

University to offer counselling degree

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Elaine Yau

Shue Yan University will offer Hong Kong's first master's degree in counselling psychology, a milestone as it is the first time a private university has launched its own postgraduate programme in the city.

Offered by the department of counselling and psychology, the master's degree in counselling psychology carries 66 credits and offers both part-time and full-time modes of study. Professor Catherine Sun Tien-lun, head of the department of counselling and psychology, said the programme would fill an as yet untapped niche in the market for psychology professionals.

"Chinese University and the University of Hong Kong offers master's programmes in clinical psychology. But no universities offer a master's in counselling psychology," she said.

"A clinical psychologist works according to a sickness-based model and prescribes treatments for patients, like those suffering from nervous breakdowns, after evaluation. Whereas, a counselling psychologist works according to a wellness-based model, which puts more focus on improving the general wellbeing of a

person to pre-empt the onset of mental problems."

Sun said there was a severe lack of awareness of the difference between the two professions in Hong Kong, as compared to the West. There are 300 clinical psychologists registered with the Hong Kong Psychological Society, and 20 counselling psychologists.

"General practitioners mostly refer troubled patients to clinical psychologists without understanding that some patients who show incipient signs of mental problems are more suitable to receive treatment that revolves around self-help and counselling sessions."

The course consists of work placements with social organisations and training sessions held at the counselling research centre on campus that caters to outside patients and Shue Yan students.

Graduates could get jobs with social or government organisations after completing the course, Sun said. "They could help with policy-making, like how to devise better anti drug-use policies and design workshops to help reduce the stress endured by carers of chronically ill patients."