

# NPHF Monthly Newsletter



HUMBOLDT-TOIYABE NATIONAL FOREST



Picture from <https://www.uscapitolchristmastree.com/humboldt-toiyabe-national-forest-to-provide-2025-us-capital-christmas-tree/>

## Shaping Systems Through Education: Mezzo Social Work in Academia

*Yezenia Olivera, MSW, MBA is the Field Education Program Director for the School of Social Work at the University of Nevada, Reno.*



### Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I was born and raised in Reno, Nevada, where I attended schools in the heart of the city and graduated from Hug High School. As the youngest child of immigrant parents and one of five siblings, I was the first in my family to graduate from high school and pursue higher education. This milestone represented not only a personal achievement, but also a significant step forward for my family.

I went on to earn my undergraduate degree in Business with an emphasis in Marketing. After gaining several years of professional experience, I returned to graduate school to further my education and broaden my impact. I earned a Master of Social Work, followed by a Master of Business Administration. Together, these degrees have shaped my interdisciplinary perspective and strengthened my ability to approach complex challenges through both human-centered and organizational lenses.

### Can you describe where you work currently, your role and what skills you find are needed/important?

I am the Field Education Program Director at the School of Social Work at the University of Nevada, Reno, where I provide leadership and oversight for the Field Education Program. In this capacity, I manage the overall operations of the field department, including the development, implementation, and evaluation of practicum placements for BSW and MSW students. I, alongside my team, oversee partnerships with a wide range of community agencies and supervise and support field instructors and task supervisors. We also ensure that field experiences align with academic curriculum, learning objectives, and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accreditation standards.

A significant aspect of my role involves program management and coordination. This includes overseeing field policies and procedures, managing timelines and placement processes, guiding field curriculum development, and ensuring consistent communication across students, faculty, and community partners. ...*Continued on Page 2*

## Congratulation Graduates!



*Ebony Clark, MSW - ADSD*

*Sonia Ruiz, MSW - DCFS*

*Johanna De La Rosa, MSW - DCFS*

## Upcoming Webinars

### What it's like to take the Licensure Exam

Past scholarship recipients will share about how they prepared and what it was like to take the exam.

January 27th 6:30-7:30pm



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I also address complex student, agency, and ethical concerns by applying social work ethics, institutional policy, and professional judgment to support student success while maintaining program integrity.

The skills most essential to my role include strong leadership, communication, organization, and problem-solving abilities, as well as the capacity to manage multiple priorities in a fast-paced academic environment. Collaboration, conflict resolution, and decision-making are critical, as is a solid foundation in social work values, ethics, and educational policy. Equally important is the ability to provide clear guidance, set expectations, and support students and community partners with professionalism, consistency, and empathy while balancing the administrative and relational demands of the program.

**Why did you decide to move into academia and work in a programmatic role (Mezzo)?**

I decided to move into academia and a programmatic (mezzo) role because it allows me to influence systems, programs, and educational structures that directly shape student learning and professional practice. Field education sits at the intersection of students, agencies, and the institution, and I am drawn to the opportunity to strengthen those connections while improving access, equity, and quality in practicum experiences.

Working in a programmatic role allows me to apply my practice experience at a broader level—developing processes, supporting community partnerships, and addressing systemic barriers that impact students and agencies alike. Academia also provides the space to mentor emerging social workers, uphold professional and ethical standards, and contribute to the preparation of competent, reflective practitioners. This mezzo-level work aligns with my strengths in leadership, coordination, and problem-solving, and allows me to create sustainable impact beyond individual client-level interventions.

**Can you share a success story (or impactful story) of something that you encountered at work?**

One particularly impactful experience in my role involved supporting someone who was struggling with her field placement. She was having difficulty receiving critical feedback from her site supervisor and initially felt targeted, which made the practicum experience challenging for her. Through our work together, we were able to explore her feelings, reflect on her own impact, and examine the supervisor's perspective in a constructive way.

We developed strategies for her to professionally address concerns, receive feedback without taking it personally, and navigate difficult conversations with her mentor. Over time, the student learned to engage with feedback thoughtfully, advocate for herself appropriately, and focus on the outcomes of her practicum experience. By the end of the semester, she not only continued successfully in her placement but also demonstrated significant growth in professional self-awareness, resilience, and reflective practice.

This experience was particularly meaningful because it highlighted the importance of guidance, reflective support, and relationship-building in field education. It reinforced our work can help students navigate complex interpersonal and structural challenges while preparing them to become thoughtful, competent social work professionals.

**Are there areas of training that have become invaluable in your work?**

Several areas of training have become invaluable in my work as Field Education Program Director. First, training from our accreditation board, CSWE, have been critical, as they help me guide students, support field instructors, and navigate complex student–agency dynamics. Second, training in social work ethics and structural competency is essential, especially when addressing issues related to power, privilege, and systemic barriers in placements.

Additionally, conflict resolution and communication training has been extremely helpful for facilitating difficult conversations between students, supervisors, and agencies, ensuring that concerns are addressed constructively. Finally, training in program management and organizational leadership allows me to coordinate multiple moving parts—placements, curriculum, compliance, and agency partnerships—effectively while maintaining program integrity and fostering positive outcomes for students. These combined skills and trainings equip me to balance the administrative, supervisory, and educational responsibilities of my role while supporting students and community partners with professionalism and empathy.

**What advice would you give to students interested in pursuing either work within the academic realm or managing programs?**

For students interested in academia or program management, I would emphasize building strong communication, problem-solving, and leadership skills. Seek mentorship and hands-on experience to learn how to navigate complex systems and support students, agencies, and communities effectively. Working in academia can be challenging, but for those who are passionate about supporting students and engaging with individuals from diverse backgrounds, it is a highly rewarding and impactful field.

# Social Work Scholarship Recipient Check-In



One of Nichole's favorite places

Nichole Garcia is a MSW student at the University of Nevada, Reno working at the Division of Public and Behavioral Health (DPBH) in Washoe County. Nichole has been with the scholarship program since Summer 2025.

## Would you share about your background?

I grew up in Reno, Nevada, where I still reside today. I am a first-generation, bilingual student raised by a single mother who always encouraged me to work hard in school and pursue a better future. For most of my childhood, I imagined becoming a veterinarian and believed that was the path I would follow. However, during high school I began to question whether that career was truly the right fit for me. In college, I explored new interests and ultimately earned degrees in Psychology and Spanish. After graduating, I worked in the mental health field, primarily in inpatient psychiatric settings. It was through this work that I gained a deeper understanding of the role social workers play in supporting individuals and families. Seeing their impact firsthand inspired me to pursue a career in social work.

## Where do you currently work and what do you do? Share any practicum placements.

I currently work at Lake's Crossing Center as a Psychiatric Caseworker. Our facility specializes in competency restoration, and in this role, I provide legal process education while also managing a variety of casework responsibilities. I support clients in both English and Spanish as they learn about the legal system and their role within it. In addition to education, I handle case management tasks such as completing records requests and assisting with discharge planning. I will be starting my practicum at Crisis Supportive Services of Nevada next term.

## How has your schooling informed the work that you do? How have you been able to implement what you've learned in school into your work?

School has deepened my understanding of concepts that directly influence the therapeutic relationship. One of the most significant lessons has been the importance of self-reflection and cultural awareness. These practices are essential for providing effective, ethical, and client-centered care. These skills allow us to build more meaningful relationships to better support our clients.

## Can you share a success story (or impactful story) of something that you encountered at work?

Something that deeply impacts me is when Spanish-speaking clients express gratitude for having someone on their team who can communicate with them in their own language. I've experienced this not only in my current role but in previous positions as well. Growing up in a family whose first language was Spanish, I've seen firsthand how important it is for people to receive services in a language they understand. Being able to offer that support feels both meaningful and necessary.

## RESOURCE CORNER

# AI and Social Work in Nevada

*Artificial Intelligence (AI) is here to stay and it's important to stay up to date on how it will affect your day to day tasks as a social worker.*

In June 2025 Assembly Bill 406 (AB406) was approved by the Governor and enacted. The bill addresses the the misuse of AI in mental and behavioral health care.

To summarize this bill states that,

### AI Can:

- Be used to assist administratively with scheduling, billing, organization, etc.
- Assist with research
- Write session notes and therapeutic plans as long as they are reviewed by the therapist.

### AI Cannot:

- Provide therapy or use a clinical title



To read more about the bill go to:  
<https://naswnv.socialworkers.org/Professional-Development/AI-Regulation>

# PREP SERIES: CAREER PATHWAYS

*For the next few months this newsletter will share tips and techniques for resumes, interviewing, and overall career planning.*

## Informational Interviewing

Informational Interviewing is a way to meet with professionals in their field to learn more about the job responsibilities, skills/education needed, industry, culture, and networking opportunities for jobs you are interested in. It is a great way to make connections and see whether a job or career field is a good fit. The goal of the meeting is not to ask for a job, but to learn.

### Benefits

- Learn about the professional's career field and what skills are needed. Most people like to share about what they do and are willing to give their time to others who are interested in learning.
- Learn how they moved into their chosen profession; previous roles, education, and training.
- Practice interviewing and active listening.
- Expand your network.
- Identify other people to talk to.

### How to set up an informational interview

- Identify the person you would like to contact.
- Call or email and ask to set up a 30 minute interview where you can learn about their job and their role.
  - Example email: Hi (their name). I am a social work student working at (work location). I am interested in learning more about the field of (list interest). I was wondering if you had 30 minutes in the next week or two to share with me about your job, how you got there, what skills are needed to be successful in the role.
- During the interview, make sure to stay within the 30 minutes time frame. If the person doesn't mind spending more time with you then let them make that call.
- After the interview send a thank you email letting them know how much you appreciated their time

### Example questions to ask

- Tell me about your job?
- What do you like best about your job?
- What is a challenging part of your job?
- How did you move into this role?
- How does one move into this field?
- or What is a pathway to get started in this field?
- What does a normal work day look like?
- What advice do you have for me?
- Is there anyone else I should talk to?

### What not to do

- Show up late.
- Take more time than you said you would.
- Not prepare enough questions.
- Ask how much they are paid. (Instead ask what the salary range is for a role/job)
- Ask if they are hiring.