

Investing in Equity

Rice University is located in Houston, Texas, which due to its proximity to Mexico, Central and South America, makes the city a cultural melting pot for many diverse Latino-based populations. Rice's Kinder Institute for Urban Research monitors Houston's growing and diverse population and found that in 2008 the city's Latino population outgrew the Anglo population. Rice has also seen an uptick in recent years of Latino students and employees.



A group of Latino employees at Rice University listen to a presentation on saving for retirement.

With this increase in Latino employees, it came to the attention of Rice's benefits administrators that this population was lagging behind the general employee population in two areas: retirement savings and wellness. Rice's human resources organization promptly set out to discover why this was and how to remedy the situation.

Retirement Savings

Rice identified the need to target its Latino employee population in 2003 after noticing lower participation rates and awareness of financial planning and worked to develop targeted programs to help penetrate cultural and language barriers. These programs are still continuing and even expanding as the university builds on this population's trust and successes.

"Our efforts started internally, offering benefits and other HR information both orally and written in Spanish," says Elaine Britt, director of benefits and compensation at Rice

University. "Some of our techniques evolved over time as we learned the specific preferences of this population." For example, it was quickly realized among Rice's benefits team that the Latino population generally prefers oral communication for discussing personal issues like money and health. "They prefer to form a relationship with an individual and once they trust that person, they then trust their word," says Britt. "This is very different from the usual *modus operandi*, as our non-Latino population tends to prefer written communication over an oral discussion and usually wants things documented and in writing for their records."

The benefits team then partnered with outside vendors to implement Spanish-specific programs and materials for Rice's Latino staff members, including biannual retirement planning seminars and one-on-one sessions with financial advisors held on campus and presented in Spanish. Other targeted campaigns include Spanish-language posters/flyers; e-mails to supervisors and communication through word of mouth and supervisor endorsement of the sessions; in-person talks to targeted groups; and working with management to authorize time off from work duties for employees to attend programs.

Thanks to the benefits team's targeted retirement savings communications, Rice's Latino employee population is better educated on the nuances of saving for the future (some of these staff members were not even aware that Rice was providing funds toward their retirement, and now they are not only managing these funds, but also saving their own funds toward their retirement goals). Additionally, as a result of the program, savings rates have increased among the institution's Latino employees. In fact, Rice's Latino population is now exceeding the non-Latino population in participation in the institution's voluntary 403(b) program.

Health and Wellness

Armed with data finding that Hispanics/Latinos are almost twice as likely as non-Hispanic whites to be diagnosed with diabetes, Rice's benefits team also targeted the university's Latino employees for diabetic education, including measuring blood glucose, and education on healthy eating and lifestyle changes to

inclusion cultivates excellence

manage and prevent Type II diabetes. Through this initiative, 23 percent of Rice's Latino employee population was identified as either diabetic (and unaware that they had an ongoing health issue) or pre-diabetic.

Thanks to the diabetes program, the benefits team, in partnership with the university's wellness provider, was able to intervene and assist this population in managing blood sugar and improving overall health. In addition, the university's health risk assessments are now offered in Spanish.

Enabling Success

When thinking about the ways diversity, equity and inclusion are encouraged in higher education, recruitment efforts are often top of mind. However, the success of employees once they are part of an institution also needs to be considered. The health and financial

wellbeing of faculty and staff members are critical to their job performance and therefore their success, and in the long run, critical also to the success of the institution.

"The targeting of health and financial programs to Rice's Latino population has engendered a greater sense of loyalty to the university among these employees," concludes Britt. "These staff members now know that Rice truly cares about their personal health and wellbeing. At the end of the day, we simply want these employees to have the same chance for success as our non-Latino employees, and now that we are speaking their language, literally, this helps to level the playing field." 

For its Latino-targeted benefits and wellness initiatives, Rice University received CUPA-HR's 2012 Inclusion Cultivates Excellence Award.

Inclusion Cultivates Excellence Award

This CUPA-HR award recognizes and celebrates institutional initiatives and programs that have made a significant impact with respect to inclusive and equitable workplace practices, particularly those that have brought about cultural change throughout the organization. The institution selected for the award receives a \$5,000 contribution to its endowment, thanks to the generous support of PeopleAdmin.

In addition to Rice University, several other institutions were nominated for this year's Inclusion Cultivates Excellence Award. The commitment of these institutions and the work they're doing to foster a diverse, inclusive and equitable workforce in higher education is an inspiration.

Auburn University – Diversity Initiative: Diversity Strategic Plan
Central Michigan University – Excellence Through Inclusion
Duquesne University – Minority Development Internship Program
Johns Hopkins University – Campus Conversations on Diversity and Inclusion
Maricopa Community College District – MOSAIC: Maximizing Our Strengths as an Inclusive Community
Miami Dade College – Diversity Commitment
Raritan Valley Community College – HR Professional Development Diversity Initiatives
University of Central Florida – Leadership Enhancement Program
University of Kentucky – Humanity Academy and UK@Work
University of Virginia – Office of Equal Opportunity Programs
Valencia College – Circles of Belonging