

Hablemos Español

Dr. Cynthia Lucero Center Latino Mental Health Program

www.mspp.edu/latino

MSPP

Massachusetts School of
Professional Psychology

Meeting the Need...Making a Difference

Introduction

The Dr. Cynthia Lucero Center's Latino Mental Health Program (LMHP) offers a unique opportunity for students who are interested in working with Latinos. Through intensive immersion in Spanish language and Hispanic cultures, students are prepared as culturally sensitive clinicians with expertise to meet the particular mental health needs of this rapidly growing and underserved segment of the U.S. population.

The Need

Today, 1 in 8 individuals in the U.S. is Hispanic or Latino, and by 2050, 25% of the U.S. population will be of Hispanic descent. Despite this looming population explosion, only about 1% of the nation's psychologists identify themselves as Latinos. The need for professionals, Latino and non-Latino, trained to care competently for Latino patients/clients is already critical and will only increase in severity over the next few years.

Given that many Latinos in the U.S. are limited English proficient, the ability to provide services in Spanish is essential in providing competent services to this population. Even among English-fluent Latinos, many communicate more effectively in Spanish. Besides the obvious need for effective communication, there are also unique similarities, as well as differences among Latinos that must be well understood in order to make competent clinical assessments and implement effective interventions.

The Academic/Cultural Immersion Experience

In addition to completing the core curriculum in one of MSPP's academic programs, students in the LMHP attain advanced Spanish fluency and clinical competence working with Latino patients/clients. The training emphasizes an awareness of the social and cultural similarities and differences among Latinos, and an understanding of the social context of Latinos living in the U.S. Graduates of the program acquire greater sensitivity, not just to the role of culture, but also, of economics and other social factors as these affect developmental, emotional, relational and behavioral processes pertinent to the mental health of Latinos.

Latinos Can Learn Too

For students of Hispanic/Latino descent, regardless of their level of Spanish fluency, the program fosters self-awareness of their Latino identity, as well as a deep appreciation of the rich diversity among the different Latino cultures and how these impact on their clinical work with Latinos. It also gives them a unique opportunity to work as volunteers in Latin America, participating first hand in the provision of mental health services while adapting to the particular challenges and resources (oftentimes very limited) of the local social settings. For Latino students with limited Spanish fluency the program offers an opportunity to enhance their linguistic competence.

Program Highlights

- Intensive Spanish language training in different Latin American countries during two consecutive summers (each involving a 5 week immersion experience).
- Opportunity to conduct volunteer mental health work in various Latin American settings.
- Participation in weekly conversational Spanish group during all regular semesters at MSPP.
- Opportunity for Latino students to expand their cultural training in a Spanish-speaking country different from their own country of origin or heritage.
- Extensive clinical training in field placements serving Latino patients to enhance the students' sensitivity to the specific mental health needs of Latinos.
- Clinical Seminars (years 2 and 3) conducted in Spanish to increase fluency and introduce the metaphors and language of psychotherapy with Spanish-speakers.
- A two-part core course (summers 1 and 2): "Latino Mental Health in the U.S. Social Context" that is integrated with the summer immersion experience.
- A variety of activities (e.g., conference, lectures, films, social and cultural events) throughout the year that expose students to various aspects of Latino cultures

Preliminary Outcomes...

Fifteen students are currently enrolled in the LMHP (MSPP years 2 & 3), and 14 more (year 1) are in the process of applying for admission to the program. Of these, 6 students, including 4 Spanish-language Learners ("SLLs") and 2 Latinos, have already completed 2 summer immersion programs in La Guácima, Costa Rica and Guayaquil, Ecuador. Another group of 10 students, including 7 SLLs and 3 Latinas, completed their 1st summer immersion program in Costa Rica. All of these students already demonstrate significant improvement in Spanish fluency, and are working with Latino patients/clients at a variety of settings providing mental health services in Spanish. We're in the process of implementing more objective measures of Spanish language fluency and Latino cultural competence to assess our program's outcomes.

Who Can Apply?

Applicants with an intermediate level of Spanish language fluency who have been accepted into an MSPP academic program.

Dr. Cynthia Lucero Scholarship

The Dr. Cynthia Lucero Scholarship is awarded to one entering student from any academic program at MSPP with a serious commitment to working with underserved Latino/Hispanic communities in the U.S. The "Lucero Scholar" is selected among entering students who enroll full-time (greater than or equal to 11 credits per semester) in an MSPP program and receives \$15,000 each year. Selection criteria are based on a student who exemplifies the work and dedication of the late Dr. Cynthia Lucero, an MSPP graduate who passed away in 2002 while running the Boston Marathon. Good academic standing is required in order to maintain the scholarship.



Dr. Cynthia Lucero

