

# HRSA BHWET Scholar Alumni Professional Outcomes

Emily Carmichael, MSW Candidate  
*Department of Social Work*



## Introduction

Western Carolina University (WCU) Department of Social Work has received a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) *Behavioral Health Workforce Education and Training* (BHWET) for Professionals grant. Research was done to consolidate information regarding BHWET alumni demographics and follow their success since graduating from WCU’s Social Work and Counseling programs.



## University Mission

The University emphasizes undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral programs, along with educational outreach, research, creative endeavors, and cultural activities to advance individual well-being and promote economic and community development in Western Carolina and beyond.

## Federal Grant

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) HRSA Bureau of Health Workforce seeks to enhance health outcomes and promote health equity by ensuring access to quality care, supporting a skilled health workforce, and advancing innovative programs.

## BHWET Project Goal

To improve the supply and distribution of the behavioral health workforce practicing team-based care in integrated settings on the Qualla Boundary (home of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians) and high-need/high-demand areas of Western North Carolina with populations across the lifespan.

## Past Success

The 2021-2025 BHWET grant builds upon the successful 2014-2016 and 2017-2020 BHWET grant awards.

## Collaborators

- Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians (EBCI)
- Center for Native Health (CNH)
- Vaya Health
- Integrated healthcare partners across Southern Appalachia



## Catchment and Population

The BHWET program focuses on Medically Underserved Communities (MUCs) and Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) in 12 rural counties and the Qualla Boundary with individuals at risk for mental health and substance use disorders or who are otherwise considered vulnerable.



For this study, files from a total of 266 BHWET Alumni who attended WCU between the 2014 and 2024 academic years were assessed. Academic year 2024-2025 was excluded from this study as those students are still enrolled at WCU and have not yet had the ability to pursue licensure in the field.

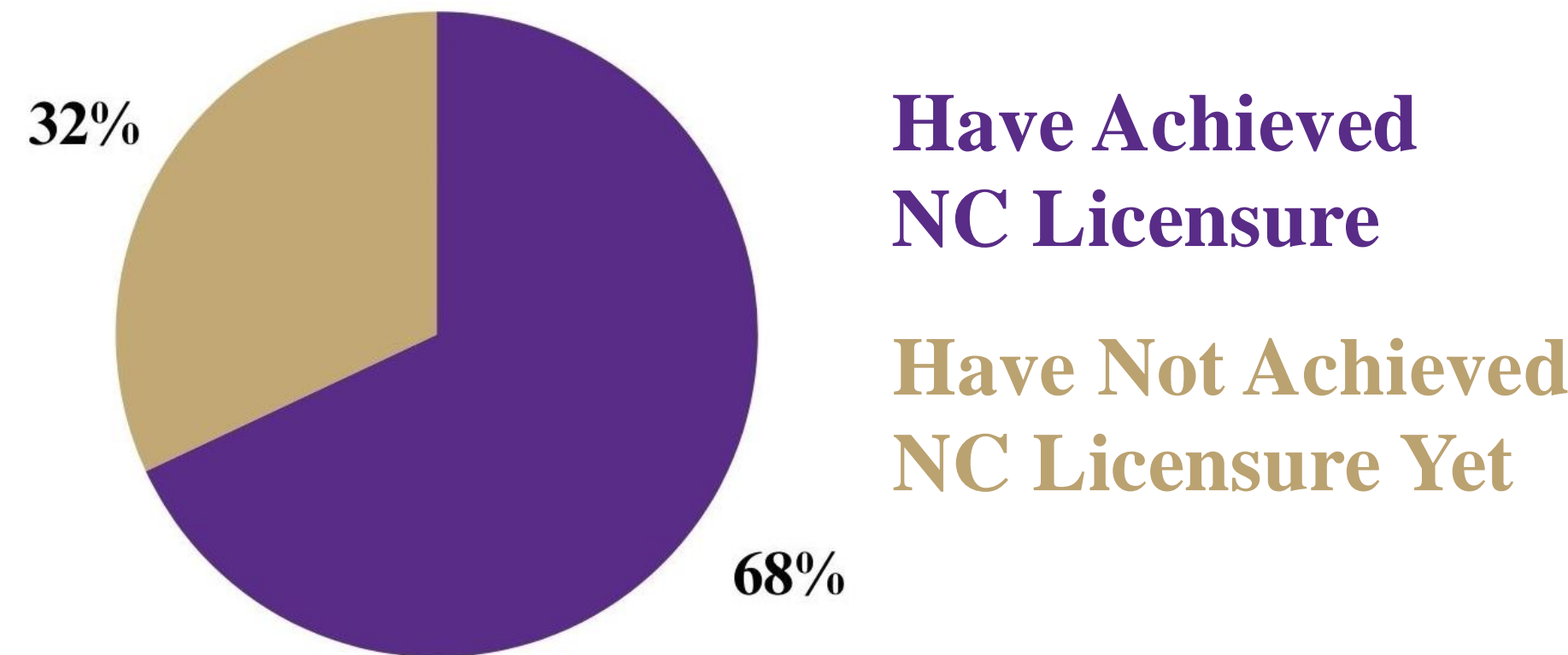
## Methods

Licensure data for BHWET Alumni was obtained through a comprehensive review of official state licensing databases. The North Carolina Social Work Certification and Licensure Board, the North Carolina Board of Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselors, the North Carolina Addictions Specialist Professional Practice Board, and the Public Schools of North Carolina license verification systems were used to verify the license status of alumni. These databases provided up-to-date information on licensure types, active status, and any related credentials achieved. This methodology ensured a thorough and accurate representation of alumni licensure achievements.

## Results

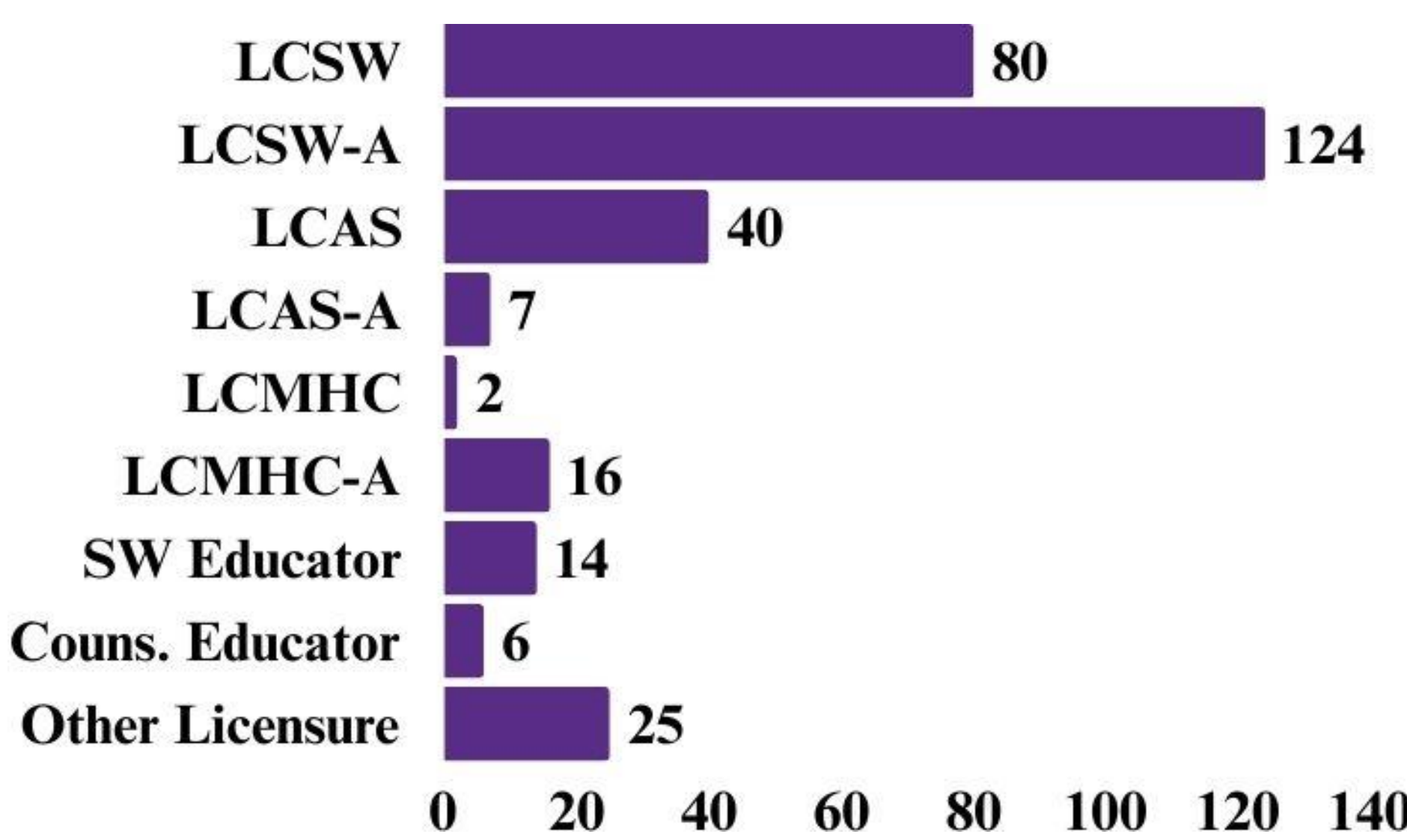
Among the 266 Scholars, there were 215 females (80.8%), 50 males (18.8%), and 1 non-binary individual (0.4%).

266 (100%) of students come from disadvantaged backgrounds in some way (e.g., divorced parents, financial strain growing up, part of a marginalized or minority group, etc.), with 110 (41.4%) being first-generation college students.



Among the 266 BHWET Alumni from 2014 to 2024, 181 (68%) have attained some form of licensure in the state of NC, with many obtaining multiple licenses (e.g., LCSW and LCAS), compared to 85 (32%) who have not yet.

## Detailed Break Down of Licenses



## Limitations

The study was limited to BHWET Alumni within North Carolina, though some students likely moved out of state to pursue employment and licensure in Social Work or Counseling. Those pursuing further education (e.g., PhDs) may delay workforce entry and licensure. The predominantly female sample, spanning early to middle adulthood, may face life events (e.g., family planning, marriage, pregnancy) that could impact licensure timelines. Additionally, name changes due to marriage could complicate identification in licensure databases. Some BHWET Alumni may have obtained a license and let it lapse, or obtained a license after databases were checked.

## Conclusions

BHWET Scholars represent individuals from historically marginalized and disadvantaged backgrounds, including first-generation college students, individuals facing financial hardships, and residents of rural areas. These factors are widely recognized as barriers to opportunities, increasing risks of college attrition and entry into low-paying jobs. Despite these challenges, Alumni of Western Carolina University's BHWET enhanced education and training with stipend grant program have demonstrated remarkable resilience and achievement. The majority have obtained licensure in helping professions, with many earning multiple credentials, highlighting their dedication and competence. Additionally, a pledge to community is highlighted when, upon award, every BHWET Scholar signs a Letter of Commitment. This Scholar assurance is to remain in the catchment area for a one year or more, thereby contributing to the expansion of integrated care in underserved communities in Western NC.

## Recommendations

The financial, academic, and psychosocial support provided through the HRSA grant has been pivotal in empowering BHWET Scholars to overcome systemic barriers, making careers in licensed helping professions more accessible and equitable for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## References

Esu, E. B., Chibuzor, M., Aquaisua, E., Udoh, E., Sam, O., Okoroafor, S., Ongom, M., Effa, E., Oyo-ita, A., & Meremikwu, M. (2021). Interventions for improving attraction and retention of health workers in rural and underserved areas: A systematic review of Systematic Reviews. *Journal of Public Health*, 43(Supplement\_1), i54–i66. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdaa235>

Jefferies, G., Davis, C., Mason, J., & Yadav, R. (2023). Using simulation to prepare social work students for field education. *Social Work Education*, 43(5), 1369–1383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2023.2185219>

Lewine, R., Manley, K., Bailey, G., Warnecke, A., Davis, D., & Sommers, A. (2019). College success among students from disadvantaged backgrounds: “poor” and “rural” do not spell failure. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 23(3), 686–698. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025119868438>

Milano, N., Petruzzini, L., Covington, E., Jones, B., & Findley, P. A. (2022). Social workers in Integrated Care Beyond Primary Care: A scoping review. *Translational Behavioral Medicine*, 12(11), 1038–1048. <https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibac082>

Rubin, M., & Kilgore, R. C. (2019). Integrated Care Workforce Development: University-Community Collaboration. *Social Work Education*, 39(4), 534–551. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2019.1661987>

## Acknowledgments

Faculty mentor Emma Miller, MSW, LCSW, BHWET Project Coordinator.

The BHWET project is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling \$480,000.00 with 0% financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit HRSA.gov