counseling theories, techniques, and interventions to promote mental health, wellness, resilience, recovery, and optimal functioning across diverse patient populations.
3. Counseling Relationships and Modalities: Demonstrate effective therapeutic communication, interviewing, relationship-building, and counseling skills in the provision of individual, couples, family, and group counseling across diverse clinical and community settings.
4. Ethical, Legal, and Professional Practice: Apply ethical principles, legal requirements, professional standards, and sound clinical judgment in counseling practice while demonstrating the professional dispositions and counselor identity necessary for responsible and increasingly independent professional practice.
5. Cultural Responsiveness and Whole-Person Conceptualization: Integrate cultural humility and an understanding of individual, developmental, familial, social, biological, cultural, and systemic influences when conceptualizing and responding to patient mental health needs.
6. Research, Outcomes, and Reflective Practice: Critically evaluate and apply research and scholarly literature to inform evidence-based counseling practice; evaluate counseling services and patient outcomes; and engage in self-reflection and ongoing professional development to improve clinical effectiveness.
7. Interprofessional Collaboration, Advocacy, and Professional Leadership: Collaborate effectively with healthcare and helping professionals, organizations, and community resources to coordinate services, advocate for patients and the counseling profession,



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

address barriers to mental health care, and advance mental health and well-being within communities.



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

E. Similar Programs at Other Alabama Public Institutions

List programs at other Alabama public institutions of the same degree level and the same (or similar) CIP codes. If no similar programs exist within Alabama, list similar programs offered within the 16 SREB states. If the proposed program duplicates, closely resembles, or is similar to any other offerings in the state, provide justification for any potential duplication.

CIP Code	Degree Title	Institution with Similar Program	Justification for Duplication
51.1508	(MA) Clinical Mental Health Counseling	University of Alabama	Outside of service area
51.1508	(MA) Clinical Mental Health Counseling	University of West Alabama	Outside of service area
13.1101	Clinical Mental Health Counseling with Clinical Mental Health Counseling Option	University of South Alabama	Outside of service area
42.2803	(MA) Clinical Mental Health Counseling	University of North Alabama	Different delivery modality (campus-based model)
13.1101	(MS) Counselor Education with Clinical Mental Health Care Option	Jacksonville State University	1. Different delivery modality (campus-based model); 2. Different service area (program states serving Northeast Alabama)
13.1101	(MA) Counselor Education with Clinical Mental Health Care Option	Auburn University Montgomery	Outside of service area
42.2803	(MS) Counseling with Clinical Mental Health Care Option	Troy University	Outside of service area
13.1101	(MA) Counseling with Clinical Mental Health Care Option	University of Alabama in Birmingham	Outside of service area
13.1101	(M.Ed.) Counseling with Clinical Mental Health Care Option	University of Montevallo	Outside of service area
42.2803	(MS) Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling	Alabama A&M University	Different specialty

F. Relationship to Existing Programs within the Institution

Nearly all new programs have some relationship to existing offerings through shared courses, faculty, facilities, etc. Is the proposed program associated with any existing offerings within the institution, including options within current degree programs? **Yes** ☒ **No** ☐



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

If **yes**, please describe these relationships including whether or not the program will replace or compete with existing offerings: (**Note:** If this is a graduate program, list any existing undergraduate programs which are directly or indirectly related. If this is a doctoral program, also list related master's programs.)

Although this program will be a new graduate offering at Athens State and will require faculty with credentials specific to the program, several existing undergraduate programs within the Behavioral Sciences division are expected to serve as pathways to the new master's program. These include majors and minors in Psychology, Sociology, and Behavioral Science. The CMHC master's program will complement, rather than replace or compete with, existing undergraduate offerings by providing a pathway for students who wish to pursue advanced study and professional preparation in clinical mental health counseling. Core faculty in the CMHC master's program will also be credentialed to teach specialized undergraduate courses within the Behavioral Sciences division, such as *Special Topics: Careers in Mental Health*, further strengthening connections between the undergraduate and graduate curricula.

If **not**, please describe how the institution plans to support a program unrelated to existing offerings.

N/A

G. Collaboration

Have any collaborations **within your institution** (i.e., research centers, across academic divisions, etc.) been explored? **Yes** ☒ **No** ☐

If **yes**, provide a brief explanation of the proposed collaboration plan(s) for the program:

The proposed Clinical Mental Health Counseling program will build upon existing resources and expertise across Athens State University. Internal collaboration will include coordination within the Behavioral Sciences division and with relevant academic programs, faculty, and University offices to support curriculum development, student recruitment and advising, academic and student support services, library and research resources, technology-supported instruction, career and professional development, and program assessment. Opportunities for interdisciplinary collaboration will also be explored where appropriate to strengthen students' understanding of behavioral health, professional practice, and service to diverse individuals and communities. As the program develops, these internal partnerships will support implementation, continuous program improvement, student success, and the integration of the proposed graduate program within the broader mission and resources of Athens State University.



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

Have collaborations with **other institutions or external entities** (i.e., local business, industries, etc.) been explored? **Yes** ☒ **No** ☐

If **yes**, provide a brief explanation of the proposed collaboration plan(s) for the program:

Athens State University has begun exploring collaborations with regional healthcare, behavioral health, and community-service organizations to support the development of supervised clinical training opportunities for students in the proposed Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. Initial discussions have included organizations that have expressed willingness to consider serving as future practicum and/or internship training sites, including Huntsville Hospital Behavioral Health Services, Lighthouse Psychiatry & Behavioral Health Clinic, Ability Plus, and Addie's Place: Child Advocacy Center. These potential partnerships would provide opportunities for students to gain supervised experience with diverse patient populations and to develop competencies in clinical assessment, counseling interventions, interdisciplinary collaboration, continuity of care, community-based services, and other areas appropriate to each training setting. Additional clinical partnerships will continue to be developed as the program progresses to ensure sufficient, diverse, and high-quality practicum and internship opportunities. Formal clinical training arrangements will be established in accordance with University, program, professional, and applicable accreditation requirements prior to student placement.

H. Programmatic Accreditation

Select the appropriate program accreditor from the drop-down menu below:

Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)

Provide a detailed timeline for gaining accreditation (i.e., when will full candidacy be reached?):

Athens State University intends to pursue initial accreditation of the M.S. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling through the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). The program will be designed from its inception in alignment with the CACREP 2024 Standards, with the intention of pursuing accreditation at the earliest appropriate point in the program's development.

Fall 2027–Spring 2028: The program will implement its curriculum, policies, faculty structure, student assessment processes, program evaluation procedures, and other requirements in alignment with CACREP standards. The inaugural cohort will begin the



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

program in Fall 2027, and the program will begin systematically collecting student learning, program evaluation, and other evidence necessary to demonstrate compliance with CACREP standards.

2028–2029: The program will continue implementation and assessment, collect and evaluate program and student-outcome data, develop and maintain clinical training partnerships, and document compliance with applicable CACREP standards. During this period, the program will also prepare for the formal self-study process and ensure that sufficient documentation is available to support the accreditation application.

2029–2030: Athens State will complete and submit the CACREP application and Self-Study Report (SSR) at the earliest appropriate point permitted by CACREP requirements and the program's stage of development. Following CACREP's initial review and any required response or addendum, the program will prepare for the accreditation site visit.

Spring 2030 and thereafter: The inaugural cohort is expected to complete the program in Spring 2030. Under current CACREP policy, an initial accreditation site visit may be scheduled when students in a new master's-degree program are in the final term of their program prior to graduation. Accordingly, Athens State will seek the earliest feasible site visit and subsequent CACREP Board review, with the goal of achieving initial CACREP accreditation as soon as reasonably possible following completion of the required review process.

I. Professional Licensure

Will the program be considered a Professional Licensure Program based on the following definition: **Yes** ☒ **No** ☐

Professional Licensure Program: As defined in federal regulations, an instructional program that is designed to meet educational requirements for a specific professional license or certification that is required for employment in an occupation or is advertised as meeting such requirements.

If **yes**, please explain:

The proposed Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling is a professional licensure program designed to provide the graduate educational preparation required for students to pursue professional counselor licensure in Alabama. The 60-semester-hour curriculum will be designed to meet the academic requirements established by the Alabama Board of Examiners in Counseling (ABEC) and will include the academic and supervised clinical preparation necessary for professional counseling practice. Upon completion of the



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

degree, graduates will be prepared to pursue the appropriate Alabama counseling licensure pathway. Licensure is granted by ABEC and requires completion of additional Board requirements, including application, examination, post-degree supervised professional experience, and other requirements established by the Board.

Select the appropriate licensure body from the table below:

Alabama Board of Examiners in Counseling

Select the appropriate license from the table below:

Clinical, Counseling, and School Psychologists
Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)

J. Professional Certification

Will students earn industry certifications while completing the degree or be prepared for industry certifications upon graduation? **Yes** ☒ **No** ☐

If **yes**, please explain:

The proposed M.S. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling will prepare graduates to pursue the National Certified Counselor (NCC) credential administered by the National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC). The program's graduate counseling curriculum and supervised clinical preparation will provide the educational foundation for national certification and preparation for the National Counselor Examination (NCE). Eligible students may also have opportunities to pursue the NCC application and examination process prior to graduation in accordance with NBCC requirements. National certification is awarded by NBCC and requires candidates to satisfy all applicable education, examination, ethical, and other certification requirements.

K. Admissions

Provide any additional admissions requirements beyond the institution's standard admissions process/policies for this degree level. Include prerequisites, prior degrees earned, etc.

In addition to the institution's standard graduate admissions requirements, applicants to the Master's in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) program should have a minimum cumulative undergraduate GPA of 3.0 on a 4.0 scale. Applicants with a cumulative undergraduate GPA below 3.0 may be considered for admission based on a holistic review of their application and may be asked to submit additional evidence of academic readiness, such as GRE, MAT, or other appropriate assessment scores.



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

All applicants will be evaluated through a holistic admissions process that considers academic preparation as well as factors relevant to success in the counseling profession and in the program's virtual learning environment. The admissions process may include a personal statement, letters of recommendation, an interview with program faculty, and other appropriate assessments of an applicant's professional goals, interpersonal skills, readiness for graduate-level study, and suitability for the counseling profession. Meeting minimum academic requirements does not guarantee admission to the program.

L. Mode of Delivery

Provide the planned delivery format(s) of the program as defined in policy (i.e., in-person, online, hybrid). Please also note whether any program requirements can be completed through competency-based assessment.

All instruction will be conducted online; there will be non-instructional in-person requirements for internship and practicum, as well as in-person opportunities for professional networking.

All program requirements must be completed via the proposed curriculum; no competency-based curriculum adjustments will be made.

Can students complete the entire degree program through distance education (100% online) based on the following definition? **Yes** ☒ **No** ☐

Distance Education: An academic program for which required instructional activities can be completed entirely through distance education modalities. A distance education program may have in-person requirements that are non-instructional (e.g., orientation, practicum).

M. Instructional Site(s)

Provide the planned location(s) where the program will be delivered (i.e., main campus, satellite campus, off-campus site.) If the program will be offered at an off-campus site, provide the existing site name or submit an **Off-Campus Site Request** if new.

The program will be delivered entirely through distance education modalities via the Athens State University main campus.

Will more than 50% of this program be offered at an off-campus site(s) **Yes** ☐ **No** ☒

If **yes**, which sites?

N. Industry Need

Using the federal **Standard Occupational Code (SOC) System**, indicate the top three occupational codes related to post-graduation employment from the program. A full list of SOC codes can be found at <https://www.onetcodeconnector.org/find/family/title#17>.



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

SOC 1 (**required**): 21-1018 (Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors)

SOC 2 (optional):

SOC 3 (optional):

Briefly describe how the program fulfills a specific industry or employment need for the State of Alabama. As appropriate, discuss alignment with Alabama's Statewide or Regional Lists of In-Demand Occupations (<https://www.ache.edu/index.php/policy-guidance/>) or with emerging industries as identified by [Innovate Alabama](#) or the [Economic Development Partnership of Alabama](#) (EDPA).

The CMHC Master's program at Athens State will prepare graduates for employment in one of Alabama's Statewide and Region 1 in-demand occupations, SOC 21-1018 (Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors). Specifically, the proposed program responds to a documented workforce need in Alabama and nationally. As of July 2026, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) identified 66 of Alabama's 67 counties as Mental Health Care Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), with more than 2.9 million Alabamians living in a designated mental health shortage area. Although our neighboring Madison County is the lone county with technically sufficient coverage, Limestone (Athens State's home county), Morgan, Lawrence, and Lauderdale counties are each designated with an HPSA score of 18 and a shortage type of "Low-Income Population Shortage." HRSA estimates that only 28.4% of the mental health workforce need in these designated areas is being met and that an additional 128 practitioners would be required to eliminate the identified shortages. Addressing this need, particularly in rural and underserved communities, is directly aligned with Athens State's service mission in the North Alabama region. This need is further reinforced by U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projections, which identify a master's degree as the typical entry-level education for substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors and project employment in this occupational category to grow 18.4%, substantially faster than the average for all occupations. These data demonstrate a significant and continuing need for the graduate-level preparation of qualified mental health professionals and support the development of the proposed CMHC program.

O. Additional Education/Training

Please explain whether further education/training is required for graduates of the proposed program to gain entry-level employment in the SOC occupations selected above.

Certain jobs within this Standard Occupation Code can be attained without further education or training after graduating with the CMHC Master's. These include Master's-level professionals within certain community agencies, behavioral health case managers or care coordinators, certain crisis service positions, behavioral health administration or management positions, or jobs within research or higher education. However, additional training such as licensure is



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

needed for the ALC (Associate Licensed Counselor) to LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor) pathway to expand services and interventions rendered by the clinician, to participate in insurance paneling, and to expand employment and income possibilities. The proposed CMHC Master's at Athens State will be designed to steer graduates toward the ALC to LPC pathway within the field. This path will increase job retention, satisfaction, and lifetime earnings within the field.

P. Student Demand

Please explain how you projected the student enrollment numbers in the **Business Plan, Lines 24-27** and provide evidence to substantiate student demand (i.e., surveys, enrollments in related courses, etc.).

At the beginning of the Fall 2026 semester, Athens State surveyed students enrolled in psychology courses to assess potential demand for the proposed M.S. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC). Respondents included Psychology, Sociology, and Behavioral Science majors, as well as a smaller number of students from other disciplines, including Education and Criminal Justice. Of the 109 students who responded, 51 (46.8%) indicated they were "Extremely Interested" in enrolling in the proposed program after completing their undergraduate degree, 14 (12.8%) were "Very Interested," 18 (16.5%) were "Moderately Interested," 11 (10.1%) were "Slightly Interested," and 15 (13.8%) were "Not at All Interested." Overall, 59.6% of respondents indicated that they were very or extremely interested in the program, while 76.1% expressed at least moderate interest. With a targeted initial cohort of 20 students, the 65 respondents who expressed very or extremely strong interest represent more than three times the planned cohort size, even before considering prospective students beyond Athens State's existing undergraduate pipeline.

The survey also generated 51 qualitative responses, providing additional evidence of student demand. Recurring themes included a strong preference to remain at Athens State for graduate study; the affordability and accessibility of the University; established relationships with Athens State faculty and the University community; interest in an online or flexible delivery format; and a desire for a local alternative to CMHC programs at other Alabama institutions. Several respondents specifically indicated that they were already planning to pursue graduate education in clinical mental health counseling elsewhere but would prefer to enroll at Athens State if the proposed program were available. Other respondents identified Fall 2027 as their anticipated point of entry and explicitly stated an intention to enroll if the program is available. Students also expressed particular interest in a program designed to



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

meet Alabama professional counseling licensure requirements, pursue CACREP accreditation, provide local practicum and internship opportunities, and offer flexible online or hybrid coursework. The quantitative and qualitative survey results demonstrate substantial interest among Athens State's current undergraduate population and suggest that the proposed program has the potential to retain graduates who would otherwise leave Athens State to pursue comparable graduate programs elsewhere.



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

II. Program Resources and Expenses

A. All Proposed Program Personnel

Provide all personnel counts for the proposed program.

Employment Status of Program Personnel		Personnel Information		
		Count from Proposed Program Department	Count from Other Departments	Subtotal of Personnel
Current	Full-Time Faculty	1		1
	Part-Time Faculty	0	2	2
	Administration	2		2
	Support Staff	2		2
**New To Be Hired	Full-Time Faculty	2		2
	Part-Time Faculty	2		2
	Administration	0		0
	Support Staff	0		0
		Personnel Total		11

Current:

Full-Time Faculty: Brooke Murphy (1 of 3 required core CMHC faculty by CACREP); *Note: Dr. Murphy was a replacement hire for Jessica Allen and is therefore cost neutral to starting the new program.*

Part-Time Faculty: Lori Price from Psychology; Patrice Broaden from Staff (Director of Student Wellness and Accessibility)

Administration: Brooke Murphy (CMHC Program Director); Joe Chandler (Behavioral Sciences Division Head)

Support Staff: Bethlynn Sanders; Emily Cofer

**New / To Be Hired:

Full-Time Faculty: Two new CES (Counselor Education and Supervision) PhD faculty will need to be hired to satisfy CACREP requirements. *Note: one hire should be cost neutral to starting the new program, as a retirement vacancy is anticipated in Behavioral Sciences this coming academic year; the second hire will represent the only new FTE line requested to start the program.*

Part-Time Faculty: Two adjunct faculty hires are anticipated based on connections within the professional networks of Dr. Murphy and the two new CES PhD Full-Time hires.



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

Provide justification that the institution has proposed a sufficient number of faculty (full-time and part-time) for the proposed program to ensure curriculum and program quality, integrity, and review:

CACREP standards dictate a starting point of three full-time, CES (Counselor Education and Supervision) PhD faculty and a designated Program Director to ensure program quality, integrity, and review capabilities. Dr. Murphy, already hired, is one of those three core faculty members. She is also designated as the Program Director as we navigate the proposal phase. If approved, we will hire the two additional CES PhD core faculty members to satisfy CACREP requirements. Proposed part-time faculty will supplement the program with domain-specific expertise when needed. The CMHC Master's will be housed in the Behavioral Sciences Division, which provides existing administrative support via the Division Head, Program Coordinator, and College of Arts and Sciences administrative assistant positions.

Note: Include *any new funds* designated for compensation costs (faculty, administration, and/or support staff to be hired) in the **Business Plan, Line 7 - Personnel Salaries and Benefits**. Current personnel salary/benefits *should not be included* in the Business Plan.



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

B. Proposed Faculty Roster*

Complete the following **Faculty Roster** to provide a brief summary and qualifications of current faculty and potential new hires specific to the program.

***Note:** Institutions must maintain and have current as well as additional faculty curriculum vitae available upon ACHE request for as long as the program is active, but CVs are **not** to be submitted with this proposal.

CURRENT FACULTY

1	2	3	4
CURRENT FACULTY NAME (FT, PT)	COURSES TAUGHT including Term, Course Number, Course Title, & Credit Hours (D, UN, UT, G, DU)	ACADEMIC DEGREES and COURSEWORK Relevant to Courses Taught, including Institution and Major; List Specific Graduate Coursework, if needed	OTHER QUALIFICATIONS and COMMENTS Related to Courses Taught and Modality(ies) (IP, OL, HY, OCIS)
Brooke Murphy; FT	Credentialed to teach all graduate CMHC courses	Ph.D., Counselor Education and Supervision, University of the Cumberlands; Master of Science, Counseling and Psychology, Troy University	Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor (LPC-S); National Certified Counselor (NCC)
Lori Price, PT	Credentialed to teach CMHC electives in theories of counseling and related topics.	Ph.D., Educational Psychology, University of Georgia; Master of Science, School Counseling, Tennessee State University	Current undergraduate psychology faculty, Athens State University; Formerly employed as a School Counselor in High School settings in Georgia and Tennessee
Patrice Broaden, PT	Credentialed to teach CMHC electives in counselor supervision and related topics.	Ph.D., Counselor Education and Supervision, Walden University; Master of Arts, Counseling, Wayne State University	Current Director of Student Wellness and Accessibility, Athens State University

ADDITIONAL FACULTY (TO BE HIRED)

1	2	3	4
FACULTY POSITION (FT, PT)	COURSES TO BE TAUGHT including Term, Course Number, Course Title, & Credit Hours (D, UN, UT, G, DU)	ACADEMIC DEGREES and COURSEWORK Relevant to Courses Taught, including Institution and Major; List Specific Graduate Coursework, if needed	OTHER QUALIFICATIONS and COMMENTS Related to Courses Taught and Modality(ies) (IP, OL, HY, OCIS)
FT	Credentialed to teach all graduate CMHC courses	Required Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES)	Preferred current LPC and NCC
FT	Credentialed to teach all graduate CMHC courses	Required Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision (CES)	Preferred current LPC and NCC
PT	Specialized CMHC electives by specialty (dependent on professional networks of new hires)	Minimum: Master's in Counseling or related field from CACREP-accredited program.	Preferred current LPC and NCC
PT	Specialized CMHC electives by specialty (dependent on professional networks of new hires)	Minimum: Master's in Counseling or related field from CACREP-accredited program.	Preferred current LPC and NCC

Abbreviations: (FT, PT): Full-Time, Part-Time; (D, UN, UT, G, DU): Developmental, Undergraduate Nontransferable, Undergraduate Transferable, Graduate, Dual: High School Dual Enrollment
Course Modality: (IP, OL, HY, OCIS): In-Person, Online, Hybrid, Off-Campus Instructional Site



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

Accessibility. Affordability. Coordination.

New Program Proposal

Equipment

Will any special equipment be needed specifically for this program? Yes ☐ No ☒

If **yes**, list the special equipment and include all special equipment costs in the **Business Plan, Line 8**:

C. Facilities

Will new facilities or renovations to existing infrastructure be required specifically for the program? Yes ☐ No ☒

If **yes**, describe the new facilities or renovations and include all *new* facilities and/or *renovation* costs in the **Business Plan, Line 9**:

D. Assistantships/Fellowships

Will the institution offer any assistantships specifically for this program? Yes ☐ No ☒

If **yes**, provide the number of assistantships to be offered and include all *new* costs for assistantships in the **Business Plan, Line 10**.

Explain the function of the Assistantships (i.e., teaching, research, etc.):
N/A

E. Library

Will any **additional** library resources be purchased to support the program? Yes ☒ No ☐

Books and eBooks: Kares Library has a strong collection of books and eBooks to support the program. Currently, we provide access to more than 6,000 eBooks focused on mental health topics, along with 231 counseling eBook titles published within the last five years. These resources cover a wide range of foundational and specialized subjects, giving students and faculty access to current research and evidence-based practices. As the program develops, we will continue to strengthen the collection by adding eBooks that address emerging therapy approaches and current trends in counseling and mental health practice. In addition, we plan to purchase selected print titles to ensure students have access to both digital and physical resources that support their coursework and professional preparation.

Journals: The library currently provides access to 213 journals across relevant disciplines, including 88 mental health journals, 79 counseling journals, 6 group counseling journals, 10 child and adolescent counseling journals, and 10 counseling ethics journals. Approximately 80% of these titles are peer-reviewed, while the remaining journals are scholarly or trade



Alabama Commission on Higher Education

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New Program Proposal

publications. Based on the breadth and depth of these holdings, we have a strong collection of core journals that should adequately support the proposed program.

If **yes**, briefly describe new resources to be purchased and include the cost of new library resources in the ***Business Plan, Line 11***:

Databases: While the program would be well supported by two main databases, PsycINFO and PsycARTICLES, Athens State University is exploring the addition of PsycTests in fiscal year 2027 at a cost of \$5,000 to \$7,000 per year depending on annual uplift and inflation. We will continue to review resources available through the American Psychiatric Association or Alexander Street, for potential video content. In the meantime, the most essential videos for the program would likely focus on teaching counseling techniques, role-play demonstrations, skill development, and student self-assessment and reflection. We already provide access to Kanopy, which includes approximately 415 videos that could support instruction in these areas.

F. Accreditation Expenses

If programmatic accreditation was indicated above, please include all accreditation costs in the ***Business Plan, Line 12*** and itemize and explain below:

The proposed M.S. in Clinical Mental Health Counseling (CMHC) will seek specialized programmatic accreditation from the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP).

No accreditation expenses are anticipated during Years 1 and 2 of the program. During these initial years, faculty and program administrators will focus on recruiting, program implementation, assessment, data collection, and preparation for the CACREP accreditation process.

In Year 3, the University anticipates submitting the CACREP Self-Study Report and completing the required accreditation site visit. Based on CACREP's current published fee schedule, the Self-Study/application fee is estimated at \$3,750. This includes a \$1,000 fee for Pre-Applicant Accreditation Management System (AMS) access and a one-time \$2,750 application cost. The standard three-person site visit fee at \$6,000, for a total estimated initial accreditation expense of \$9,750.



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Beginning in Year 4, an annual accreditation maintenance fee is included in the budget.

Based on the current CACREP FY2027 rate of \$4,150, annual accreditation expenses of \$4,150 are projected for Years 4 through 7.

The resulting estimated CACREP accreditation costs over the seven-year business-plan period are:

Years 1–2: \$0

Year 3: \$9,750

Year 4: \$4,150

Year 5: \$4,150

Year 6: \$4,150

Year 7: \$4,150

Total estimated seven-year accreditation cost: \$26,350.

These estimates are based on CACREP's currently published fees and are subject to change, as accreditation fees are reviewed annually by the CACREP Board of Directors. The Behavioral Sciences Division will incorporate future fee adjustments into the program's operating budget as necessary.

G. Other Costs

Please include all other costs incurred with program implementation, such as marketing or recruitment, in the **Business Plan, Line 13** and explain below:

Program marketing and recruitment are institution-wide and are included in the University's centralized budget.

III. Program Revenue and Funding

A. Tuition Revenue: Please describe how you calculated the tuition revenue that appears in the **Business Plan, Line 17**. Specifically, did you calculate using cost per credit hour or per term? Did you factor in differences between resident and non-resident tuition rates?

Note: Tuition Revenue should be proportional to total enrollment.

Athens State University calculated tuition revenue using cost per credit hour. For graduate programs offered via distance education, there is no difference between resident and non-resident tuition.

B. External Funding: Will the proposed program require external funding (e.g., Perkins, Foundation, Federal Grants, Sponsored Research, etc.)? **Yes** ☐ **No** ☒



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If **yes**, please include all external funding in the ***Business Plan, Line 18*** and explain specific sources and funding below:

C. Reallocations: For each year will tuition revenue and/or external funding cover projected expenses? **Yes** ☒ **No** ☐

If **not**, budget reallocation may be required. Please include all reallocations in the ***Business Plan, Line 19*** and describe below how your institution will cover any shortfalls in any given year.

1	ACADEMIC DEGREE PROGRAM BUSINESS PLAN								
2	INSTITUTION:	Athens State University							
3	PROGRAM NAME:	Clinical Mental Health Counseling, MS					CIP CODE:	51.1508	
4	SELECT LEVEL:	GRADUATE (MASTER'S)							
5	ESTIMATED *NEW* EXPENSES TO IMPLEMENT PROPOSED PROGRAM								
6		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	TOTAL
7	PERSONNEL SALARIES & BENEFITS	\$145,113	\$357,650	\$357,650	\$357,650	\$357,650	\$357,650	\$357,650	\$2,291,013
8	EQUIPMENT								\$0
9	FACILITIES								\$0
10	ASSISTANTSHIPS/FELLOWSHIPS								\$0
11	LIBRARY	\$5,000	\$5,000	\$6,000	\$6,000	\$7,000	\$7,000	\$8,000	\$44,000
12	ACCREDITATION	\$0	\$0	\$9,750	\$4,150	\$4,150	\$4,150	\$4,150	\$26,350
13	OTHER COSTS								\$0
14	TOTAL EXPENSES	\$150,113	\$362,650	\$373,400	\$367,800	\$368,800	\$368,800	\$369,800	\$2,361,363
15	*NEW* REVENUES AVAILABLE FOR PROGRAM SUPPORT								
16		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	TOTAL
17	TUITION + FEES	\$190,080	\$362,880	\$475,200	\$527,040	\$552,960	\$552,960	\$552,960	\$3,214,080
18	EXTERNAL FUNDING								\$0
19	REALLOCATIONS								\$0
20	TOTAL REVENUES	\$190,080	\$362,880	\$475,200	\$527,040	\$552,960	\$552,960	\$552,960	\$3,214,080
21	ENROLLMENT PROJECTIONS								
22									
23		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	AVERAGE
24	FULL-TIME ENROLLMENT HEADCOUNT	No data reporting	26	34	38	40	40	40	36.33
25	PART-TIME ENROLLMENT HEADCOUNT		3	4	4	4	4	4	3.83
26	TOTAL ENROLLMENT HEADCOUNT		29	38	42	44	44	44	40.17
27	NEW ENROLLMENT HEADCOUNT		17	18	20	20	20	20	19.17
28	Validation of Enrollment			YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	
29	DEGREE COMPLETION PROJECTIONS								
30	Note: Do not count Lead “0”s and Lead 0 years in computing the average annual degree completions.								
31		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	AVERAGE
32	DEGREE COMPLETION PROJECTIONS	No data reporting	8	12	14	16	17	17	14.00

Graduate Curriculum Overview

Graduate Curriculum Checklist:

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Overview | ☐ |
| 2. Components | ☐ |
| 3. Options (as required) | ☐ |

1. Graduate Overview

Enter the credit hour value for all applicable components (N/A if not applicable). The credit hours MUST match the credit hours in the Curriculum Components table.

Curriculum Overview of Proposed Program	
Credit hours required in Program Courses	42
Credit hours in Program Options (concentrations/specializations/tracks)	0
Credit hours in Program Electives	9
Credit hours in Required Thesis/Research	0
Credit hours in Required Capstone/Internship/Practicum	9
Total Credit Hours Required for Completion:	60

Maximum number of credits that can be transferred in from another institution and applied to the program:	15
Intended program duration in semesters for full-time students:	7
Intended program duration in semesters for part-time students:	10

Does the program require students to demonstrate industry-validated skills, specifically through an embedded industry-recognized certification, structured work-based learning with an employer partner, or alignment with nationally recognized industry standards?	YES	NO
☐	☐	☐

If **yes**, please explain (i.e., number of hours required, etc.): For the Practicum course, students must complete 100 supervised clock hours with an industry partner, at least 40 of which must be direct service with actual clients. For the Internship courses, students must complete 600 supervised clock hours with an industry partner, 240 of which must be direct service with actual clients. Students must also pass the industry-recognized Counselor Preparation Comprehensive Examination (CPCE) prior to graduation.

Does the program include any concentrations/ tracks/ options? If yes , please explain (i.e., define):	YES	NO
☐	☐	☐

2. Graduate Components

Please provide all course information as indicated in the following table. Indicate new courses with "Y" in the associated column. If the course includes a required work-based learning component, such as an internship or practicum course, please indicate with a "Y" in the WBL column.

Insert Additional Rows as Needed				
Institution:	Athens State University			
Program Name:	Clinical Mental Health Counseling			
Program Level:	GRADUATE (MASTER'S)			
Curriculum Components of Proposed Program				
Course Number	Course Name	Credit Hours	New? (Y)	WBL? (Y)
Program Courses		42		
CMHC500	Orientation and Foundations of Counseling	3	Y	N
CMHC510	Theories of Counseling	3	Y	N
CMHC520	Multicultural and Diversity Counseling	3	Y	N
CMHC530	Human Growth and Development	3	Y	N
CMHC540	Techniques and Skills in Counseling	3	Y	N
CMHC550	Law, Ethics, and Professional Standards in Counseling	3	Y	N
CMHC560	Group Counseling	3	Y	N
CMHC580	Assessment and Testing	3	Y	N
CMHC620	Research Methodology and Program Evaluation	3	Y	N
CMHC570	Psychopathology, Diagnosis, and Treatment Planning	3	Y	N
CMHC610	Trauma and Crisis Counseling	3	Y	N
CMHC650	Addiction & Substance Abuse Education, Prevention, and Intervention	3	Y	N
CMHC660	Psychopharmacology	3	Y	N
CMHC630	Career Development	3	Y	N
Program Options (enter total credit hours from all options below)		0		
Program Electives		9		
	Choose 3 (Internship 3 Only if Needed)			
CMHC590	Family, Couples, and Sex Counseling	3	Y	N
CMHC600	Counseling Children and Adolescents	3	Y	N
CMHC640	BioPsychoSocial Aspects of Disability	3	Y	N
CMHC700	Internship 3	3	Y	Y
Required Thesis/Research		0		
Capstone/Internship/Practicum		9		
CMHC670	Practicum	3	Y	Y
CMHC680	Internship 1	3	Y	Y
CMHC690	Internship 2	3	Y	Y
Total Credit Hours Required for Completion:		60		

Appendix: Letters of Support
Athens State University MS in Clinical Mental Health Counseling



8375 Highway 72 W • Madison, AL 35758 • (256) 265-2012

September 2, 2026

Athens State University
300 N Beaty Street
Athens, Alabama 35611

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to offer my support for Athens State University's proposal to establish a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. As President of Madison Hospital, and a longtime member of the Madison and Huntsville communities, I have had the opportunity to observe both the tremendous growth occurring throughout North Alabama and the evolving healthcare needs that accompany that growth.

Healthcare extends beyond the treatment of physical illness and injury. Mental and behavioral health are important components of the overall health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities. From the perspective of healthcare leadership, access to an adequate network of qualified professionals across the continuum of care is essential to meeting community needs.

North Alabama's continued population growth has brought tremendous opportunities to our region, while also increasing demand across healthcare and community-service systems. Since opening our doors on February 28, 2012 we have experienced continuous growth in the area of mental health needs, these needs also extend to younger and younger patients-in fact as young as 6 years of age.

Parents and caregivers are struggling to find adequate resources in our area, and I feel strongly that a program such as this would help us continue to meet those needs. We transfer patients all over the state of Alabama in order to find placement options. Imagine being a parent of a child that has to be placed in south Alabama for care? While I know the program being proposed for Athens State University is primarily for outpatient counseling, I believe these additional resources will prevent patients from seeking care in hospitals because they will have the support they need to manage their mental health needs, here locally.

Not all hospitals have mental health departments, and even if they do, they are for inpatient needs. Emergency Rooms are not sources of the best care for mental health needs; the outpatient setting is very valuable as a resource that we can offer. Having more professionals is the resource we need.

The effects of limited access to mental health services can extend well beyond an individual patient. Ensuring that communities have access to qualified professionals who can provide appropriate counseling, prevention, intervention, and ongoing support is an important part of strengthening the broader healthcare system.

Meeting these needs requires not only services, but also a sustainable workforce. Developing qualified healthcare professionals within the communities where they are needed is an important component of long-term workforce planning. Athens State University's proposed Clinical Mental Health Counseling program would create an additional graduate educational pathway for individuals seeking to become professional counselors while helping strengthen the pipeline of qualified mental health professionals available to North Alabama communities.

A locally accessible graduate program also offers opportunities to connect higher education with the healthcare and community organizations serving the region. Through supervised clinical education and partnerships with community providers, students can gain meaningful experience while developing an understanding of the populations and needs of the communities in which they may ultimately practice. Madison Hospital believes strongly in relationships formed with our local universities, colleges and schools. By training the workforce of the future, we are all ensuring that our patients have the resources we need to care for our patients.

As North Alabama continues to grow, maintaining a strong healthcare infrastructure will require continued attention to both physical and behavioral health needs and to the workforce necessary to address them. Preparing additional well-qualified clinical mental health counselors within our region has the potential to expand access to care, strengthen the continuum of behavioral health services, and contribute to healthier communities.

For these reasons, I support Athens State University's proposal to establish the Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. I believe the development of additional highly trained mental health professionals can make an important contribution to the health and well-being of Madison County and the broader North Alabama region.

Sincerely,


Mary Lynne Wright
President



LIGHTHOUSE PSYCHIATRY AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
CLINIC, LLC.

8215 MADISON BLVD SUITE 150, MADISON, AL 35758

August 27th, 2026

To Whom It May Concern:

As a board-certified Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioner and co-owner of Lighthouse Psychiatry and Behavioral Health Clinic in Madison, Alabama, I am pleased to offer my support for Athens State University's proposed Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program.

Through my work in psychiatric and behavioral health care, I have seen firsthand the importance of access to qualified mental health professionals in North Alabama. At Lighthouse, our work reflects the interdisciplinary nature of behavioral health care, bringing together professionals who contribute different expertise to meeting patients' needs. Within this continuum of care, qualified counselors and psychotherapists play an essential role in providing ongoing therapeutic services and working collaboratively with psychiatric providers and other behavioral health professionals.

North Alabama is experiencing a significant demand for accessible, comprehensive behavioral health services that include both psychotherapy and medication management. Due to the shortage of available counselors and psychotherapists, many patients face extended wait times before beginning treatment and may not receive services at the frequency necessary to adequately address their mental health needs.

As a result, patients may even seek supportive counseling from their medication management providers because of limited access to psychotherapy services. While medication management providers can offer valuable support and education, our professional education and scope of practice limits the extent of psychotherapy we are able to provide. This places additional demands on providers while highlighting the need for a stronger, more comprehensive behavioral health workforce.

It is encouraging to see mental health becoming increasingly normalized and openly discussed in our communities. However, increased awareness must be accompanied by increased access to qualified behavioral health professionals. To adequately meet the mental health needs of North Alabama, there is a critical need to expand educational program opportunities that prepare counselors, psychotherapists, and other behavioral health professionals to enter the workforce.

Expanding behavioral health education and training programs would help address workforce shortages, reduce patient wait times, improve continuity and frequency of care, and promote a collaborative model in which patients receive psychotherapy and from appropriately trained professionals. Investing in the behavioral health workforce is essential to ensuring that the growing recognition of mental health needs translates into meaningful, timely, and high-quality care for the people of North Alabama.

The proposed Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Athens State University would provide an important opportunity to strengthen the pipeline of professionally prepared counselors serving North Alabama. A graduate program located within the region has the potential not only to expand educational opportunities for individuals pursuing careers in mental health, but also to help behavioral health organizations develop and maintain the workforce necessary to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

From a clinical perspective, I also value the proposed program's emphasis on rigorous graduate education, ethical practice, evidence-based counseling, and supervised clinical experience. Preparing counselors to work effectively within an increasingly collaborative behavioral health system will benefit patients, providers, and communities throughout the region.

Lighthouse Psychiatry and Behavioral Health Clinic would welcome opportunities to explore future collaboration with Athens State University and its Clinical Mental Health Counseling program, such as clinical training opportunities, professional education, consultation, or other partnerships that support the development of the behavioral health workforce.

For these reasons, I strongly support Athens State University's proposal to establish the Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. As a psychiatric provider and behavioral health practice owner serving the North Alabama community, I believe expanding the availability of well-prepared counseling professionals will be an important contribution to the accessibility and quality of mental health care in our region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katy Cousart, PMHNP-BC". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katy Cousart, PMHNP-BC

Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioner – Board Certified
Co-Owner Lighthouse Psychiatry and Behavioral Health Clinic



August 31, 2026

To Whom It May Concern:

As a Licensed Professional Counselor, CEO and Co-Founder of Solutions 4 Success LLC, and an Athens State University alumna, I am pleased to express my strong support for the establishment of a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program at Athens State University.

For more than 25 years, I have worked with children, adolescents, adults, and families across community, educational, faith-based, and professional settings. Through Solutions 4 Success LLC, I have had the opportunity to provide counseling and related services to individuals, couples, and families presenting with a broad range of behavioral, emotional, relational, and life concerns. These experiences have given me firsthand insight into the importance of accessible, high-quality mental health care and the continuing need for well-prepared professional counselors within our communities.

Throughout my career, I have witnessed a significant increase in both the demand for mental health services and the complexity of the concerns individuals and families bring into counseling. Anxiety, depression, trauma, family instability, behavioral concerns, workplace stress, grief, and other challenges increasingly require timely access to qualified mental health professionals. Yet many individuals continue to face barriers to care, including limited provider availability, long wait times, financial constraints, transportation challenges, and difficulty finding professionals who can effectively address their needs. These challenges are particularly significant in communities where the number of qualified providers has not kept pace with the growing need for services.

As a practicing counselor and owner of a counseling practice, I also understand the importance of developing a strong pipeline of qualified professionals prepared to enter the mental health workforce. Graduate counselor preparation requires far more than academic knowledge alone. Future counselors need rigorous clinical education, strong ethical and professional identities, supervised experience working directly with clients, and opportunities to develop the clinical judgment, cultural responsiveness, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills necessary for effective professional practice.

Athens State University's proposed Clinical Mental Health Counseling program would provide an important new pathway for individuals seeking graduate preparation in counseling while also helping strengthen the mental health workforce serving North Alabama. Preparing counselors in our rapidly growing region provides students with opportunities to build professional relationships, complete supervised clinical experiences in local communities, understand regional needs, and potentially launch their careers in those same communities after graduation. This would create an incredible pipeline to meet the need of the mental health workforce crisis within our state.



I am particularly supportive of strong partnerships between counselor education programs and community-based mental health providers. Practicum and internship experiences allow developing counselors to apply academic knowledge in authentic clinical environments, receive guidance from experienced professionals, strengthen their professional identities, and better understand the needs of the individuals and communities they will ultimately serve. These partnerships can simultaneously support the education of future counselors while strengthening the professional mental health network throughout North Alabama. I have partnered with Amridge University, Oakwood University, Calhoun Community College, and Alabama A& M University in the past.

As an Athens State University alumna, I am especially pleased to support the University's continued growth and its consideration of a graduate program that directly prepares mental health professionals. My educational and professional experiences have demonstrated the value of creating accessible pathways that allow students to develop professionally, remain connected to their communities, and ultimately use their knowledge and skills in service to others. I am also active in Launchbox and use its services to expand my business repertoire. I am also an active mental health contractor with the Limestone DHR Foster Care services as a therapist for this vulnerable population. My next business venture, as a recent graduate of the Limestone County Childcare Accelerator Cohort, positions me to meet the growing need for highly qualified childcare services in our growing community.

For these reasons, I strongly support Athens State University's proposal to establish the Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. From my perspective as a Licensed Professional Counselor, Developmental Psychologist, counseling practice owner, Chief Operating Officer of a Home and Community-Based Medicaid waiver service, and Athens State alumna; I believe this program has the potential to expand opportunities for future counselors, strengthen the mental health workforce, develop meaningful community partnerships, and increase access to high-quality counseling services throughout North Alabama. For additional information, you can contact me at 256-924-0553 or email me at solutions4success@att.net.

Kindest regards,

Dr. Marcy J. Watkins

Dr. Marcy J. Watkins, LPC, NCC

Developmental Psychologist

CEO & Co-Founder

Solutions 4 Success LLC | Ability Plus, Inc | Zoe Life Preparatory Academy

Sep. 1st, 2026

To Whom It May Concern:

I am pleased to offer my support for Athens State University's proposal to establish a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. As a member of the Owens Cross Roads City Council, an Army Veteran, and a professional with extensive experience in workforce development, education, and Veteran support, I have had opportunities to see the needs of North Alabama communities from several different perspectives.

Throughout my military service, professional career, and community involvement, I have worked with individuals navigating significant life transitions and barriers to personal, educational, and professional success. My experience supporting Veterans has been particularly meaningful and has reinforced for me the importance of communities having access to appropriate resources when individuals and families need support. During my years supporting Veterans, I encountered individuals whose unmet mental health needs affected their ability to secure employment, maintain stability in their daily lives, sustain healthy personal relationships, and successfully transition into civilian life. Although the VA offers certain mental health services regardless of enrollment status, access to its full range of ongoing mental health care depends on a Veteran's eligibility for and enrollment in VA health care. Additionally, some Veterans who are eligible may not feel comfortable seeking mental health care through the VA for a variety of personal reasons. Expanding the availability of qualified mental health counselors within the broader community would provide Veterans with additional options for seeking care in settings where they may feel more comfortable. Improved access to qualified mental health care can benefit not only the Veterans receiving treatment, but also their families and personal relationships.

As North Alabama continues to grow, ensuring access to an adequate behavioral health workforce is an important component of supporting healthy and resilient communities. From my experience in public service and workforce development, I recognize the importance of developing educational pathways that prepare qualified professionals to meet regional workforce and community needs. In my work, I found that many Veterans preferred working with counselors who were also Veterans. They often felt that a counselor with military experience could better understand where they were coming from, speak the same language, and relate to aspects of military service and the transition to civilian life that may be difficult to explain to someone without that shared background. Creating additional pathways into the counseling profession may also encourage more Veterans to enter the field, helping expand the availability of providers with both professional training and lived military experience.

Athens State University's proposed Clinical Mental Health Counseling program represents an opportunity to address both an educational and a community need. Establishing a graduate pathway in North Alabama can create additional opportunities for individuals

who want to enter the counseling profession while also helping develop a pipeline of qualified professionals who may remain in and serve communities throughout our region. This type of investment in education and workforce development can have effects that extend well beyond individual graduates to the families, employers, Veterans, and communities they ultimately serve.

I am particularly supportive of efforts that connect higher education with the evolving needs of the communities around it. A graduate counseling program that combines strong academic preparation with supervised professional training can help prepare future counselors to serve a variety of populations and contribute to the broader network of behavioral health resources available in North Alabama.

As a councilwoman in Owens Cross Roads, I have also seen the needs that accompany growth in communities outside the Huntsville metropolitan core. In my experience, residents of Owens Cross Roads and surrounding communities within the 35763 area have relatively few nearby, brick-and-mortar options for mental health care, with many more services concentrated in Huntsville. Traveling into Huntsville is not always convenient or practical, particularly for residents who work remotely and do not otherwise commute into Huntsville regularly. Expanding the number of qualified counselors in North Alabama could help support individuals and families throughout the region, particularly in Owens Cross Roads and other growing communities located in what residents locally refer to as “this side of the mountain.”

For these reasons, I support Athens State University’s proposal to establish the Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. I believe expanding the educational pathway into the counseling profession within North Alabama has the potential to strengthen our regional workforce, improve access to qualified mental health professionals, and contribute positively to the long-term well-being of the communities we serve.

The views expressed in this letter are my own and do not represent an official position or endorsement by the City of Owens Cross Roads or the Owens Cross Roads City Council.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Liddle

Councilwoman, Place 5

City of Owens Cross Roads, Alabama

Army Veteran

(256)417-3691

jenniferaliddle@gmail.com



Addie's Place child Advocacy Cener
26789 Hwy 195
Double Springs, Al 35553

September 2, 2026

Diane Watson
Director
Addies Place 501(c)(3)
26789 Highway 195
Double Springs, AL 35553

Dear Dr. Brooke Murphy Program Director of Clinical Mental Health Counseling,

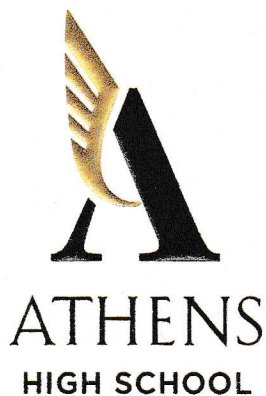
I am writing this letter of support for Athens State University's proposal to add to their program inventory a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling. This program would create a pipeline for qualified therapists. Interns could complete their practicums at the CAC and potentially become employees. It would be my hope that it would increase trauma-focused counseling services for child victims which would in turn decrease the amount of waiting times. National Children's Alliance reports that due to shortages of trained providers it takes weeks or even months for these children to begin to receive the treatment they deserve. It would improve research and evaluation support for CAC's and increase recruitment into rural areas.

I applaud Athens State University as they continue to create programs that meet the needs of Alabamians. I hope that you will concur with my assessment and support the institution's efforts to establish this program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Diane Watson, LMSW". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the last name "Watson" being particularly prominent.

Diane Watson, LMSW
Executive Director
Addie's Place Child Advocacy Center
205-272-2338



655 U.S. HIGHWAY 31 NORTH
ATHENS ALABAMA 35611
TELEPHONE (256) 233-6613

September 4, 2026

To Whom It May Concern:

As Executive Principal of Athens High School, I am pleased to express my support for Athens State University's proposal to establish a Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program.

At Athens High School, we recognize that educating young people involves more than their academic development. The social-emotional well-being of students, the relationships they develop with others, and the support they receive from their families, schools, and communities are all important to their ability to learn, grow, and prepare successfully for adulthood. As a school leader, I have seen the importance of approaching student success from this broader perspective.

High schools are also in a unique position to observe the challenges facing adolescents and families. Students may arrive at school carrying concerns related to their emotional well-being, relationships, family circumstances, grief and loss, trauma, anxiety, depression, substance use, or other life experiences. These concerns do not remain separate from education; they can influence attendance, engagement, relationships, behavior, academic performance, and students' plans for life after high school.

I have noticed the changes exhibited with a lot of my students' social - emotional well being over the better part of five years. There seem to have been a variety of issues with students being able to channel their emotions without being upset or angry. Many of the cases that I've witnessed have been dealing with students who are emotionally fragile. My concerns are that the number of these cases are increasing which hampers our school climate as we truly place the utmost value on maintaining and building upon our school culture.

Schools play an important role in recognizing concerns, supporting students, engaging families, and connecting them with resources. However, schools cannot independently meet every mental health need that arises among students and families. Some students require clinical assessment and treatment that must occur outside the educational setting. In those situations, the availability of qualified mental health professionals within the community becomes an important extension of the network of support surrounding the student.

For that reason, I see value in Athens State University developing a graduate program specifically designed to prepare Clinical Mental Health Counselors. Increasing the number of

A COMMUNITY CONNECTED BY EDUCATION

MEMBER OF SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

well-prepared mental health professionals in our region has the potential to strengthen the community resources available to adolescents and families when their needs extend beyond the services that can be provided within a school.

There is also particular value in developing this program here in Athens, Alabama. Athens State University and Athens High School are both deeply connected to the community we serve. Providing a local graduate pathway into the counseling profession can create opportunities for individuals who already understand our community to obtain advanced professional preparation and potentially remain in North Alabama to serve the children, adolescents, adults, and families who live here. As a high school principal, I also view this proposed program through the lens of the future educational and career opportunities available to our students. Part of preparing students for life after high school is helping them envision meaningful pathways through higher education and into professions where they can contribute to their communities. Athens State University is an important part of our local higher education community, and I can envision Athens High School graduates continuing their education there as they pursue their own academic and professional goals. The development of a graduate program in Clinical Mental Health Counseling would expand those possibilities by creating a local pathway for students who may ultimately aspire to careers in counseling and mental health. It is especially meaningful to consider that students educated in our community could one day become the professionals who return to serve the individuals and families within that same community.

Being the Executive Principal I place a great value in partnerships with community programs, leaders and professionals because in order to truly impact the lives of students it's going to take a community of mental healthcare professionals. My faculty and staff place great importance on having strong community partners available to schools and families, the value of developing local professionals who understand the Athens community, or the importance of collaboration among schools, families, universities, and community mental health providers.

As educators, one of our most important responsibilities is helping young people develop the foundation they need for successful lives beyond high school. Academic preparation is an important part of that foundation, but so are healthy relationships, social-emotional development, resilience, and access to appropriate support when challenges arise. A strong network of qualified mental health professionals contributes to that foundation not only for individual students, but also for families and the community as a whole.

For these reasons, I support Athens State University's proposal to establish the Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling program. I believe the program represents an opportunity to strengthen the connection between education and community well-being while developing additional professionals who can support individuals and families throughout Athens and the surrounding North Alabama region.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Willie Moore".

Willie Moore, Executive Principal
Athens High School
Athens City Schools