

Bilingual Scholarships in Texas for Mental Health Workforce Diversity

By Rick Ybarra, M.A., program officer, Hogg Foundation for Mental Health

Studies have shown that people of color and those who speak languages other than English are under-represented in social work and mental health professions in not only in Texas, but everywhere in the United States. As a result, these populations are far less likely to receive effective mental health services that meet their cultural and linguistic needs.

Spanish is the second-most common language in Texas and was the primary language spoken at home by 6.2 million people in Texas in 2006, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Texas' Latino population reached 8.6 million, 36 percent of the state's population and was the second largest in the U.S. in 2007.

The Hogg Foundation for Mental Health introduced the Bilingual Scholarship Program in 2008 to increase cultural and linguistic diversity in the Texas mental health workforce. The foundation committed funding for full-tuition scholarships to Spanish-speaking graduate social work students attending eligible universities. The program provided up to \$1 million for a three-year period to Texas universities that were accredited or pending accreditation by the national Council on Social Work Education.

The Bilingual Scholarship Program was developed to raise awareness of—and begin to meet the need for—more cultural and linguistic diversity in the state's mental health workforce. The scholarships also are helping to build diversity in higher education programs for mental health professions. The foundation has awarded a total of 53 scholarships to bilingual students at 11 Texas graduate schools from fall 2008 through the spring 2010 semester.

In 2010, the Hogg Foundation for Mental Health extended the scholarship program for three more years, with a total additional commitment of nearly \$1.5 million to the now 12 participating universities over the next three years. Funds will cover scholarships, faculty and student stipends, students' professional development and the development and implementation of a scholarship sustainability plan at each university.

Historically focused on building the capacity of Spanish-speaking mental health providers in Texas, the extension of the Bilingual Scholarship Program permits an expansion into languages other than Spanish that are prevalent in the community.

FIRST BILINGUAL SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS GRADUATE, ENTER WORKFORCE

Several bilingual scholarship recipients already have completed their graduate social work programs and are working in mental health-related fields in Texas. Two of the graduates share how they are applying their newly gained knowledge, skills and experience.

Flor Avellaneda, a Baylor graduate, is working with Communities in Schools in Waco, Texas, the nation's largest nonprofit dropout prevention program. She helps 130 sixth- through eighth-grade children and their families with tutoring, counseling, group work, interventions and, most importantly, language translation—all in an attempt to keep kids in school.

Elizabeth Castaneda, a Texas State University graduate, is coordinating a grant-funded program, College Access Challenge, at the university. "We work with high school students and parents



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addressing issues that prevent children from going to college," Castaneda said. "We also do community outreach for anyone who needs pre-college information."

Avellaneda said returning to graduate school would have been difficult, if not impossible, without the scholarship.

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"I was very involved academically. Trying to juggle a part-time job, school and a 40-hour-a-week internship would have been incredibly difficult," she said. "The scholarship helped tremendously."

Castaneda agreed. "The grant helped me significantly because I was able to go to school full-time. There would have been no way I could have done it otherwise," she said.

For more information about the Hogg Foundation and its Bilingual Scholarship Program, please visit www.hogg.utexas.edu.