

**OP-ED**    APRIL 7, 2016 6:15 PM

# Private partnership will enhance MDC, downtown

**HIGHLIGHTS**

Educational entities and private sector can work together to aid students, community

New project will enhance downtown

Will not encroach on iconic Freedom Tower



BY JULIE GRIMES  
[mdcalumni.com](http://miamiherald.com/opinion/op-ed/article70589522.html)

As public colleges and universities across the nation confront declining funding, many of them are venturing into private/public development projects to finance academic programs, improve infrastructure and ultimately provide needed services to their communities.

Miami Dade College, the nation's largest, most diverse institution of higher education, is no different. In fact, proposals are currently being considered to partner with the private sector to help the college build the School of Humanities; a performing arts theater, conference center, and other educational spaces in a vacant, currently underutilized, lot owned by the college.

This is a perfect example of how educational entities and the private sector can and do work together to benefit both students and the community. It's a simple concept. If approved, the college gets its much needed facilities built by the chosen developer in exchange for the private sector obtaining the remaining development rights for the property.

With this development, MDC will add to Miami's architectural achievements and continue its decades-old tradition of supporting and contributing to the development of downtown Miami. The college's Wolfson Campus is strategically positioned in the heart of downtown Miami, and it is to the advantage of both MDC and the community to collaborate for the future development of the area.

The Wolfson Campus was the pioneer in the rebirth of downtown Miami decades ago and the forerunner to the emergence of the arts in the urban corridor.

This new project will enhance — not diminish — downtown, and it will in no way encroach on the iconic Freedom Tower at MDC per project and committee guidelines. Most important, the development will address critical unmet needs of the college, such as creating a space for students and faculty to perform and innovate.

It will also allow MDC to host graduation, academic conferences, performances and other major events on campus. Currently, the college spends significant monies securing off-site venues for these events, which is not the most sustainable of models.

Other communities across the country are already benefiting from the fruits of private/public developments. In 2011, the City University of New York opened a \$110-million building in East Harlem, the result of a partnership between CUNY, the state of New York and three private entities. The building now houses the School of Public Health and School of Social Work.

Similarly, at Metropolitan State University in Denver, a public/private partnership resulted in the building of its Hospitality Learning Center and the SpringHill Suites Denver Downtown. The project created much-needed classroom space to accommodate the student body. More importantly, the students at the university's School of Hospitality & Tourism are now able to gain practical knowledge in the industry because of the on-site hotel.

As dollars for education are increasingly limited, partnerships like these continue to surface in communities across the United States. Like MDC, colleges nationwide are being innovative in dealing with declining funding in the face of unmet needs. In early March, the Wallace Foundation commissioned a study titled “Collective Impact and the New Generation of Cross-Sector Collaborations for Education: A Nationwide Scan.” In a nutshell, the study, conducted by Columbia University, found that more communities nationwide are considering cross-sector collaboration related to education.

For decades, MDC has been a great steward of downtown Miami’s growth and development, and this project would only expand the college’s commitment to the community. The partnership, if ultimately approved, will also provide an ideal scenario for students to learn and understand the value of bringing together the academic and private-sector worlds for the improvement of their communities.

I look forward to seeing this project become a reality, and I applaud MDC for once again leading our community into a brighter future.

*Julie Grimes is chair of the Miami Dade College Foundation board of directors.*



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Nothing wrong with the private partnership model IF it allows a vote by the people since the college is a public institution. Something this large architecturally will be a landmark building. People who live here should have a say on what goes up on that land. The "experts" choices should have included the other two proposals, at least they offer the public something more dramatic to look at. Those two raise the spirits and excite the soul. The "chosen" are instead soulless.

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