Latinos en MBA

Leveraging an MBA for career success

By Tara García Mathewson

Cynthia Ponce graduated with an MBA and almost immediately qualified for a promotion. She didn’t know it would happen so quickly, but she knew the Master’s in Business Administration would be good for her career.

Ponce studied accounting as an undergrad and spent the first decade or so of her career focusing on financials. When she started considering business school programs, she wanted something that was going to develop new expertise. The standard MBA, in the end, opened up a diverse curriculum with information about all aspects of business.

“The well roundedness of the program, to me, it made more sense for my career path,” Ponce said.

And the accelerated program at Northern Illinois University’s College of Business, a one year MBA, turned out to be the perfect fit.

Ponce, who graduated from NIU in 2014, has a 21 year old daughter and a 7 year old son along with a very supportive husband, all of whom committed to her course of study and made possible the balancing act of work, school and family. Her employer, Elkay Manufacturing, also played a role in Ponce’s success. The company covered a portion of her tuition and made its own commitment to accommodating the demands of being a working student.

One of Ponce’s key pieces of advice to anyone considering a graduate program is to make sure family members are fully on board. During NIU’s yearlong program, which has twice per week evening classes and requires additional evening and weekend work, Ponce spent a lot of time away from home.

“It is a really big commitment to go back to school and dedicate the amount of hours you have to dedicate,” Ponce said.

But, in the end, finishing her degree was worth it. A position opened up at Elkay Manufacturing just a month after Ponce graduated, giving her the opportunity to move up from being a financial reporting manager to the finance manager of the entire business unit.

Long Term, Ponce’s goal with her MBA is simply to put the coursework to use. She wants to make sure she takes what she learned and applies it to the work she is doing now and in the future. That means holding onto the insights she gleaned about how the various parts of a business fit into a cohesive whole.

“It was really a stepping stone for me to get a better understanding of business and all the intricacies of all the different areas,” Ponce said.

One other piece of advice, though, is to wait on business school until getting at least a few years of work experience. Some business schools do not even accept students straight out of college, and Ponce agrees with the rationale. Classrooms of people with diverse business backgrounds adds to the overall experience. And the frame of reference that workplace experience provides is invaluable.
Earning your MBA from NIU gains you more than just a degree. You graduate with an expanded professional network, robust communication and interpersonal skills, and most importantly the confidence to succeed in business. It’s a life-changing experience at NIU.

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