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# MDC Turns to 'Weekend College' To Keep Students With Full-Time Jobs

By [ROWAN MOORE GERETY \(/PEOPLE/ROWAN-MOORE-GERETY/\)](/PEOPLE/ROWAN-MOORE-GERETY/) • MAR 21, 2017

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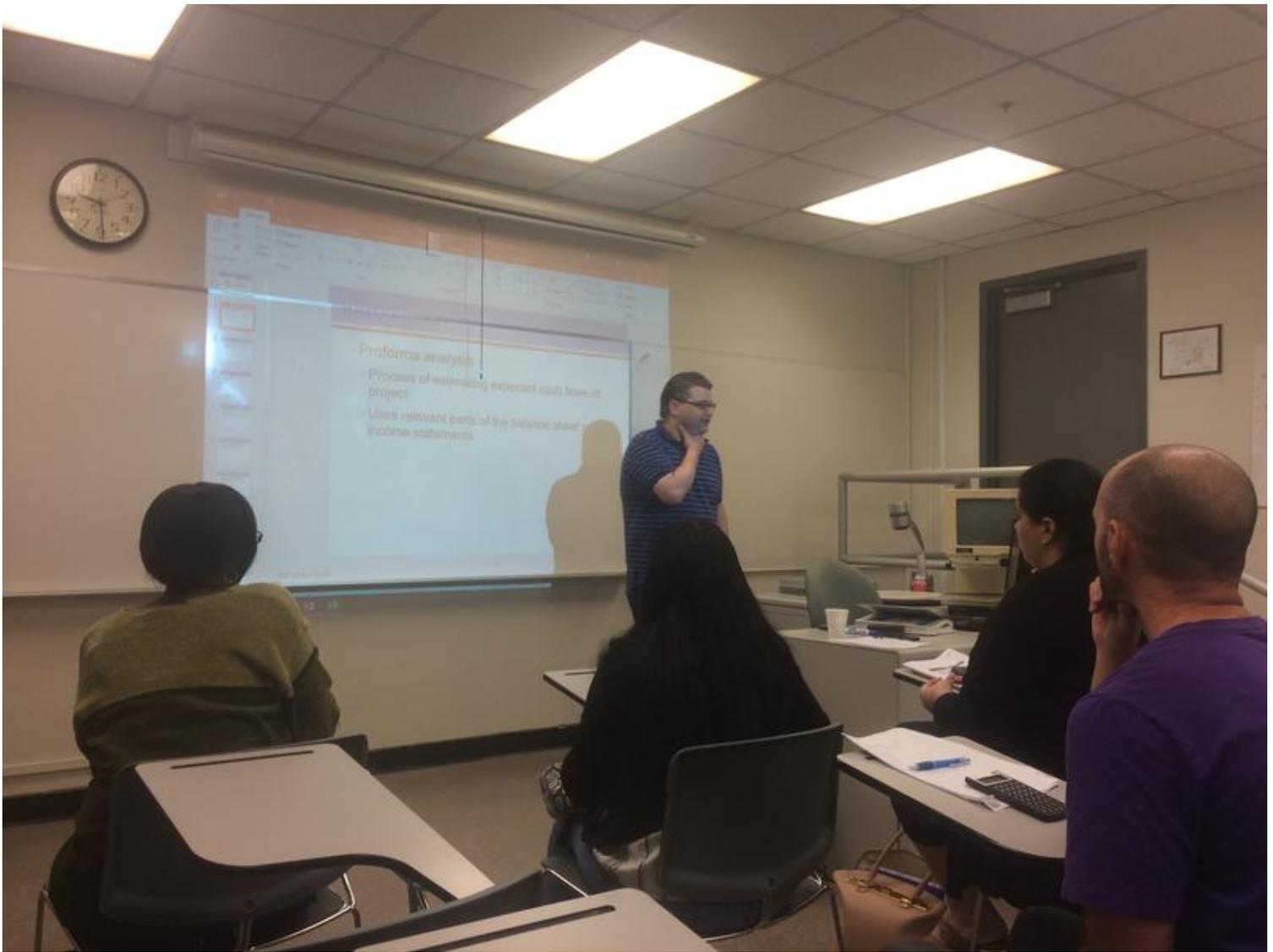
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*Professor Raul Corzo is already 90 minutes into his Saturday morning finance class by 9:30 AM*

ROWAN MOORE GERETY



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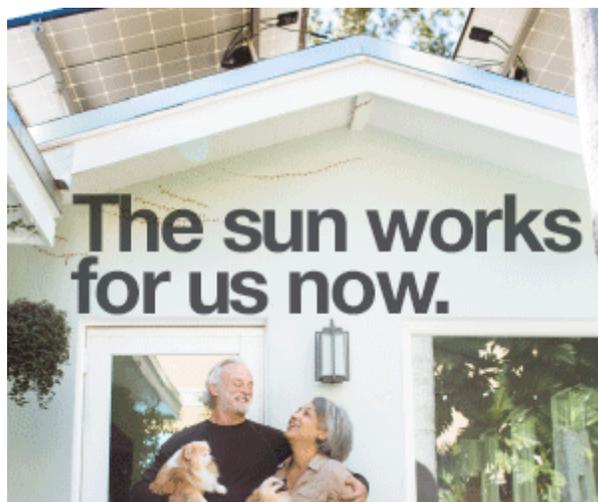
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A promotional graphic for the Knight Arts Challenge. It features a black square with a white 'KF' logo on the left. To the right, the text 'KNIGHT ARTS CHALLENGE' is written in bold, black, uppercase letters. Below this, the text 'GET FUNDING FOR YOUR ARTS IDEA.' is written in bold, black, uppercase letters. Underneath, the text 'Join us to learn how to apply to the Knight Arts Challenge!' is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font. The background is white with a pattern of small red dots on the left side and a solid red vertical bar on the right side.

**KNIGHT  
ARTS CHALLENGE**

**GET FUNDING FOR  
YOUR ARTS IDEA.**

Join us to learn how to apply  
to the Knight Arts Challenge!



When Yomaira Hidalgo set out for an associate's degree taking classes at ITT Tech three nights a week, it didn't take long to unravel the precarious routine she shared with her husband, her mother and three young children. In a word, she says, it was "miserable."

Hidalgo wanted to become a crime scene investigator, but between "attending to your partner and the baby, and trying to do homework—it wasn't happening," she says. "The homework would just pile up."

READ MORE: 'You're Dealing With A One-Call Close:' How ITT Tech Sold Itself To Students (<http://wlrn.org/post/youre-dealing-one-call-close-how-itt-tech-sold-itself-students>)

For years, doctors and CEOs have turned to accelerated 'executive MBA' programs that compress a graduate degree into a semester of Saturdays and Sundays, designed to help professionals carve out time in a hectic schedule of early meetings and children's soccer practices. But what if your day, like James Louis', is filled instead with a shift waiting tables at a Miami Beach Marriott, book-ended by more than two hours, each way, on public buses? "I can't come to school on days I work," Louis says.

Every morning, Hidalgo uses the family's lone car to chauffeur her son and her mother to school and work, respectively, before clocking in at her full-time job at a pet pharmacy. "To get [my son] up, like 'hey, come on take a shower. Then he takes 40 minutes in the shower. It's like ' you don't have that much body, can you please??'" Hidalgo sighs, returning to a project for a Saturday morning public speaking class at Miami-Dade College (MDC). "It makes sense for me to go do it on the weekends because it makes my schedule a little bit easier."

Hidalgo and Louis are both students at the new "Weekend College" program at MDC's North Campus, one of a handful of new weekend-only degree programs sprouting at community colleges around the country. Efraín Venezuela, an associate dean who helps to oversee the program, says "three quarters of our student population have the same issues."

"They have two jobs, they have relatives to take care of, they have children, they're financially challenged," Venezuela says. "They want something, they want to finish a degree, but unfortunately, they have personal considerations that preclude them from being a regular day-time student—they have to do evenings and weekends."

Venezuela says MDC administrators kept hearing from students who had to pull out of classes to keep up with their weekday obligations, or who missed exams and important lectures because they got stuck in rush hour traffic on I-95. "So when you offer them the opportunity, say, 'Listen, what about if you can finish up—don't quit, you can finish up only on weekends?' They say, 'OK, that sounds great.' "



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*Yomaira Hidalgo is studying to become a crime scene investigator. She juggles full-time work with raising her three kids, making college classes an impossibility during the week.*



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Tom Bailey, director of the Community College Research Center at Columbia University's Teacher's College, says community colleges have a long tradition of striving for maximum flexibility. "Certainly, community colleges have fundamentally organized themselves to be convenient," he says.

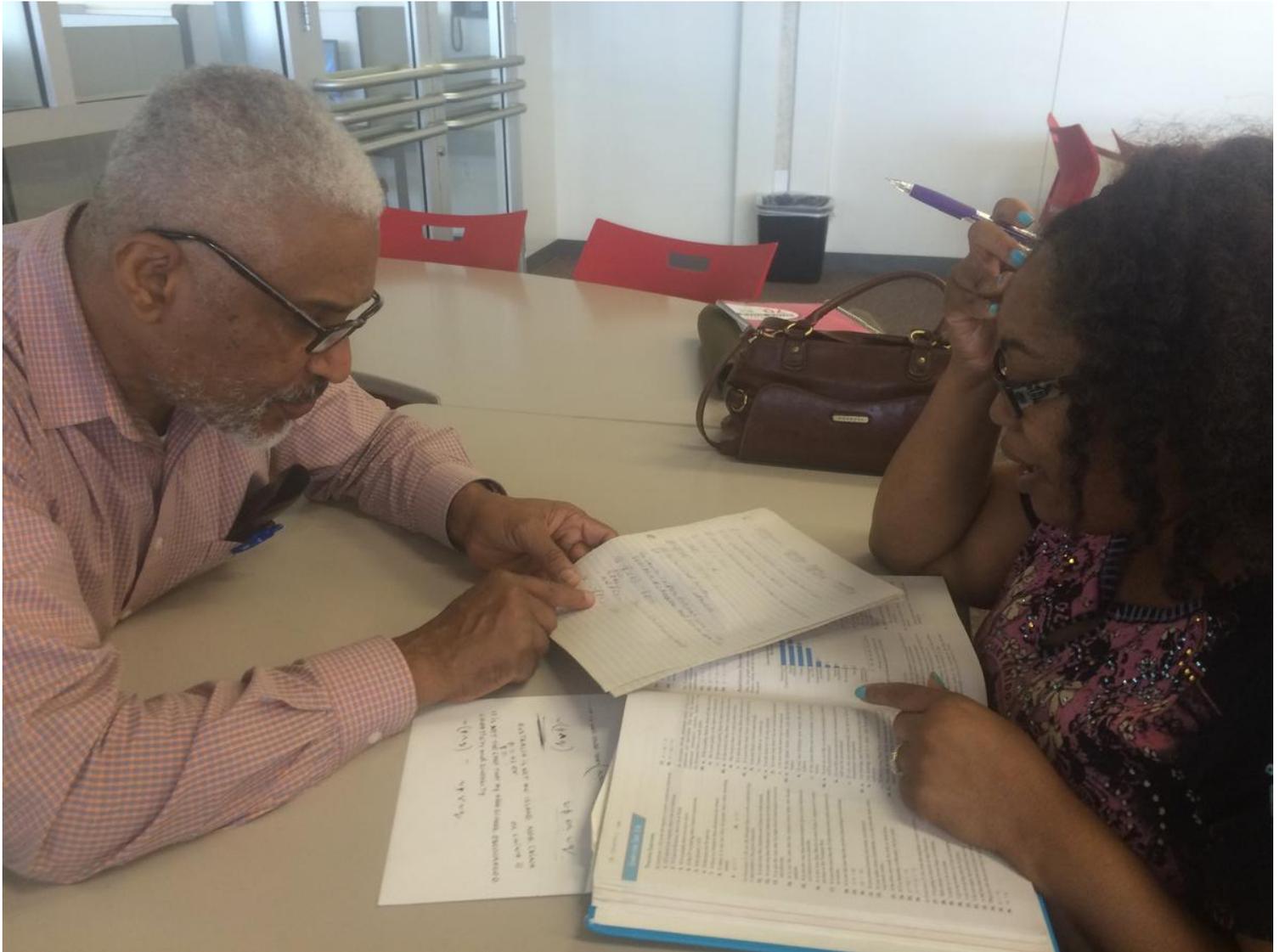
Community colleges have offered early morning and late night classes for decades, and were among the earliest adopters of online course offerings. What's new about weekend college programs like the one at MDC is that financial aid, academic advising and tutoring are all available on Saturdays too. Bailey says these service are crucial in helping weekend students succeed, while boosting

Efrain Venezuela, associate dean for MDC's North Campus, helps to oversee the Weekend College program.

CREDIT ROWAN MOORE GERETY / WLRN

community college graduation and retention rates. "The longer it takes a student to finish, the less likely they are to finish," Bailey says.

Weekend college is also seen as a potential solution to another looming problem for community colleges nationwide. Without the benefit of large endowments, Bailey says, "Community colleges live and die on enrollment." Schools across the country benefited from a boom in enrollment during the recession when full-time work was harder to come by. Now, they're coping with a drop in new students as the labor market tightens. "If you have weekend college than you can keep your full-time job," Bailey says.



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MDC is trying boost retention and graduation rates for students who work full-time by offering tutoring, along with financial aid and academic advising, on Saturdays too.

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There are currently about 2,100 students enrolled in weekend courses at Miami-Dade College's North Campus. Not all of them are full-time. For the time being, students can earn a variety of associate's degrees, or a bachelor's in business administration, with plans to expand course offerings semester by

semester.

In Professor Raul Corzo's finance class, which starts promptly at 8 a.m. on Saturdays, Ashley Jitta is among the students puzzling over two formulas businesses can use to calculate their "debt to equity" ratio. The equation could certainly come in handy: Jitta works in human resources for Miami-Dade County, but she also owns a fleet of mobile car washes on the side, with plans to expand.



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*Ashley Jitta, a mother of two who works for Miami-Dade County and runs her own fleet of mobile car washes on the side, studies up on equity and debt in a Saturday morning finance class.*

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Even so, Jitta says being here on Saturdays is not an easy choice. "It is kind of bittersweet because I'm doing this for my children so that I can grow in my career, better my business, and just be a role model to them, but being away on the only day we both have off..." Jitta trails off. "I'd rather spend my Saturdays taking them to the beach."

Another weekend student, Sergio Espino says he waited a long time after getting his associate's degree at Miami-Dade College to come back for a BA. It was just too hard to juggle school and work while he was raising a family. "It's been 40 years," he says. "Now I'm back here—to finish."

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