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Growing an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

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In a bygone era, our parents and grandparents worked the same job for the same company their entire lives. It was a simpler time. Not so today. Our children and students are projected to hold 11 jobs or more by the time they're 48 years old.¹ Hardly a simple time when entire industries emerge and disappear overnight.

In this now-you-see-it, now-you-don't world, higher education is not exempt. At [Miami Dade College](#) (MDC), we asked ourselves what it meant to be entrepreneurial. What did it mean for our faculty and students?

We needed to turn the learning process on its head. If our students were to become the adaptable, courageous, collaborative and disruptive risk-takers the moment demanded, then it had to be okay to fail; to learn to embrace uncertainty and bank on their resilience.

This is fast becoming the atmosphere of MDC's entrepreneurial ecosystem. Critical thinking, communication and team skills, as well as hands-on learning and mentoring are staples for the nucleus of the system, MDC's [Idea Center](#). The Center's entrepreneurial skillset is fostering student innovation, developing ideas from across Miami's diverse neighborhoods.

Our associate degree in science in business entrepreneurship offers comprehensive entrepreneurship immersion where students get to hear presentations from leading entrepreneurs in the world – Google, Lyft, Facebook, Uber and more. It also offers mentoring and start-up seed funding after which the most successful ones are tested with potential customers in the real world.

The quintessential MDC/Miami start up story centers on a 38 year-old single father, studying, straining to make ends meet and make it home to feed his son. One capstone

USA, passed \$50,000 in revenues during its first year.

At MDC, we try to diversify our educational programs to accommodate the needs of the students who wouldn't have had many learning opportunities outside of our classrooms. Through our short-term, intensive programs, we provide training for underemployed young adults, coding workshops for young women in high school to shift the gender imbalance in STEM fields as well as an array of other courses and discussions relevant to today's workplace - visual storytelling, virtual reality, robotics and cybersecurity.

Last but hardly least, MDC's Institute for Civic Engagement and Democracy (iCED) oversees higher education's largest service learning program and a range of student and community engagement. With iCED's lead, MDC has earned the highly regarded Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, and is the first community college to receive Ashoka U Changemaker Campus designation.

Despite Miami's South Beach persona, it remains among the nation's poorest cities. Our students are predominantly from neighborhoods that have attracted far too little entrepreneurial energy. But we are diversifying the pipeline of changemakers. Our students know their ideas matter, and they can deliver that new energy for years to come.

¹ Bureau of Labor Statistic, U.S. Department of Labor, 2015.
www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/nlsov.pdf.

Eduardo J. Padrón is President of Miami Dade College. He is the recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama in 2016.

LEARNING BY DOING. SELLING AND MAKING MONEY

