

‘It’s our day; it’s not my day’: Miami Dade College has investiture for Madeline Pumariega

BY [JIMENA TAVEL](#)

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New MDC President Madeline Pumariega, the first woman to hold that position, celebrates her investiture Friday, Dec. 10, 2021. The ceremony was at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, Ziff Ballet Opera House. PEDRO PORTAL PPORTAL@MIAMIHERALD.COM As soon as Rolando Montoya positioned the Miami Dade College presidential chain and medallion on the shoulders of Madeline Pumariega at a ceremony Friday afternoon, the college, the largest of its type in Florida with about 120,000 students and 6,500 employees, entered a new era.

The investiture ceremony held at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts in downtown Miami officially marked the formal beginning of Pumariega’s tenure as the fifth official president of the college — the first woman to hold the position — even though she’s done the job since January. The seven-member MDC Board of Trustees selected her on Nov. 17, 2020, after a complicated 19-month search process.

The investiture ceremony is one of the oldest traditions in academia, dating back to the Middle Ages.

Pumariega succeeded Eduardo Padrón, the college's fourth president, who led the institution for nearly 25 years before retiring in 2019; Montoya, who stepped in as interim president after Padrón's departure, stood on stage and placed the regalia on Pumariega.

Sue Arrowsmith, a college spokeswoman, said Padrón didn't attend because he was receiving an award in California.

"Wow," said Pumariega, a [graduate and former basketball player at the college](#).



U.S Rep. Frederica Wilson speaks during the investiture ceremony for MDC President Madeline Pumariega on Friday, Dec. 10, 2021. Pedro Portal PPORTAL@MIAMIHERALD.COM

She credited her Catholic upbringing and her relatives for her success. She referenced her late mother, a former teacher who left Cuba with Pumariega's father in the early 1960s and who died last year. Pumariega said her mom allowed her children and grandchildren "to achieve the American dream."

"I would not be here if it were not for those two pillars in my life — my faith and my family," said Pumariega, who grew up in Hialeah and graduated from Hialeah High. "I'm just that girl from Hialeah; I'm just one of you."

She also mentioned a meteoric rise in enrollment at the college since she came on board — likely her greatest accomplishment so far.

From 2019 to 2020, the college lost 9,000 students, the steepest decline in its 61-year history. Pumariega reversed the enrollment trend, gaining back the 9,000 and even growing the student body beyond that.

"I can tell you today ... we will close the fall term up 1.8%. And we are just getting started," she said. She closed her investiture address by thanking the college's students, faculty and staff, as well as other community members.

"It's our day; it's not my day," Pumariega, 54, told the crowd at the Ziff Ballet Opera House.

The occasion included a performance from the New World School of the Arts Symphony Orchestra and attracted hundreds of guests, including University of Miami President Julio Frenk and Florida International University President Mark Rosenberg.

Pumariega's 84-year-old father, Miguel, and her 17-year-old daughter, Alyssa, also went. She hugged and kissed both of them at the start of the ceremony before taking the stage.

Three videos played during the two-hour affair, featuring Miami Mayor Francis Suarez, U.S. Reps. Maria Elvira Salazar and Carlos Gimenez and Florida Sens. Marco Rubio and Rick Scott.

In her brief remarks, Miami-Dade County Daniella Levine Cava, who was elected as the county's first woman mayor in 2020, called Pumariega her "dear friend" and a "fellow female warrior." She presented her with a county declaration of Dec. 10 as Madeline Pumariega Day.

U.S. Rep. Frederica Wilson presented Pumariega with a congratulatory declaration that will be preserved at the U.S. Library of Congress, recognizing the milestone.



U.S. Rep. Frederica Wilson, left, presents a congratulatory declaration that will be preserved at the U.S. Library of Congress to new MDC President Madeline Pumariega on Friday, Dec. 10, 2021. Pedro Portal PPORTAL@MIAMIHERALD.COM

Mark Richard, the founder and a former president of the teacher's union, United Faculty of Miami Dade College, said the faculty trusts Pumariega and looks forward to working with her.

"We walk arm in arm with you, Madame President, on the mission of higher education, scholarship, truth and Miami Dade College," he said.

Isabella Cunningham, a Colombian American and the Student Government Association president of Wolfson Campus, said it's a privilege, as a Hispanic woman, to see someone who looks like her lead the college.

"Representation matters," Cunningham said.



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This story was originally published December 10, 2021 9:37 PM. JIMENA TAVEL 786-442-8014 Jimena Tavel covers higher education for the Miami Herald and el Nuevo Herald. She's a bilingual reporter with

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