

OP-ED

Miami Dade College is a student-to-workforce pipeline for the 21st century | Opinion

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MDC

As president of Miami Dade College, I have focused on creating educational opportunities that anticipate the workforce needs of tomorrow's global economy, furthering equity in opportunity for our extremely diverse student population.

One example is the creation of MDC's stackable credentials in data analytics, which teach high demand, real-world skills. My vision for Miami is a cutting-edge, trendsetting hub of extraordinary digital talent and training. To realize this, MDC partnered with the Business-Higher Education Forum (BHEF) – the nation's oldest membership organization of Fortune 500 CEOs, college and university presidents, and other leaders dedicated to the creation of a highly skilled future workforce – to implement a methodology created by BHEF and funded by the National Science Foundation.

Their methodology identifies, responds, and builds academic pathways customized to the workforce needs of our region. We know there is a growing need for workers who possess digital science and analytics skills. A Gallup poll revealed that by 2021, 69 percent of employers expect candidates with data, science and analytic skills to get preference for jobs, yet only 23 percent of college and university leaders say their graduates will have those skills.

Our data analytics-focused curriculum fills this talent gap. Working closely with BHEF, we were able to engage in a deep and fruitful partnership with Nextera Energy, a leading clean energy company headquartered in Juno Beach, Florida. This partnership resulted in a symbiotic relationship, providing our students with curriculum, engagement and experience while providing Nextera with a pipeline of qualified workers.

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Today, our digital science and data analytics ecosystem is thriving and empowering our community. One hundred percent of our first graduating cohort (2018) were recruited and placed in positions like business intelligence analyst, data warehousing specialist and data analyst; annual salaries reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics averaging over \$75,000. Our program also provides Florida students with a unique opportunity: MDC has the only analytics major at a public institution in the state. It's important to note that 78 percent of our student body works while attending college.

Many members of our second cohort in the data analytics program are being hired before degree completion with the ongoing support of the business community to finish their education. While working extremely hard, these MDC students are enjoying greater career satisfaction and financial success.

As I near the end of my 50-year career at MDC and reflect on the college's many accomplishments, I am particularly proud of our national leadership in developing a pathway for our students to be the workforce for the next generation. MDC has the largest enrollment among colleges in the United States, serving more than 160,000 students.

Minority enrollment is 88 percent of our student body. For me, creating equity means empowering our students with marketable skills and creating career pathways to greater economic possibility in communities we serve.

As mentioned, much of this has been accomplished through our successful partnerships with leading companies such as Amazon, Facebook, Google, McKinsey, Tesla, Microsoft, Generation, IBM, Siemens and many others that are providing our students cutting edge opportunities in emerging fields such as cloud computing, digital marketing, cybersecurity, IT, supply chain and logistics, robotics, animation and artificial intelligence, to name a few.

As I prepare to step down as president of MDC in August, I challenge other higher education presidents to pursue more meaningful and methodical partnerships with industry. By partnering with these companies and BHEF, we at MDC are playing an essential role in the economic growth of our region and our students.

We are proud to be leading the way in this innovative way of teaching, learning, skilling and employing.

Eduardo J. Padrón is president of Miami Dade College