

The Road to Inclusive Excellence

By Antonio Farias, Director of Diversity, USCGA

We are facing a national crisis. The National Academies of Engineering and Science have stated that it requires a concerted, long term, and deliberate plan to reach into the untapped potential in underrepresented minority populations if we are to emerge from the crisis in science, technology, engineering, and math that threatens our way of life as Americans.¹ In order to “rise above this gathering storm,” the U.S. Coast Guard Academy has committed itself to joining forces with experienced partners, such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), the National Naval Officers Association (NNOA), the Association of Naval Sea Officers (ANSO), and the Connecticut-based College of Technology, to provide the most effective leadership workforce to meet the safety, security, and stewardship demands of our Nation. Appreciating an environment that is inclusive of diversity is paramount to creating this workforce and the Academy’s Community of Inclusion diversity strategy is an important step in the right direction.

As the Dean of Academics, Dr. Kurt Colella (CAPT, ret) likes to say,

“It’s all about vectors – direction and magnitude.” Without a strategy (direction) and leadership (magnitude), diversity stagnates, leading initially to a culture of ‘me’ rather than ‘we,’ which is the bedrock of unit cohesion in military service. The core mission of the Academy remains rock solid – develop young women and men for service to the American people, but boy, the American people are changing, as they always have, forcing its Guardians to adapt to the complexity that comes from serving an increasingly pluralistic and demographically rich citizenry.

As a result, the Academy is implementing a cascading Community of Inclusion diversity strategy. Diversity is a collective experience driven by our institutional mission of developing leaders of character and is supported by a multiplicity of perspectives that only a demographically rich population can produce. In order for diversity to work and provide us the educational benefits necessary in developing young minds, our efforts will rely on a variety of actions to create this Community of Inclusion. It will require taking deliberate

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It’s a Family Thing

By Antonio Farias

Cadets from the Compañeros Council recently invited CAPT James Rendon to be the guest speaker at the Academy’s Latino Heritage Month luncheon. As he walked into the room, he was struck by the diverse gathering – a far cry from his days as a cadet, and a prime example of what inclusion looks like as practiced by this emerging generation of future officers. He addressed a capacity crowd of cadets, faculty, and staff at the Officer’s Club.

Asked why an officer’s heritage is important to the Coast Guard, CAPT Rendon replied, “If you Google ‘Hispanic Culture’ you’ll see a lot of reference to Hispanic family values. The familia is a

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L-R: Michael J. Rendon, ICE (brother); CAPT Richard A. Rendon, USCG (ret) (brother); Ms. Margaret A. Storey, FAA (sister); Mr. John Rendon, Jr, USAF (ret) (father); Mrs. Madeline C. Rendon, USAF (ret) (mother); CAPT James E. Rendon, USCG; CDR John C. Rendon, USCG (brother)

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close-knit group and the most important social unit, though the term familia goes beyond the nuclear family. The Hispanic 'family unit' includes not only parents and children, but also extended family, friends and neighbors – people looking out for people, sacrificing so that the next generation reaches higher levels of excellence without forgetting their roots. Individuals within a familia have a moral responsibility to aid other members of the family experiencing difficulties. Familias gather to celebrate holidays, birthdays, baptisms, graduations, instilling in their children the importance of honor, dignity, work-ethic, service, pride, good manners, and respect for authority."

Discrediting the myth that there are not enough talented Latinos out there, CAPT Rendon is quick to point out that his family is not the exception, but rather an example of Latinos across the United States. "I so much admire my parent's work ethic and commitment to providing me, mis hermanos y hermana the best chance to succeed in life. They are an example to follow, in terms of their parenting, in terms of their service to family, community, and Nation. My mom & dad completed a combined 65 years of Civil-Service in the U.S. Air Force, all the while raising and supporting their familia."

Latino culture pays it forward, and it does so with a tempered sense of humility and pride, as evidenced by CAPT Rendon's comments, "Regarding government service, we learned it from our parents, my sister with 35 years at the FAA, my older brother, 30 plus years w/Army/Border Patrol/ Special Agent w/ INS, my other brother, USCGA, Class of 81, now Captain (ret), younger brother, USCGA Class of 88, now Commander (ret), and his son, a member of the proud Class of 2014. There's also a cousin, Class of 92, an active duty Commander, and a nephew who went astray, chose the Air Force Academy, and now an AF pilot. And I, well, I'm Class of 83 and still loving life in uniform, paying a debt to a nation I love, and a familia that taught me we're all in this together. My family is rather typical, as Hispanic families place great importance on certain values: honor, dignity, work-ethic, and service."

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steps, such as the difficult dialogues on race, gender, and sexual orientation the Academy community is undertaking. It will require a truthful assessment of past barriers, such as the relatively new entrance of women and underrepresented minorities. I say relatively new when one considers what 40 years means in the larger life cycle of the Academy. Finally, creating a Community of Inclusion will require a continuously monitored system of performance through the use of an Equity Scorecard.

The Equity Scorecard is a database tool designed to help colleges and universities utilize existing institutional data to identify academic inequities between student groups. The Equity Scorecard is adaptable to each institution's specific needs and has been successfully implemented at numerous colleges and universities across the country. By itself it is neither an intervention nor a solution; it is merely an informative tool. The data collected through this system will provide us with the information needed to make sound policy decisions with regards to the application of resources.

The Community of Inclusion diversity strategy's core function is to provide equity of experience for cadets and faculty/staff, but more importantly, equity of outcome in all developmental domains (intellectual, professional/military, physical, civic, aesthetic) to all graduating cadets, particularly underrepresented minorities and women. This "rising tide" will benefit all. With the attitude of "excellence and high standards for all," student support services will reinforce team work and the development of potential and higher levels of performance for all through a web of mentoring, coaching, and engaged reinforcement of the ultimate goal of becoming a commissioned officer and leader in a world that is increasingly culturally complex and sees diversity as a functional asset to mission accomplishment.

A small historical marker was recently crossed when CAPT James Rendon became the first officer of Latino heritage and the first underrepresented minority to rise to the position of Assistant Superintendent. He recently spoke to a group of cadets, faculty and staff about his Hispanic heritage and its impact on his CG career (see inset). Justice Sandra Day O'Connor has said that "the path to leadership must be visibly open to talented and qualified individuals of every race and ethnicity," and all members of our society "must have confidence in the openness and integrity of the education institutions that provide that training." The Academy is on the right path.

1. *Committee on Prospering in the Global Economy of the 21st Century (U.S.). 2007. Rising above the gathering storm energizing and employing America for a brighter economic future. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press. <http://www.nap.edu/books/0309100399/html/index.html>*

Prior to coming to work for the Academy in 2005, Antonio Farias served as Associate Director of the McNair Scholars Program at Mercy College and, before that, as an Instructor in the Africana and Puerto Rican/Latino Studies Department of Hunter College (both in New York) and HEOP/EOP Associate Director at Colgate University. He holds a B.A. in Comparative Literature and an M.A. in Ethnic Studies from the University of California, Berkeley where he has also completed his course work for a Ph.D. in Comparative Ethnic Studies.

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These values that are part of Hispanic upbringings are similar to the values our Coast Guard demands of its personnel - our service core values of Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty. So are the concepts of community and family different? CAPT Rendon says "Not at all. You're born into family, but you build or break down community every day through your actions. I have always felt our Coast Guard is a community of families. It is our greatest strength, the backbone of our success, and why our service is so special. That is not to say everything has been perfect in terms of "family harmony" throughout my career...there indeed have been occasions of misunderstandings, lack of appreciation for different cultural perspectives, experiences, backgrounds, on my part and on the part of others. But in most all cases, it was our Core Values, our commitment to mission and to each other - our reliance on team play and our common acceptance of the term "Servanthood" that allowed us to resolve our differences, work together, support the "familia" and get the job done."

"Throughout my career, I have laid witness to so many examples of Coast Guard members working together as a "close-knit group" as a family - Active duty and Reserve Officers, enlisted, civilians, and Auxiliarists. I was amazed to attend a cadet Compañeros Council luncheon last month, thinking there would be 30 or so Latinos attending,

only to see 150+ Latinos and non-Latinos attend, all eager to participate, to learn, to share, and to support the council's initiatives. This is great stuff and serves as an indicator that we are moving in the right direction. Other indicators within the Corps include active Diversity Peer Educators, Genesis Council, Asian Pacific Islander Council, International Council, and the Women's Leadership Council."

When asked about his opinion on the organizational commitment to diversity, CAPT Rendon replied that "We as a service are not as diverse as we would like to be. We are concentrating a lot of effort these days toward doing better drawing from/attracting a larger, more diverse population by cultivating a Community of Inclusion so the workforce is capable of thriving in today's increasingly complex global environment."

CAPT Rendon closed the luncheon by saying: "I truly believe that a diverse Coast Guard is a stronger Coast Guard. Latinos have so much to offer our service and our service has so much to offer Latinos. I encourage all of you to continue to get to know each other, work to understand each other, to help each other, to learn from each other, and to work as a Team. Continue to do things to build camaraderie, be supportive Compañeros, shipmates, support our strong Academy family so that when it's time to leave, to go into the field as officers, you are equipped, you are ready to be the example and to do your part within the larger Coast Guard family. Gracias mis amigos, mi familia, for listening and for doing your part to strengthen our organization. Vaya con Dios....Semper Paratus...Orale Osos! Go Bears!"

As the Chief Diversity Officer for the Academy, I represent and champion the interest of all cadets, faculty, and staff who are committed to exploring new ways to unleash the power of diversity in the pursuit of excellence. As a Latino I can't help but feel something more expansive than mere pride as I see CAPT Rendon doing his work as Assistant Superintendent - it goes deeper, lays somewhere beneath the level of words, but manifest itself is a sense of belonging, a family thing we are all a part of.



L-R: CAPT Richard A. Rendon, USCG (ret) (brother); CAPT James E. Rendon, USCG; CDR John C. Rendon, USCG (brother); LCDR Paul E. Rendon, USCG (cousin); Anthony Rendon, USAF (nephew)