

## Bringing the state seal of biliteracy to higher education

### What this research was about and why it is important

A Seal of Biliteracy (SoBL) is an award given by a school, district, or state in recognition of students who have studied and attained proficiency in two or more languages. State seals of biliteracy exist in 44 states in the U.S. and present a promising method of serving an increasingly bilingual population. Currently, state SoBLs have been available almost exclusively at the high school level, however data shows that heritage language speaking students are often not afforded this opportunity. An expanded option in higher education is important to improve access to this state recognized credential for linguistically diverse students.

### What the researchers did

- The researcher created a SoBL academic program that was implemented in the State of Oregon and operationalized at a community college and captured data on student participants.
- This article describes the implementation model that could serve as an effective model for two- and four-year colleges interested in recognizing and supporting the language assets of heritage language speakers.
- The model could be replicated by higher education institutions either wholly or in part and could be tailored to the unique linguistic demographics of other regions.

### What the researchers found

- Data from the implementation process found both benefits and challenges of the model.
- Data collected from the implementation model provided evidence of the positive impact that biliteracy programs have on students, and specifically noted that students' cultural identity and language confidence was strengthened.
- Increased interest and enrollment in higher level language learning was also reported. Challenges emerged around testing, the need for consistent academic standards, and recognition of the SoBL in the state. The project also revealed confusion around a newly created competing private *Global Seal of Biliteracy* that could undermine the validity of the official state SoBL.
- Additional implications emerged around the potential to link SoBL programs to specific career pathways, such as teacher education.

### Things to consider

- Because the college described in this article is a Hispanic Serving Institution with emphasis on service to bilingual Hispanic students, the model linked Spanish language studies to the State SoBL. However, the model could be adapted to other regions and other languages.
- Although this model champions the state SoBL in higher education, it does not diminish the value of the opportunity at the high school level. Ideally, a college option would reinforce and strengthen student perception of the value of state SoBLs and encourage students to take advantage of the opportunity at the high school level.
- Because community colleges reach a greater proportion of nontraditional and diverse students, they are a good vehicle for expanding this opportunity, although any higher education venue could initiate a SoBL to demonstrate support for bilingualism.
- SoBL programs have the potential to disrupt the English-dominant power norms present in schools and society and are therefore an important aspect of educational equity work in higher education. Constructing programs of study that authentically cultivate and credential heritage language ability recognizes bilingualism as an asset, validates students' heritage, and builds confidence.
- Therefore, expanding SoBL programs into higher education is a promising way that college and university departments can offer an asset-based approach to supporting culturally and linguistically diverse students.

**Material, data, open access article:** [open access article](#)

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