

AdvertisingAge®

WANT TO FIX THE DIVERSITY PROBLEM? START WITH THE COLLEGES

The Multicultural Population Grows in Numbers and Buying Power, but Advertising Courses Don't Reflect This

Published: July 31, 2012



Edward T. Rincón

Is the advertising community prepared to address the needs of a multicultural America? I wonder, especially considering the stubborn reluctance of industry stakeholders to embrace the opportunities of multicultural campaigns.

We see sparse hiring of minorities, along with poor retention rates of blacks and Hispanics at large advertising agencies and a lag in proportionate spending on multicultural campaigns, despite evidence of their return on investment.

What is behind this industry reluctance? Many things, perhaps, but certainly one factor is the role played by U.S. academic institutions.

Over the past 30 years, I have conducted numerous studies of multicultural consumers as well as taught courses on related topics at four Dallas-area universities. Following are some insights I have gleaned:

- Fewer than five academic programs in the United States offer a degree or coursework related to multicultural consumer behavior. Florida State University has the best model of multicultural education with undergraduate, graduate, certificate and online programs.
- Most business schools focus their curriculum on global markets whose economic and social instability help to drive immigrants to the United States for a better quality of life. Do schools see the irony?
- The typical business curriculum, including textbooks, gives only passing reference to the importance or presence of multicultural consumers. Other academic departments, such as history, foreign languages, sociology and education have traditionally shown more leadership in this regard.
- Business schools employ few faculty members from U.S. multicultural communities who could offer students important insights about these consumers, and serve on thesis or dissertation committees to support their research interests.
- Knowledge of U.S. Latinos among college students is fragile. I developed and administered a 20-item multiple-choice test to measure knowledge of U.S. Latinos to a non-scientific sample of 151 college students, including 49 Hispanics and 102 non-Hispanics. Students showed minimal to modest knowledge regarding U.S. Latinos in regard to ethnic identity, demographics and research insights. (You can try the [Test of Latino Culture](#) online to see how you do.)

Clearly, academic institutions could play a more prominent role in the multicultural industry. Following are ideas that they should consider:

- Reach out to local business and multicultural communities to discuss their expectations regarding multicultural content.
- Offer multicultural courses related to advertising, marketing, public relations and research methods.
- Business schools, in particular, should recruit more U.S.-born black, Hispanic and Asian faculty who can offer students key insights from their U.S. experiences.
- Online courses on multicultural topics should be offered to reach out to a broader base of learners. A short-term certificate program on multicultural consumers should be offered for professionals who want to expand their skill set in this area.
- Libraries need to be expanded with multicultural studies, books and case studies that can supplement the classroom experience. Book publishers should be encouraged to diversify their content in traditional textbooks beyond global topics.
- Students and faculty members should be encouraged to conduct studies that focus on multicultural consumer behavior.

The U.S. multicultural population grew from 79.3 million in 2000 to 102.7 million in 2010. We're not talking about small potatoes here: trillions in buying power. Really, what are the colleges and universities waiting for?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Edward T. Rincón is President, Rincón & Associates.

Copyright © 1992-2012 [Crain Communications](#) | [Privacy Statement](#) | [Contact Us](#)