

Current and Future Need for Bilingual Employees

Survey of Northern Illinois Employers

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NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

**Center for
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Executive Summary

An online survey was conducted June/July 2015 with northern Illinois employers to determine their current and future need for bilingual employees. A total of 244 employers completed the survey. Of these employers, 101 are businesses and 143 are nonprofit organizations.

Current and Future Importance to Employers That College Graduates are Bilingual

- The need among employers in the Northern Illinois region for bilingual college graduates is expected to rise in the next five years.
 - One out of three employers (34.4%) indicate it is important when hiring a recent college graduate for an open position in their organization that the individual communicate effectively in more than one language.
 - One out of two (49.0%) employers report that ***in five years from now*** it will be important when hiring a recent college graduate for an open position in their organization that the individual communicate effectively in more than one language.
- There are differences in the importance placed on bilingualism between the for-profit and nonprofit sectors.
 - Nonprofit organizations (54.2%) are more likely than businesses (41.4%) to believe that ***in five years from now*** it will be important when hiring a recent college graduate for an open position in their organization that the individual communicate effectively in more than one language.

Employers' Need for Bilingual Employees

- While most (89.3%) employers believe that bilingualism isn't critical to a college graduate's prospect for employment, they do see benefits that bilingual employees can deliver.
 - Seven out of ten (71.1%) employers think hiring recent college graduates who are bilingual will increase customer/client satisfaction or retention of customers/clients with specific language backgrounds.
 - Two out of three (65.1%) employers believe hiring recent college graduates who are bilingual will improve the competitiveness of their organization.

- Three out of five (58.8%) employers think hiring recent college graduates who are bilingual will attract new customer/client segments with specific language backgrounds to their organization.
- Additionally, about one-half or more of businesses believe that hiring college graduates who are bilingual will:
 - engage new suppliers or contractors with specific language backgrounds (59.0%),
 - enable the company to conduct business in other countries (51.5%), and
 - enable the company to expand business being conducted in other countries (48.5%).
- The top three languages considered useful by employers were Spanish, Polish, and Mandarin.
 - The majority of businesses (84.2%) and nonprofit organizations (86.0%) indicate Spanish is the most useful language to their organization. This finding tracks demographic trends in the region which show a significant growth in the Hispanic population over the past several years. (Survey respondents were asked to identify which languages are most useful to their organizations—with multiple responses permitted.)
 - One out of four (25.7%) businesses and more than one out of three (35.0%) nonprofit organizations report Polish is the most useful language to their organization.
 - Additionally, more than one out of five (22.8%) businesses state that Mandarin is the most useful language to their organization. This finding suggests that outreach to China is a growing priority for regional companies.

Methods by Which Universities Can Improve Bilingual Education

- Universities have an important role to play in providing bilingual education.
 - One out of two (50.9%) employers report that greater emphasis by universities on students' learning to communicate in more than one language is important to their organization's current and future needs.
 - More than two out of five (43.5%) employers that university provision of proficiency testing and certification in languages other than English is important to their organization's current and future needs.
 - Additionally, two-fifths or more of employers report that it is important to their organization's current and future needs that universities place greater emphasis on

service projects and internships in bilingual communities (42.4%) and have greater outreach to organizations seeking bilingual employees (39.6%).

Methodology

An online survey was conducted June/July 2015 with Northern Illinois employers, both businesses and nonprofit organizations, to determine employers' current and future need for bilingual employees. The topics covered in the survey included:

- current importance of college graduates being bilingual,
- future importance of college graduates being bilingual,
- extent to which college graduates exhibit bilingualism,
- employers' need for bilingual employees, and
- methods by which universities can improve bilingual education.

Similar questions were asked of both businesses and nonprofit organizations. Businesses were asked 38 questions and nonprofit organizations were asked 37 questions.

The questionnaire was pretested with 100 employers prior to the start of the study.

A stratified random sample of 4,800 employers, 2,700 businesses with 20 or more employees and 2,100 nonprofit organizations, located in Northern Illinois (north of Interstate 80) was obtained from Dunn & Bradstreet. The name, title, email address, and mailing addresses of the human resource director/manager or executive officer (CEO, President, Executive Director) of each business was obtained. The sample of businesses was stratified by size (small, medium, large) using number of employees. Small businesses were defined as having 20-499 employees, medium businesses were defined as having 500-999 employees, and large businesses were defined as having 1,000 or more employees. Medium and large businesses were oversampled.

On June 1, 2015 a personalized letter was mailed to the human resource director/manager or executive officer of each sampled employer inviting them to complete the survey. The letter explained the purpose of the study, how the results will be used, and the confidentiality of their responses. The letter also emphasized that even if bilingualism is not of interest to them that they should still fill out the survey so that a more complete picture of employment needs in the region can be obtained. The letter included the web address of the survey and a unique passcode to access the survey. The letter was signed by Douglas D. Baker, President of Northern Illinois University.

On June 10, 2015 all employers who had not yet responded to the survey were sent an email that explained the purpose of the study and included a unique link to the survey. On June 17th a reminder email was sent to those employers which had not completed the survey. Three additional reminder emails were sent to non-respondents. The survey closed on July 28, 2015.

At the end of the survey respondents could complete a separate online form for a chance to receive complimentary business and marketing services that NIU offers to external clients. Three employers were randomly selected to receive these services. Survey respondents were also sent a thank you email with a preview of the final results.

A total of 244 employers completed the survey. Of these employers, 101 were businesses and 143 were nonprofit organizations. A total of 148 employers (88 businesses and 60 nonprofit organizations) opted-out of participating in the study.

Findings

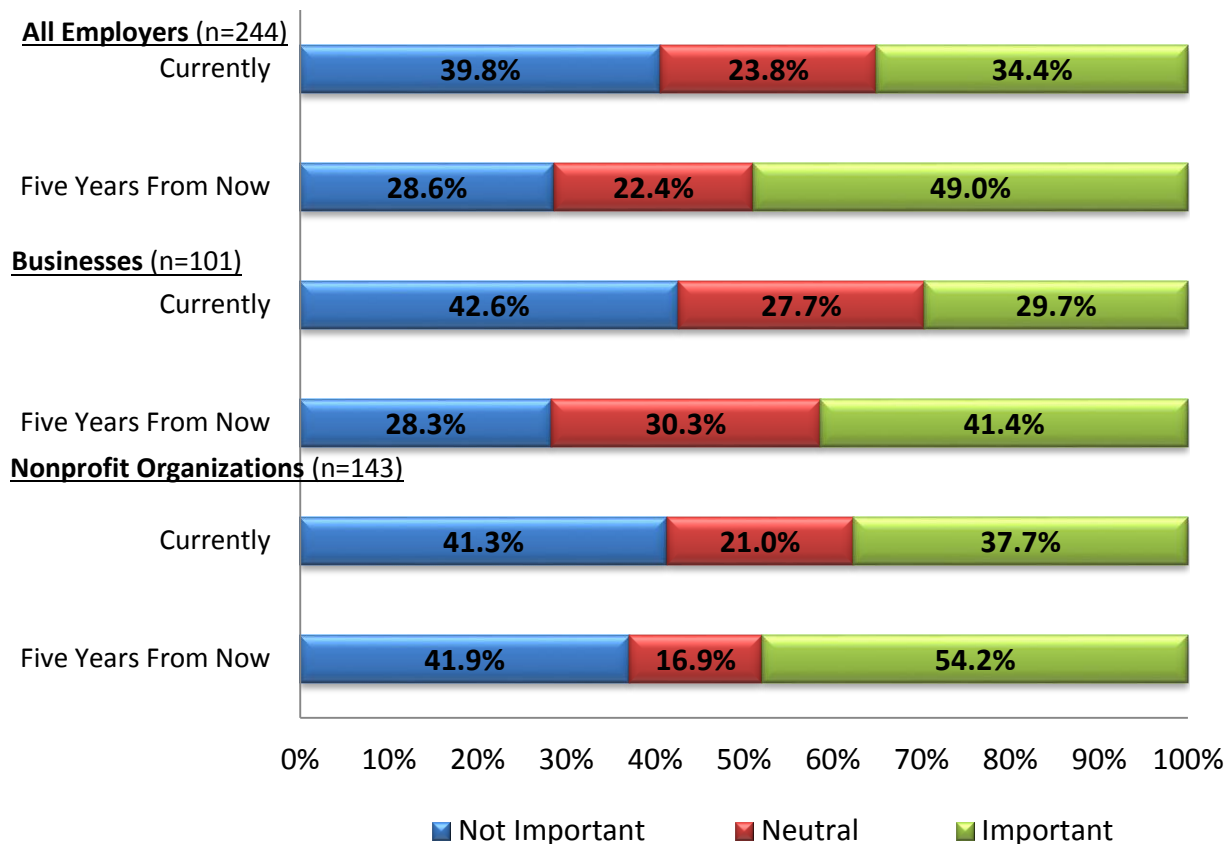
Current and Future Importance to Employers That College Graduates are Bilingual

The survey began with questions regarding the current and future importance to the employers that college graduates are bilingual and the extent to which college graduates applying for open positions in their organizations are bilingual.

All Employers

As shown in Figure 1, one out of three (34.4%) employers report it is important (rating of “4” or “5” on a 5-point scale) when hiring a recent college graduate for an open position in their organization that the individual communicate effectively in more than one language. When asked, “*In five years from now* when hiring a recent college graduate for an open position in your organization how important will it be that the individual communicate effectively in more than one language?” the percentage of employers indicating it will be important increases considerably, 14.6 percentage points, to 49.0%.

Figure 1. When Hiring a College Graduate Importance of Individual Being Bilingual



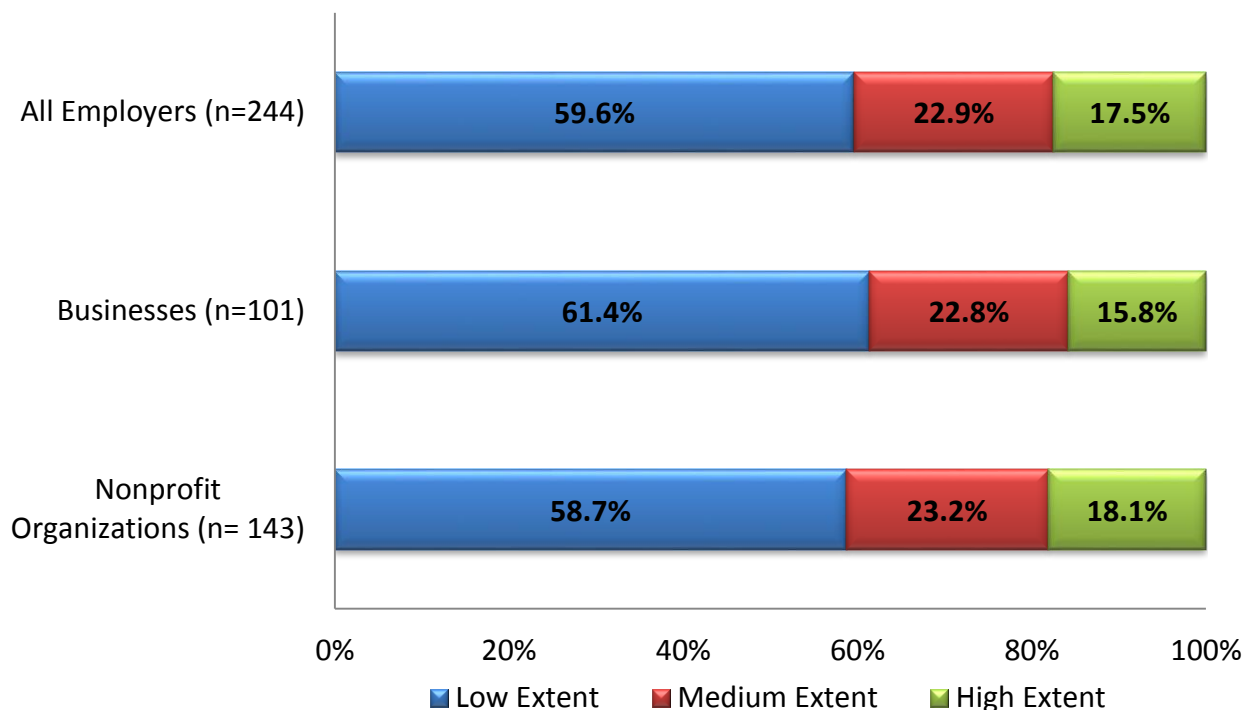
The majority (59.6%) of employers believe that recent college graduates applying for positions in their organization *do not* communicate effectively in more than one language (rating of “1” or “2” on a 5-point scale) (Figure 2).

Businesses

Three out of ten (29.7%) businesses state it is important when hiring a recent college graduate for an open position in their organization that the individual communicate effectively in more than one language. When asked “*in five years from now* when hiring a recent college graduate for an open position in your organization how important will it be that the individual communicate effectively in more than one language” the percentage of businesses reporting bilingualism will be important increases 11.7 percentage points to 41.4% (Figure 1).

The majority (61.4%) of businesses believe that recent college graduates applying for positions in their organization *do not* communicate effectively in more than one language (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Extent to Which Recent College Graduates Applying for Open Positions Communicate Effectively in More than One Language



Nonprofit Organizations

As shown in Figure 1, more than one-third (37.7%) of nonprofit organizations indicate it is important when hiring a recent college graduate for an open position in their organization that the individual communicate effectively in more than one language. More than one-half (54.2%) of nonprofit organizations believe that *in five years from now* it will be important when hiring a recent college graduate for an open position in their organization that the individual communicate effectively in more than one language; this is a 16.5 percentage points increase from the 37.7% of nonprofit organizations that think it is currently important to hire college graduates who are bilingual.

The majority (58.7%) of nonprofit organizations believe that recent college graduates applying for positions in their organization *do not* communicate effectively in more than one language (Figure 2).

Employers' Need for Bilingual Employees

Next, a set of questions were asked to determine employers current and future need for bilingual employees and the benefits to employers of hiring college graduates who are bilingual.

The majority (89.3%) (93.0%, businesses; 86.6% nonprofit organizations) of employers indicate that the ability to communicate effectively in more than one language is beneficial, but not a requirement when hiring staff for their organization (Table 1).

Approximately four out of five (78.1%) (71.0%, businesses; 83.1% nonprofit organizations) employers report that the ability to communicate effectively in more than one language is helpful for customer/client relations (Table 1).

Currently, businesses report that on average approximately 26.5% of their employees are bilingual and nonprofit organizations indicate on average approximately 15.6% of their employees are bilingual. As shown in Table 1, three out of five employers (62.0%) (61.6%, businesses; 62.2% nonprofit organizations) state they will need more staff in the next three years with the ability to communicate effectively in more than one language.

Table 1. Employers Current and Future Need for Bilingual Employees

Statement	Percent Agree With Statement		
	All Employers (n=244)	Businesses (n=101)	Nonprofit Organization (n=143)
The ability to communicate effectively in more than one language is beneficial, but not a requirement when hiring staff for our organization	89.3	93.0	86.6
The ability to communicate effectively in more than one language is helpful for customer/client relations	78.1	71.0	83.1
The ability to communicate effectively in more than one language is not required for our organization's work	69.0	82.0	59.9
Our organization will need more staff with the ability to communicate effectively in more than one language in the next three years	62.0	61.6	62.2
The ability to communicate effectively in more than one language assists staff with upward mobility within our organization	46.9	54.0	41.8
The ability to communicate effectively in more than one language is an essential core competency for our organization's work	24.7	21.0	27.5

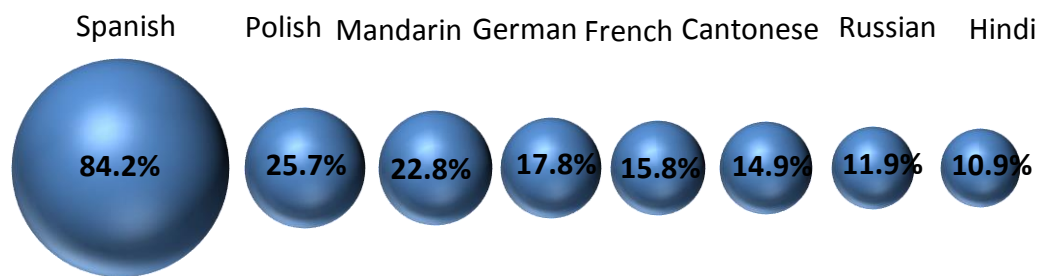
Languages Which Are Most Useful to Employers

Employers were asked to indicate the most useful languages to their organizations from a list of 19 languages. Figure 3 shows the top eight languages that are most useful to for-profit companies and nonprofit organizations. The majority of businesses (84.2%) and nonprofit organizations (86.0%) indicate Spanish is the most useful language to their organization. One out of four businesses (25.7%) and more than one out of three (35.0%) nonprofit organizations

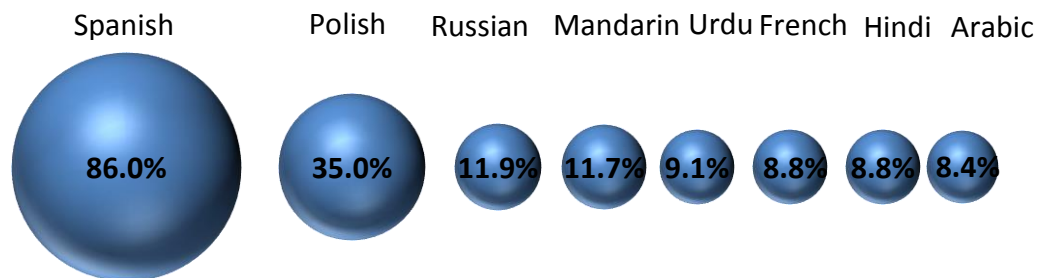
report Polish is the most useful language to their organization. Additionally, more than one out of five (22.8%) businesses state that Mandarin is the most useful language to their organization. A total of 5.9% businesses and 8.0% nonprofit organizations report that English is the only language that is useful to their organization.

Figure 3. Languages Which Are Most Useful to Employers

Businesses (n=101)



Nonprofit Organizations (n=143)



Perceived Benefits of Hiring Recent College Graduates Who Are Bilingual

The respondents were presented with seven potential benefits of hiring bilingual employees and were asked, “Do you agree or disagree that hiring recent college graduates with the ability to communicate in more than one language is likely to provide the following benefits to your organization?”

As shown in Table 2, seven out of ten (71.1%) employers (67.0%, businesses; 73.9%, nonprofit organizations) think hiring recent college graduates who are bilingual will increase customer/client satisfaction or retention of customers/clients with specific language backgrounds.

Two out of three (65.1%) employers (71.7%, businesses; 60.6%, nonprofit organizations) believe hiring recent college graduates who are bilingual will improve the competitiveness of their organization.

Three out of five (58.8%) employers (55.0%, businesses; 61.5%, nonprofit organizations) think hiring recent college graduates who are bilingual will attract new customer/client segments with specific language backgrounds to their organization.

Additionally, about one-half or more of businesses believe that hiring college graduates who are bilingual or multilingual will:

- engage new suppliers or contractors with specific language backgrounds (59.0%),
- enable the company to conduct business in other countries (51.5%), and
- enable the company to expand business being conducted in other countries (48.5%).

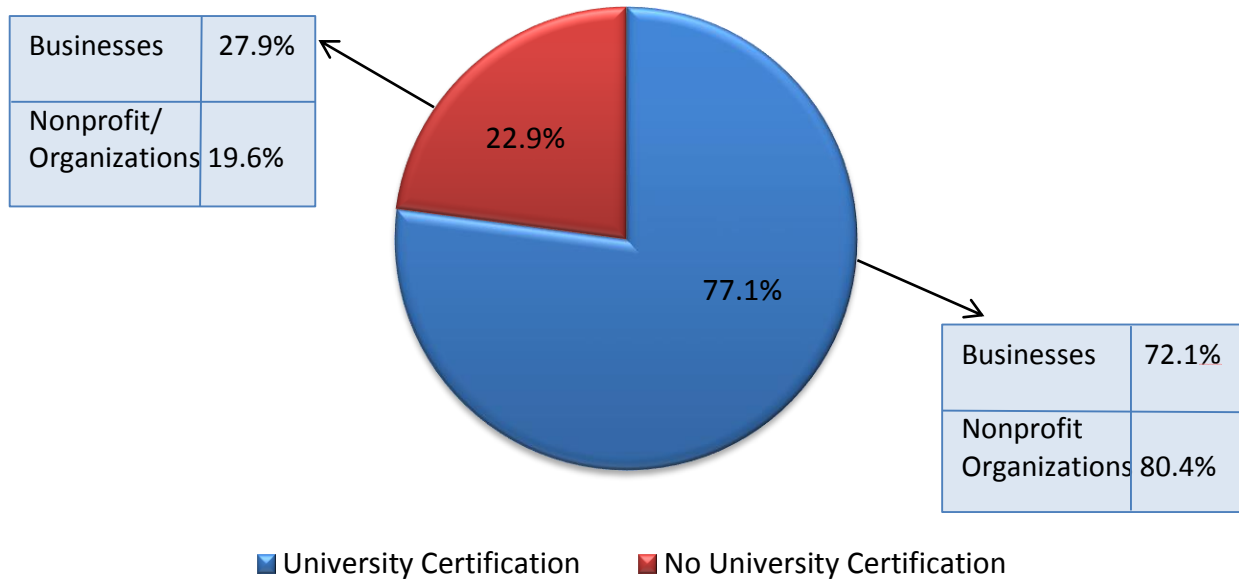
Table 2. Benefits to Employers of Hiring Recent College Graduates Who Are Bilingual

Benefit	Percent Agree		
	All Employers (n=244)	Businesses (n=101)	Nonprofit Organizations (n=143)
Increase customer/client satisfaction or retention of customers/clients with specific language backgrounds	71.1	67.0	73.9
Improve the competitiveness of your organization	65.1	71.7	60.6
Attract new customer/client segments with specific language backgrounds	58.8	55.0	61.5
Engage new suppliers or contractors with specific language backgrounds	39.2	59.0	28.6
Enable your organization to expand business being conducted in other countries/services offered in other countries	35.1	48.5	25.7
Enable your organization to conduct business/operate in other countries	33.8	51.5	21.0
Enable relocation of staff overseas	21.7	33.0	13.6

Preference for Hiring Bilingual College Graduates with University Certification

The respondents were asked when hiring for an open position in their organization which requires an individual to be bilingual whether they would be more favorably disposed to hire an individual who passed a proficiency test in the other language and has been certified by a university or an individual with no university certification. The majority (77.1%) of employers (72.1%, businesses; 80.4% nonprofit organizations) when hiring for an open position in their organization that requires an individual to be bilingual, would be more favorably disposed to hire an individual who passed a proficiency test in the other language and has been certified by a university than to hire an individual who has no university certification (Figure 4).

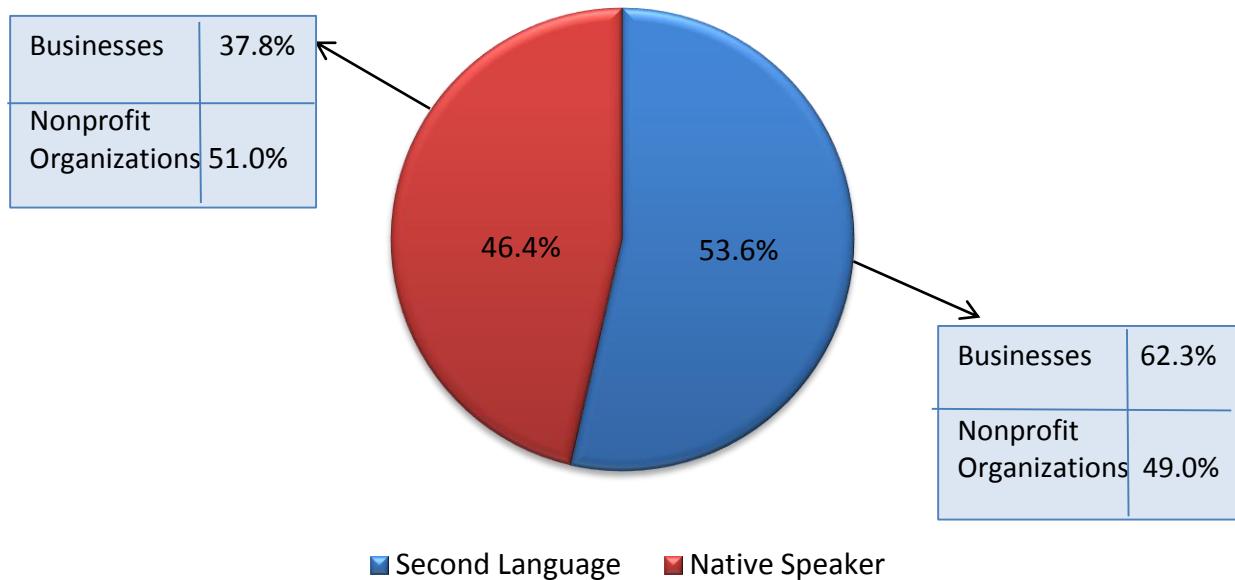
Figure 4. Preference for Hiring an Individual with University Certification or No University Certification for a Position That Requires an Individual Who Can Communicate Effectively in A Language Other Than English (n=180)



Preference for Hiring Bilingual College Graduates Who Are Native Speakers

The respondents were asked when hiring for an open position in their organization which requires an individual to be bilingual whether they would be more favorably disposed to hire an individual who is a native speaker of the other language or who has the other language as their second language. The majority (62.3%) of businesses when hiring for an open position in their organization that requires an individual to be bilingual, would be more favorably disposed to hire an individual who has the other language as their second language than to hire an individual who is a native speaker of the other language. Nonprofit organizations are divided on whether they would be more favorably disposed to hire an individual who has the other language as their second language (51.0%) than to hire an individual who is a native speaker of the other language (49.0%) (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Preference for Hiring an Individual Who is a Native Speaker of the Language or an Individual Who Has the Language as Their Second Language for a Position That Requires an Individual Who Can Communicate Effectively in A Language Other Than English (n=156)



Methods by Which Universities Can Improve Bilingual Education

Lastly, respondents were presented with a number of specific suggestions on how universities can improve bilingual education and they were asked how important each was to their organizations' current and future needs.

Table 3 shows that one-half (50.9%) of employers report that greater emphasis by universities on students' learning to communicate in more than one language is important to their organization's current and future needs. Nonprofit organizations (55.4%) are more likely than businesses (44.4%) to indicate that greater emphasis by universities on learning to communicate in more than one language is important to their organization's current and future needs.

More than two out of five (43.5%) (38.4%, businesses; 47.2% nonprofit organizations) employers state that university provision of proficiency testing and certification in languages other than English is important to their organization's current and future needs.

Additionally, two-fifths or more of employers report that it is important to their organization’s current and future needs that universities place greater emphasis on service projects and internships in bilingual communities (42.4%) and have greater outreach to organizations seeking bilingual employees (39.6%). Almost one-half (48.9%) of nonprofit organizations compared with 34.4% of businesses indicate it is important to their organization’s current and future needs that universities place greater emphasis on service projects and internships in bilingual or multilingual communities. A total of 44.7% of nonprofit organizations compared with 32.4% of businesses state it is important to their organization’s current and future needs that universities have greater outreach to organizations seeking bilingual employees.

Table 3. Importance to Employers’ Current and Future Needs of Suggestions to Improve Bilingual Education

Benefit	Percent Important		
	All Employers (n=244)	Businesses (n=101)	Nonprofit Organizations (n=143)
Greater emphasis on learning to communicate effectively in more than one language	50.9	44.0	55.4
Proficiency testing and certification in languages other than English	43.5	38.4	47.2
More emphasis on service projects and internships in bilingual	42.4	34.4	48.9
Greater outreach to businesses seeking bilingual employees	39.6	32.4	44.7
More emphasis on study abroad	32.0	32.7	31.5
Stronger international emphasis in core curriculum (e.g., courses on world areas/countries)	31.8	35.0	29.5
More emphasis on work experiences in countries outside the U.S.	26.7	27.0	26.4

Characteristics of Employers Which Completed the Survey

Businesses

The businesses which completed the survey represent a variety of industry sectors. The plurality (41.0%) of businesses report their industry sector as manufacturing. The majority of the businesses are privately owned (75.8%) and their company headquarters is in northern Illinois (86.9%). More than one-third (37.4%) of the businesses have offices located in countries outside the United States. More than two-fifths of businesses conduct business in Asia (42.7%) and/or Europe (45.8%) and more than one-third of businesses conduct business in Central America (37.5%) and/or South America (37.5%). Approximately one-half (51.5%) of the businesses have more than 500 employees. Almost one-half (48.0%) of the businesses report their total revenue as more than \$100 million. (See Table 4).

Table 4. Characteristics of Businesses Who Completed the Survey (n=99)

<u>Industry Sector</u>	Percent
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, and Hunting	2.0
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	2.0
Utilities	1.0
Construction	7.0
Manufacturing	41.0
Wholesale Trade	4.0
Retail Trade	3.0
Transportation and Warehousing	3.0
Information	6.0
Finance and Insurance	7.0
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	2.0
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	7.0
Management of Companies and Enterprises	0.0

Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	1.0
Educational Services	0.0
Health Care and Social Assistance	7.0
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	1.0
Accommodation and Food Services	2.0
Public Administration	0.0
Other Services	4.0
Don't Know	0.0
<u>Company Ownership</u>	
Privately Owned	75.8
Publicly Owned	21.2
Other	3.0
<u>Location of Company Headquarters</u>	
Northern Illinois	86.9
Southern Illinois	0.0
Other U.S. State	10.1
Country Outside the U.S.	3.0
<u>Locations of Company's Other Offices</u>	
Northern Illinois	36.4
Southern Illinois	8.1
Other U.S. State(s)	56.6
Country/Countries Outside the U.S.	37.4
No Other Offices	20.2
<u>Regions of the World that the Company Does Business In</u>	
North America	100.0

Central America	37.5
South America	37.5
Caribbean	22.9
Asia	42.7
Europe	45.8
Africa	25.0
Australia/New Zealand	29.2
Melanesia	7.3
Micronesia	7.3
Polynesia	7.3
Other	5.2
<u>Total Number of Employees</u>	
20-49	5.1
50-99	11.1
100-500	31.3
501-999	8.1
1,000-1,999	6.1
2,000-2,999	9.1
3,000-3,999	4.0
4,000-4,999	3.0
5,000 or more	21.2
Don't Know	1.0
<u>Total Revenue from Most Recent Completed Fiscal Year</u>	
More than \$1 million to \$7 million	7.5
More than \$7 million to \$50 million	24.4
More than \$50 million to \$100 million	16.9

More than \$100 million to \$500 million	16.0
More than \$500 million to \$1 billion	9.6
More than \$1 billion to \$10 billion	14.9
More than \$10 billion to \$50 billion	6.4
More than \$50 billion	1.1
Don't Know	3.2

The average percentage of revenue from international sources for the businesses responding to the survey is 15.2%. However, 51.1% of businesses believe their revenue from international sources will increase in the next five years.

Nonprofit Organizations

The nonprofit organizations which completed the survey represent a variety of organization types, including social service organizations, government entities, schools/colleges/universities, public charities, private foundations, and membership organizations/professional associations/trade associations. Also, the nonprofit organizations have a variety of focuses or activities they provide. The main office of the majority (93.4%) of the nonprofit organizations is located in Northern Illinois and 64.9% of nonprofit organizations have a main office only. A total of 55.4% of nonprofit organizations report their service area is local, 16.8% of nonprofit organizations indicate their service area is regional within Illinois, and 11.0% of nonprofits organizations state their service area is international. The majority (68.3%) of the organizations have less than 100 employees. Most organizations (68.1%) report their total operating budget as less than 10 million. (See Table 5).

Table 5. Characteristics of Nonprofit Organizations Who Completed the Survey (n=141)

<u>Organization Type</u>	Percent
Public Charity	12.2
Private Foundation	2.3
Social Service	27.3
Membership Organization/Professional Association/Trade Association	8.6

School/College/University	11.5
Government Entity	20.1
Other	18.0
<u>Primary Focus or Activity of Organization</u>	
Arts, Culture, and Humanities	4.4
Education	23.7
Environment	1.5
Animal-Related	0.7
Health Care	5.2
Mental Health and Crisis Intervention	5.9
Voluntary Health Associations and Medical Disciplines	0.7
Medical Research	0.7
Crime and Legal-Related	1.5
Employment	0.0
Food, Agriculture, and Nutrition	3.0
Housing and Shelter	2.2
Public Safety, Disaster Preparedness, and Relief	3.7
Recreation and Sports	1.5
Youth Development	2.2
Human Services	16.3
International, Foreign Affairs, and National Security	0.7
Civil Rights, Social Action, and Advocacy	3.0
Community Involvement and Capacity Building	3.7
Philanthropy, Voluntarism, and Grantmaking Foundations	3.0
Science and Technology	2.2
Social Science	0.0

Public and Societal Benefit	6.7
Religion-Related	3.0
Mutual and Membership-Benefit	1.5
Don't Know	3.0
<u>Location of Organization's Main Office</u>	
Northern Illinois	93.4
Southern Illinois	1.5
Other U.S. State	4.4
Country Outside the U.S.	0.7
<u>Location of Organization's Other Offices</u>	
Northern Illinois	22.4
Southern Illinois	4.5
Other U.S. State(s)	10.5
Country/Countries Outside the U.S.	6.0
Organization has No Other Offices	64.9
<u>Service Area of Organization</u>	
Local	55.4
Regional within Illinois	16.8
Illinois	5.8
Multi-state	6.6
National	4.4
International	11.0
<u>Total Number of Employees</u>	
0-9	20.8
10-19	12.2
20-49	17.3

50-99	18.0
100-249	10.8
250-499	7.2
500-999	7.2
1,000-1,999	2.2
2,000-2,999	1.4
3,000 or more	2.9
<u>Total Operating Budget for Most Recent Completed Fiscal Year</u>	
Less than \$500,000	15.6
\$500,000 to less than \$1 million	11.9
\$1 million to less than \$10 million	40.6
\$10 million to less than \$20 million	6.7
\$20 million to less than \$30 million	5.2
\$30 million to less than \$40 million	2.2
\$40 million to less than \$50 million	1.5
\$50 million or more	12.6
Don't Know	3.7

The average number of clients the organizations who responded to the survey serve is 212,487. On average, the percentage of bilingual clients the organizations have is 24.7%. However, a total of 52.2% of the organizations believe they will serve a greater number of bilingual clients in the next five years.

Conclusions

The need among employers in the Northern Illinois region for bilingual college graduates is expected to rise in the next five years. While one-third (34.4%) of employers currently are seeking to hire bilingual college graduates, that proportion is expected to rise to as much as half (49.0%) of regional employers in the next five years.

There are differences in the importance placed on bilingualism between the for-profit and nonprofit sectors. More than four in ten (41.4 %) businesses predict that five years from now, bilingualism will be an important criterion for employment, while more than half of nonprofit organizations (54.2 %) feel the same way.

While most (89.3%) employers believe that bilingualism isn't critical to a college graduate's prospect for employment, they do see benefits that bilingual employees can deliver. For example, more than seven in ten employers (71.1%) believe communicating effectively in more than one language can be helpful for enhancing retention or satisfaction of customers or clients with specific language backgrounds and two in three employers (65.1%) believe communicating effectively in more than one language can be improve the competitiveness of their organization.

Additionally, about one-half or more of businesses believe that hiring college graduates who are bilingual will:

- Engage new suppliers or contractors with specific language backgrounds (59 percent);
- Enable the company to conduct business in other countries (51.5 percent); and
- Enable the company to expand business being conducted in other countries (48.5 percent)

When asked to choose among a list of languages that would be most useful to their organization, the overwhelming number cited Spanish (84.2 percent nonprofit organizations and 86.0% percent businesses). This finding tracks demographic trends in the region which show a significant growth in the Hispanic population over the past several years.

The next most useful language cited was Polish, followed by Mandarin Chinese. The latter suggests that outreach to China is a growing priority for regional companies.

Universities have an important role to play in providing bilingual education. This is supported by the survey finding that more than two out of five (43.5 percent) employers believe it is important for universities to provide proficiency testing and certification in languages other than English.

Employers also believe that universities should provide engaged learning opportunities to students in bilingual communities (42.4%) and greater outreach to organizations seeking bilingual employees (39.6%).