

**SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK**  
**MAESTRÍA EN TRABAJO SOCIAL BILINGÜE EN LÍNEA**

**STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING YOUR  
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS A BILINGUAL  
HUMAN SERVICE PROFESSIONAL**

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# INTRODUCTIONS

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**School of Social Work**  
**Maestría en Trabajo Social Bilingüe en Línea**



# MAESTRÍA EN TRABAJO SOCIAL BILINGÜE EN LÍNEA



- MSW with a specialization in mental health and migration studies
- More than 90% of the courses are developed and taught in Spanish
- Foster **linguistically competent** and **culturally aware professionals**
- Traditional MSW Program – 8 consecutive semesters
- Advanced Standing MSW Program – 4 consecutive semesters
- Internship Field Requirement
  - 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Level

# OVERVIEW

- Context
- Reframing
- Set the Target
- Understanding the Agency
- Asking for What You Want

# CONTEXT

- Changing demographics of the United States
- Communities that traditionally have not had to contend with language issues are now recognizing a growing need for linguistically accessible services (Piedra, 2006).
- Limited English proficient (LEP) clients are most comfortable expressing their experiences and feelings in their native language, and they are often most comfortable with a social worker from the same cultural background (Engstrom et al., 2006).
- Demand for bilingual and culturally responsive social service professionals presents a unique opportunity
- Securing employment is relatively 'easy' due to highly sought after skill set (Engstrom et al., 2006).



# CONTEXT: CAREER PATHWAYS

How do you leverage your value as a bilingual professional depends on where you are at in your social work/service career:

- Individuals with an Bachelor's degree
- Individuals with an MSW degree
  - Advocating for a promotion
  - Negotiating a salary increase
  - Pursuing specific certifications
    - In and out of social work

## **Some Career Options:**

- Director or Associate Director roles
- Executive Director roles
- Consulting roles
- Teaching roles
- Opening a private practice

# REFRAMING

- Know what your transferable skills are, what you are worth, where and who you would consider working for, and what are your non-negotiables
- “I am a bilingual professional.”
  - Being bilingual is a huge asset, remind agencies of that!
- Some skills bilingual professionals offer:
  - Interpretation and translation
  - Facilitation skills
  - Micro level- enhanced client experience and increased client involvement, better assessment of client needs and challenges
  - Mezzo/macro level – increased outreach, increased accessibility, potential new partnerships



# REFRAMING: FROM GAPS TO GROWTH

- Bilingual social workers tend to take their skill sets as things that they do on the job and do not quantify or discuss the value of their work
  - Speaking to your skill set showcases your ability to provide additional services to agencies and clients
- What you perceive as a competency gap is in fact an experience gap that you can address with a competency you have deployed in another context
- Opportunities for growth - addressing gaps is not about stating your shortcomings
- Have a plan to fill in gaps and develop language to address your gaps when talking to prospective employers



# SETTING THE TARGET

- Be proactive and intentional in deciding what you want, not just reacting to what is out there
- Articulate what you want
- Build relationships and network effectively



## Questions to ask yourself when setting your target

- Do I want to increase capacity or build new capacity for services to LEP clients?
- Do I want to serve families, individuals, or specific neighborhoods?
- Is there an age group I want to really focus on working with?

# UNDERSTANDING THE AGENCY

- Agencies are often so grateful to have someone with enough language ability to communicate with clients that they fail to provide bilingual social workers with the resources and support they need (Engstrom et al.,2006)
- LEP clients' cases tend to be more complicated and require more time than monolingual cases
  - Immigration status, acculturation issues, and the general lack of language-appropriate resources make casework with LEP clients more complex and time consuming
- Service complexities are often poorly understood by superiors and colleagues
- Learn how your language skills are going to be used by the agency!



# ASKING FOR WHAT YOU WANT

- Negotiating an offer is not just about salary
- A common assumption is that bilingual professionals intuitively know how to use professional terminology in another language in a way that it is understood by clients
  - Request on-going trainings to enhance your professional language skills
  - Pursue training in areas you are unfamiliar with
- Inquire about pay differentials and request workload adjustments to ensure equitable value for you and the agency

# CONCLUSION

The lack of bilingual social workers is a major gap in the social work industry. Your employability as a bilingual professional will add value to clients, to agencies and contribute towards a healthier and more holistic society!



# REFERENCES

- Engstrom, D. W., Min, J. W., & Gamble, L. (2009). Field Practicum Experiences of Bilingual Social Work Students Working with Limited English Proficiency Clients. *Journal of Social Work Education, 45*(2), 209–224. <https://doi.org/10.5175/jswe.2009.200700080>
- Piedra, L. M. (2006). Revisiting the language question. In D.W. Engstrom & L. M. Piedra (Eds.), *Our diverse society: Race and ethnicity—Implications for 21st century American society* (pp. 67–87). Washington, DC: NASW Press.