
Rice University's Glasscock School of Continuing Studies Drives Enrollment Gains Through Research and Marketing



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The Challenge:

Creating a transparent and scalable marketing model that meets the changing needs of continuing studies

The Susanne M. Glasscock School of Continuing Studies magnifies the power of Rice University’s research, innovation, and teaching by making elite education accessible and applicable to non-traditional learners in the 21st-century knowledge economy. As learning moves from a one-time event to a lifetime commitment, the President of Rice University gave Dean Robert Bruce the charge to find new access points and opportunities that meet the needs of Houstonians.

Closely in tune with the changing composition and needs of the vibrant city that surrounds Rice University, the Susanne M. Glasscock School needed to take an increasingly holistic look at how society and the workforce market is changing, how they could respond to the future of Houston and how to best market the deep University portfolio of ever-changing offerings.

To lead this effort, the dean hired a new head of marketing who would create a “turnkey” model that created value for the 300 offerings within the Glasscock School but also non-credit offerings across the University, thus positioning the Glasscock School as a hub for non-traditional learning outreach. The model would involve using data-backed decision-making about where to invest in and expand program offerings, and a replicable strategy for increasing enrollment.

Enlisting Help from Marketing Experts

Recognizing this task would require significant resources and external assistance, the Glasscock School team decided to partner with a third party to help identify opportunities for programming investment, to raise awareness about Rice within its target demographics, and to drive

incremental enrollment growth. After evaluating several potential vendors, the Glasscock School selected Blackboard for the company’s experience and expertise in higher education marketing and enrollment.

A Foundation for Data-Backed Decision-Making

Results: Blackboard Student Success and the Glasscock School decided to focus first on the school’s professional studies programs, with the goal of providing a proof of concept that could later be replicated across the school and University. The Blackboard team started by conducting comprehensive market research to home in on the target audiences for both Rice University and the Glasscock School, assess the demand for professional studies in the Houston area, and understand the competitive landscape





in order to identify key differentiators to help Rice stand out. This work included:

- **Primary research** including a customized survey administered to 400+ working professionals in the Houston area.
- **Secondary research** including in-depth competitive analysis, audience segmentation, and program landscape trends.

Equipped with these insights, the Glasscock School team can now make data-driven decisions about the best program areas for ongoing investment and future launch opportunities.

Lead Generation and Nurturing

This research also served as a foundation for a comprehensive lead-generation and engagement campaign of targeted outreach to key audiences in order to increase program registrations. After reviewing the client's current marketing practices, the Blackboard Student Success and the Glasscock School teams identified an opportunity to expand engagement with prospective students ("leads") at each stage of the decision cycle—from initial interest, through registration, and beyond.

Working closely with the Glasscock School team and drawing on the market and audience research, Blackboard developed a replicable strategy for expanding the lead pool for professional studies programs, engaging with leads with the right messages sent at the right time through multiple channels, and ultimately converting leads into paid registrations.

- **Expanding the lead pool:** Blackboard Student Success developed and implemented a 15-month media plan focused on conversion marketing. Creative deliverables included a program-specific microsite, text and display advertising, and retargeting campaigns.
- **Nurturing and engagement:** To help convert new leads into registrations, Blackboard developed a customized communications plan that followed best practices for marketing e-commerce-style courses and certificate programs. The plan segmented prospects based on their stage in the decision process, recommended messaging and timing for each touchpoint, and identified triggers for when a prospect should be moved from one stage of the messaging funnel to the next. Blackboard Student Success also executed an engagement campaign aimed at Blackboard-generated leads who had not yet registered for a fall class. Outreach included calls from live agents, one-way SMS messages, and recorded voicemail.

Early Success

Though still in the early stages, the campaign has already surpassed the higher end goal across all of Blackboard's original projections. Key performance indicators through just six months of the planned 15-month campaign include:

- **87%** to goal of projected interest in program offerings
- **93%** to goal of projected information session sign-ups
- **141%** to goal of projected registrations

Based on media spend and registration to date, the campaign generated a 1.9x return on investment.

Summary

By coupling data and insights from research into a strategic marketing and media plan, Blackboard and Rice University's Glasscock School of Continuing Studies have successfully increased awareness of the school within its target demographics, significantly expanded its lead pool, and developed an effective approach for nurturing leads through the decision cycle.

By collaborating with Blackboard Student Success, the Glasscock School was able to meet its challenge of creating a replicable model for expanding revenue by launching new program offerings and growing enrollment—ultimately allowing the university to continue its mission of providing accessible and affordable programming to the Houston community.

“Blackboard took their expertise in the education space, listened to our challenges, and developed an approach that met the unique, ever-changing needs of our non-traditional students. Their team has added significant capacity to our small marketing department, allowing us to quickly respond to opportunities in the rapidly changing landscape of higher education.”

Kara Eldersveld, Director of Marketing and Communications at the Glasscock School

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