

Miami Dade College can stand at the forefront of educational innovation | Opinion

BY BERNIE NAVARRO

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In January, Miami Dade College's new president, Madeline Pumariega — an alumna — became the first woman to lead the institution. *MDC.EDU*

When I was much younger, I read a poem by Robert Frost that spoke of bridging “avocation” and “vocation.” It spoke of how love and need can intersect to create purpose.

I'm sure I did not understand the philosophical debate within the poem back then, but as I reflect on my tenure on the Board of Trustees of Miami Dade College, Frost's words seem elegantly haunting.

It has been the honor of my life to have served on the board, granted the privilege to lead as its chairman during one of the most important periods in the college's history. I have always been passionate about learning and have always done what I can to advocate for access to a quality

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education for anyone — and everyone — in our community, regardless of finances, geography, or demographics.

I viewed my service on the Board as a continuation of my mission and fully embraced my role as chairman as much more than a highlight, but rather a convergence, of my passion with a profound sense of responsibility.

I was honored to serve alongside giving and talented leaders, whom I admire and respect. MDC's board accomplished many great things and led the college during some challenging times, including the retirement of its visionary leader Eduardo Padron; the national search for his successor and subsequent naming of Madeline Pumariega as MDC's new president — a very capable leader, alumna and the first woman to preside over the college; the always-present state funding constraints; and a worldwide pandemic that threatened our very existence.

Through it all, I tried diligently to be a consensus builder and a conduit for new relationships and associations for the benefit of our institution. The board and administration worked in tandem to position Miami Dade College to be regularly recognized as the world-class learning institution that it is. My focus was always maintaining the college's accessibility to all students and protecting its local and national standing. We attracted Tesla to create a mechanic-training program; in addition, MDC created the IDEA Center; built the Gaming and Animation program; created the Business Innovation and Technology Center; constructed the Virtual Hospital at the Medical Campus; and added many cutting-edge degree and workforce-certificate programs, among many other accomplishments.

As Miami Dade College transitions to a new president and board members, I offer my support and perspectives for the future. Educational approaches are changing rapidly, accelerated by the transformative effects of technology. MDC must be receptive and adapt to the evolving landscape so it can continue to deliver a world-class education as it has done since its founding in 1960.

Our region offers a unique multicultural canvas on which the future of our hemisphere will be framed. Harnessing everyone's potential will be critical. MDC must be the educational backbone of our community and ensure we have a properly trained workforce that fuels the current tech boom. In fact, Miami's tech ecosystem can't thrive without the college at its foundation.

We've seen other booms come crashing down because of a lack of talent. Things are different now as the college recently has partnered with IBM, SoftBank, Google, Microsoft, Amazon and other tech giants — along with the mayors of Miami and Miami-Dade County — to innovate and offer dynamic and accessible training in the latest emerging industries. MDC must take advantage of its name and value proposition to propel us into the future. If you can get an education anywhere in the world with virtual learning, wouldn't you want it from the best brand with the best value?

I am proud of my service to Miami Dade College and will continue to be a committed advocate and ambassador for the college, its students and alumni. I wish President Pumariega the best in all her endeavors within and outside the college — and offer her some words from that Frost poem of my youth: “Only where love and need are one, and work is play for mortal stakes, is the deed ever really done.”

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