



Photo by Brian Cobas, Miami Dade College

The American Dream is Still Alive at Miami Dade College



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They say you can't go home again. By the time you visit again, the place is completely different from the one stored in your mind. Sometimes that's a good thing, as I learned recently when I visited my alma mater [Miami Dade College](#) to make a presentation.

The school* where I did my pre-engineering coursework had about 20,000 students at the time. Today it serves 165,000 in eight campuses across Miami's metropolitan area.

It boasts the largest campus-based enrollment in the United States. It is also the most diverse, awarding more degrees to minorities than any other school.

I was blown away. It's not just about the number of students. It's about the hope that MDC is giving to so many individuals that they can fulfill their dreams.

Just like it gave to me.

example of meeting your customers' needs.

It has gone where the students are, literally. Its 8 campuses make it easy for students across South Florida to attend school close to home or work.

It makes tuition affordable: \$3,487 per year, including fees, for AA programs; and \$3,837 for bachelor's degree programs. Only one out of 10 of its students take on Federal Student Loans.

It offers programs in high-demand skills. After two years students can use their new skills to a good job or apply them towards a bachelor's degree.

Providing an opportunity to learn

The difference Miami Dade is making by giving people an opportunity to get an education at a very low cost is amazing.

People like Grayson Palacio, a 19-year-old sophomore and the son of former MDC students. He says MDC was his best option because it was close to home and more affordable than other colleges. And, while he is able to attend school without having to work at the same time (other than summer internships) he is proud to be free of college debt.

And people like Aleksandra Gromadzka, a 23-year-old student from Poland now in her second year at MDC.

"As an international student, I have to pay the full price for all the credits so a college like MDC is a very good option," she says.

She also appreciates the MDC's way of helping students like her ramp up for the demands of an American education.

"The American study program is very different from the Polish education," she explains. "I had to learn everything from the beginning. I didn't have any knowledge about how college works. However, I feel very good at Miami Dade College now, there is many people who are always there to help."

Know your segment to win the segment

In my business career I always told people that if you want to serve a segment of the population you must appoint people from that segment to lead the effort.

MDC's success is a perfect example of that.

Its growth trajectory goes way back, but there is one figure who, in my view, deserves a lot of credit for its amazing success.

Not surprisingly, that person is from the segment. He is [Dr. Eduardo Padrón](#), the first-generation immigrant and a former MDC student who in 1995 returned to the college to lead it as president and steer it into the successful institution it is now.

Dr. Padrón and his team have shown a way to make education possible for people whose circumstances do not align with the traditional college experience.

For those students, graduating may take longer to accommodate work; it may require tutoring to fill education gaps; it may take achieving that first step, the AA, before trying for the BA. But, along the way, they find that education is not only necessary but also possible.

achieving their dreams.

I am proud to be an alumnus of this great institution.

I *am* MDC.

Ralph

[*] *After earning my AA at Miami Dade College I went to [Florida Atlantic University](#) to get my bachelor's of science in mechanical engineering.*



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