Rice University Works with Google Cloud to Help Keep Campus Safe from COVID-19

Google Cloud analytics tools help the university track COVID-19 cases to make real-time decisions

Sunnyvale, Calif., December 8, 2020 — Rice University, a highly ranked U.S. university based in Houston with more than 7,000 students and nearly 700 full-time faculty, partnered with Google Cloud to analyze COVID-19 cases among its campus community. Using Google Cloud data analytics tools BigQuery and Looker—along with a comprehensive plan for testing, contact tracing, and quarantining—Rice University has been able to maintain its on-campus learning environment during the fall 2020 semester.

“Rice University is committed to education grounded in experiential learning, research, collaboration, and the residential experience, but the COVID-19 pandemic created some significant challenges," said Klara Jelinkova, vice president for International Operations and IT, Rice University. “Thanks to the use of Google Cloud technology to track COVID-19 cases—and our own testing and contact tracing efforts—we were still able to preserve an immersive educational environment, providing an on-campus experience for our undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff.”

In July 2020, over a period of just three weeks, Rice partnered with Google Cloud to implement its solution university-wide, which included using BigQuery for data analysis and Looker for data visualization. During that time, the Rice teams met with Google Cloud almost daily to ensure the technology could process data from multiple input sources, such as webforms, spreadsheets, manually entered data, campus, and off-campus labs, and more. The teams also ensured it could incorporate new data sources and disconnect current or previous sources, all without losing historical data.

Google Cloud’s Looker made it easy for Rice to create and publish apublicly available dashboard that tracks COVID-19 tests, and reports on not only positive tests, but also the overall positivity rate for students, faculty, and staff. The dashboard displays these metrics by current date, previous seven days, and when the fall semester started (Aug. 1). While the data is viewable by the public, Rice University maintains complete ownership of the information.

“Getting students safely back on campus is a top priority for universities and schools around the globe, but this is not an easy problem to solve,” said Mike Daniels, vice president, Global Public Sector, Google Cloud. “We're thrilled to partner with Rice University as part of its comprehensive testing, tracing, and quarantining program. By combining those on-the-ground best practices with Google Cloud's analytics and dashboard capabilities, the school's overall positivity rate has remained at 0.14% since August.”

About Google Cloud

Google Cloud provides organizations with leading infrastructure, platform capabilities, and industry solutions. We deliver enterprise-grade cloud solutions that leverage Google's cutting-edge technology to help companies operate more efficiently and adapt to changing needs, giving customers a foundation for the future. Customers in more than 150 countries turn to Google Cloud as their trusted partner to solve their most critical business problems.

About Rice University

Set in the heart of Houston, Texas on a 300-acre forested campus, Rice University is a comprehensive research university dedicated to producing the next generation of leaders, generating bold research solutions and advancing tomorrow’s thinking. Consistently ranked among the nation’s top 20 universities by U.S. News & World Report, Rice is home to over 7,000 undergraduate and graduate students from more than 80 countries. Rice has highly respected schools of Architecture, Business, Continuing Studies, Engineering, Humanities, Music, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and Continuing Studies and is home to the Baker Institute for Public Policy. Rice’s undergraduate student-to-faculty ratio is 6-to-1 and its residential college system builds close-knit communities and lifelong friendships, just one reason why Rice is ranked No. 1 for lots of race/class interaction and No. 1 for quality of life by the Princeton Review. Rice is also rated as a best value among private universities by Kiplinger’s Personal Finance.

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