

Miami Dade College President Eduardo Padrón to step down after half a century at school

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Eduardo Padrón, president of Miami Dade College, during a ceremony on Wednesday, Sept. 6, 2017, at Miami Dade College to celebrate its second annual I AM MDC Day. Sept. 6 marks the first day of classes when the college opened its doors in 1960 with 1,428 eager students.

ROBERTO KOLTUN *EL NUEVO HERALD FILE*

Eduardo J. Padrón, the longtime Miami Dade College administrator and president who helped expand the school and turn it into an educational and cultural powerhouse with a national profile, announced Friday that he will step down this summer.

Padrón, 74, joined the school faculty in 1970 and has been president of MDC since 1995. He will stay on the job until August, but the college will start a national search for his replacement immediately, a spokesman said. No interim president has been named.

“This is not easy for me. I’ve been deeply rooted here for more than half a century,” Padrón told the Miami Herald Friday. “It’s at MDC that I found my religion, my vocation, my life. But just like anything, this chapter at some point has to come to an end.”

Padrón said his talks about retirement have been brewing for a while, noting that “the timing is opportune.”

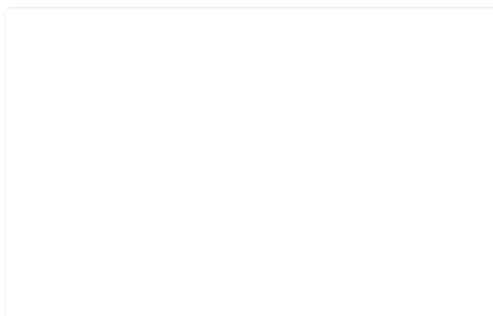
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“The decision came as we were planning the 60th anniversary of the college, which is next year,” Padrón said. “We believe it’s the perfect time to have the next leader in place to be able to take this institution to new heights. There’s already an excellent foundation to build upon so we’re ready for that transition.”





Eduardo J. Padrón

@EduardoJPadron

Today, after almost a quarter of a century as [@MDCollege](#) president, I will be stepping down from the presidency as of the end of summer 2019. I've had the pleasure and honor of working at MDC and witnessed countless lives being positively transformed by the power of education.

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Padrón's transformative touch was not limited to MDC, but extended well beyond campus to greater Miami. By boosting its educational reach and improving the skills of the city's workforce, MDC under Padrón helped diversify and expand Miami's economy and train many of its business and political leaders.

As a school administrator and president, he also played a key role in Miami's cultural and downtown renaissance, helping launch and sustain the Miami Book Fair at the Wolfson Campus, helping save and grow the Miami Film Festival when it was foundering, and securing the donation to the school of the iconic Freedom Tower for public use when its future was uncertain.

"His impact on our community is immeasurable," said Armando Olivera, a former Florida Power & Light president and former MDC trustee who has been close to Padrón for over 40 years. "And I'm not talking just about the sheer number who have been able to get an education because of his work. Beyond the number of people who improved their lives because they got an education they might not have otherwise been able to afford, is the number of jobs he created by doing that. It's been a great job machine for this community."

Padrón, the child of Cuban exiles who came to the United States in 1961 as an unaccompanied minor in Operation Pedro Pan, is himself a graduate of what was then Miami-Dade Community College after being rejected from every school he applied to, including various Ivy Leagues.

He often refers to the college as "a dream factory" for its success in offering affordable, high-quality higher education and opening doors to thousands of immigrant and minority students.

"I'm very happy those institutions rejected me. I don't think I would have been as successful," he said. "The irony of this story, is that all those institutions later came back and gave me honorary doctorates. They, too, saw MDC as a beacon of hope, an equalizer and a national model of success."

While running the downtown Miami Wolfson campus in the early 1980s, Padrón threw his weight behind a young bookseller's dream of an international book fair in Miami, helping launch what is today one of the biggest and best-known such affairs in the country.

“He’s been a mentor, and he’s been a friend,” said Books & Books owner and Miami Book Fair founder Mitchell Kaplan. “There would be no book fair without him. He has an incredible sense of vision. A time when the prevailing attitude toward Miami was a caricature, he knew that Miami could support a book fair. He knows how to galvanize people.

“The impact that he has made on the city and on education and on the cultural life of the city has been remarkable. His imprint on almost every aspect of life here is vivid, and I think this is a time to celebrate his leadership.”

The college says that under Padrón’s leadership, MDC graduated more minority students than any other higher-ed institution in the country. It now boasts the largest enrollment of any U.S. college with more than 170,000 students from 192 different countries.

Padrón, trained as an economist and with a Ph.D. from the University of Florida, climbed through the college ranks after he was recruited to the college’s faculty and turned down a corporate job.

“I thought that career path would give me the opportunity to go and make a lot of money,” Padrón said. “When I got the job, I came back to visit my former professors, who gave me a serious guilt trip. They told me I had to ‘come back, teach, and pay my dues’ for at least one year. Little did I know I’d find my purpose and quickly realize it’s what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.”

In 1995, he succeeded longtime college president Bob McCabe, who was widely credited with building the two-year community college into a major force. Padrón expanded that base by physically expanding the school, adding its West, Hialeah and InterAmerican campuses, as well as extending its educational reach and breadth. Padrón created the school’s Honors College, lauded as a feeder to top four-year universities, and established its first four-year degree program, while adding specialty programs such as a fashion and a culinary institute. x

Padrón has also been a leading national voice for immigrants’ rights and an advocate for broader accessibility to higher education for minorities and immigrants kids, roles he said he intends to carry on after leaving his post. His outspoken advocacy of public funding for MDC at times when state leaders were cutting support occasionally got him in hot water, including one time when he described state legislators as “bullies” for blocking a referendum for a local sales tax increase to fund building repairs.

Padrón received the the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](#) from President Barack Obama in 2016 and has held leadership roles in several national higher-education groups. Time magazine named him one of the nation’s 10 best college presidents in 2009.

[In a letter](#) sent to the Miami Dade College community, Padrón said he intends to remain closely involved in the school.

“Working with each of you has been an absolute joy,” he said. “We have built and strengthened one of the most respected academic learning environments in America. Through hard work and determination, we have overcome significant challenges and created a dream factory that has produced successful business leaders in every industry, accomplished artists, compassionate caregivers, law enforcement professionals, dedicated teachers, and some of the finest, most creative and engaged members of our community.

“I believe it is now time for new leadership that will continue our commitment to student access, success and innovation,” he continued.

His friends hope he finds some time for himself, too.

“He has never been selfish. It’s always been a focus on the institution, the students, the community. What you saw publicly is the man,” said Olivera. “This is not a man that at best I can tell had a lot of hobbies, or took a lot of time off.

“I’m a little worried about him,” Olivera added, in jest. “I do hope he does something fun.”

Padrón, who says he’ll have to get used to not working 14-hour days, plans on traveling, exploring off-the-beaten-path restaurants and spending time with his son and two grandchildren.

And he will continue to collect glass for his collection: “It’s transparent, like all good people should be.”



Miami Dade College President Eduardo Padrón announced on Feb. 1, 2019, that he would step down from his role at the end of the summer. *MIAMI HERALD FILE*



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