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DePaul degree puts new focus on Hispanics

Major helps students meet corporate need to reach the diverse Latino marketplace

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When trying to woo Latino clients to buy car insurance or apply for a [bank loan](#), Joanna Serrano has learned a few key strategies: Speak in formal Spanish, focus on gaining a client's trust and emphasize family security above all else.

Serrano, a DePaul University senior and intern at State Farm Insurance Co., will graduate this spring with skills that could make her the envy of other marketing majors scrambling to get jobs. She will be among the first DePaul students to graduate with a [degree](#) in Hispanic marketing, only the second program of its kind nationally and one that underscores the influence of the country's fastest-growing ethnic group.

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"You need to be educated specifically about the Hispanic marketplace to market to this group," said Serrano, a business school student from Cicero whose parents are from Mexico. "This program came right on time for me."

The [university](#) recently printed brochures to advertise the new major, and a kickoff event will be held this month. Seniors who complete the requirements could graduate with the degree, which

falls under the College of Commerce's marketing department, as early as spring. Some of the required classes have been offered over the last few semesters, but they had not been grouped together as a concentration until recently.

The new program comes as corporate America increasingly devotes marketing dollars toward reaching Latino consumers, who by 2010 are predicted to represent 11 percent of U.S. buying power, or \$1 trillion a year, according to Hispanic Business Inc.

DePaul marketing professor Steve Kelly said faculty members began discussing such a program after local business executives said they need graduates who understand the complexity of the diverse Latino market, which accounts for nearly all the recent population growth in the Chicago area. Nearly 30 percent of Chicago residents and 15 percent of state residents identify themselves as Latino, according to the U.S. census.

Students will learn that there are some general characteristics that can guide marketing to Latinos, such as playing up a focus on family, and that, more important, companies need to realize that a singular approach does not fit all Latino consumers. Preferences can change based on lifestyle, country of origin and amount of time in the United States, experts said.

"What these students will have is a thorough knowledge of the differences in Hispanic cultures," said Kelly, the program's director. "Marketers, time and time again, make mistakes of not knowing their market."

The DePaul program, called Multicultural Marketing-Hispanic Marketplace, will be offered as a major and a minor for students interested in marketing, advertising, sales and communications. In addition to general marketing classes, students must take courses in commercial Spanish language, business communications and Hispanic markets and culture. They also must complete an internship with a company that markets to Latinos.

Students will be expected to learn how to target an advertising campaign to Latino customers, including researching the audience, choosing the media approach, making the message culturally relevant and evaluating its effectiveness. Among the first lessons: It is not enough to translate an ad into Spanish and add a Latin soundtrack.

The classes will emphasize that the Latino market is not homogeneous and what might work for a Mexican consumer who has lived in the United States for many years will not work for a new immigrant from Argentina.

"To more effectively address the Latino market, you need to know those differences and similarities," said Luis Larrea, who is teaching Marketing Across Cultures: A Latin Perspective. "Some phrases or words that are used in one country are just viewed differently in others."

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In 2004, Florida State University in Tallahassee became the first university to offer a Hispanic

marketing specialty, and a few colleges offer a single course on the topic. Felipe Korzenny, who started the Florida State program, said Latino consumers are different enough to warrant the specialization.

"There are differences that are strong enough, and profitable enough, that there needs to be a dedicated effort," said Korzenny, author of "Hispanic Marketing: A Cultural Perspective."

At Northbrook-based insurer Allstate Corp., a marketing group specializes in reaching Latino consumers, and the company sponsors events such as the Latin Grammy Awards, said marketing manager Gioia Giannotti Frye. In promoting one of its insurance products, ads directed at Latino consumers put a greater emphasis on safe-driving incentives, Frye said.

George San Jose, whose Chicago advertising company specializes in the Latino market, said there is high demand for graduates with a background in the growing field.

His company, the San Jose Group, was behind a successful ad campaign for ATA Airlines Inc., which had failed to attract Latino passengers to its winter ticket sales promotion that emphasized vacation as a way to get away from it all. San Jose found that Latino travelers were more motivated by the desire to visit family and friends than escapism, and he altered the Spanish-language ads to reflect that.

"We put a different spin on it," he said. "It gave the airline credibility with Hispanics."

He said he hopes students will study successful campaigns from the past, as well as misguided efforts that were doomed from the start.

"The demand in the Midwest is huge for Hispanic students, or any type of student, who understands Hispanic marketing and advertising," he said. "If you don't address [Hispanics], you will soon be out of business."
