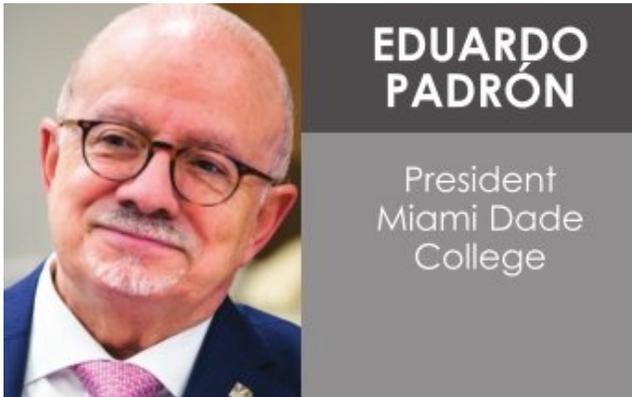


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Transforming the Community College Classroom

Educational Quality and Student Success Through Innovation in Teaching and Learning



By providing access to education and supporting industry through workforce elevation, community colleges tirelessly propel the American Dream. The key role they play in the success of individuals — and in turn families, communities and society as a whole — has earned them a place of central importance in national discussions of education and economic policy. This recognition has generated a renewed impetus to innovate measures that ensure student success.

Community colleges have answered the call by crafting more seamless academic pathways and student services with the end goal of completion — a holistic approach favored by research that indicates the “cafeteria approach” (disconnected courses, academic programs and support services) is far less effective in guiding community college students, who face different hurdles than traditional college students do.

An Uphill Climb

At Miami Dade College, the largest college in the nation, two-thirds of our student body is considered low income, with 45 percent living under federal poverty guidelines. Many are the first in their families to attend college and must do so while contending with a full-time job or providing care for a child or another family member. A large number of students — whether recent immigrants or born-and-bred Americans — lack the basic English-language and math skills necessary to hit the ground running in college. It is not uncommon for students to face all of those challenges at once, making their climb to success steeper yet.

Administrators, faculty and staff at MDC have taken a number of deliberate measures to boost student success at every step of the way. New student orientation is stronger than ever. A tiered advising model provides students with sustained support from both professional advisors and faculty mentors in an arc that ranges from before admission through graduation. Course sequence guides now map out academic program pathways that help students select the best courses each term to accomplish their goals. Communities of interest align curricular and co-curricular activities, motivating students by connecting them with like-minded peers, yielding

collaborations in and out of the classroom.

Yet, our work has just begun.

The Next Generation of Teaching

Nationwide, only 38.1 percent of students who began studies at two-year public colleges in 2009 had completed a degree by 2015. More critically yet, 45.3 percent of students didn't graduate and are no longer enrolled. If all the aforementioned measures to improve the student experience are to have an impact on moving the needle on persistence and completion, our focus must now shift toward a significant transformation in the classroom.

As indicated above, a key component of the completion agenda has been the development of structured academic pathways or course sequences. However, if these pathways are to be effective, the course content and pedagogy used in the classroom needs to be redesigned as well. It is time to shift the pedagogical paradigm in community college classrooms toward high-impact educational practices, such as the components of the Association of American Colleges and Universities' Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP). Examples of such high-impact practices include first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity and global learning, service learning and community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects. Current pedagogical approaches gaining national attention include flipped classrooms and courses contextualized to a targeted career interest.

Imagine a college classroom that is not restricted to the boundaries of any single room, where learning is contextualized to students' career paths and builds on their existing competencies and prior learning. Where technology is used appropriately to enhance — not replace — meaningful face-to-face interaction. Where partnerships with industry lead to paid internships for students, and social entrepreneurship is tied directly to course learning. Where faculty and staff work closely to provide an active learning environment that is at once cross-disciplinary and cross-functional.

Florida's community colleges have redesigned instructional modalities in developmental education courses thanks to state policy changes. However, efforts to redesign pedagogy and the classroom experience across other courses have largely been left out of redesign efforts. In reality, a similar commitment must be afforded across all disciplines to facilitate a consistent and effective upgrade of pedagogy, and boost learning outcomes. Transformation entails an intentional infusion and alignment of high-impact practices into the curriculum and in the classroom.

Implementing high-impact educational practices requires commitment at every level of an institution and needs support in the form of training for faculty, students and staff in order to convey clear expectations. As always, resources are essential and, where limited, creativity must be applied in obtaining and using resources. College administrators must commit to investing resources where they have the most impact: in ensuring that faculty receive the right tools, training and technology to positively impact student learning.

Efforts in faculty professional development need to focus on novel pedagogies focused on student engagement. We must look beyond our traditional faculty training programs to newer, more flexible yet effective models for faculty development. One novel training program, developed by the Association of College and University

Educators (ACUE), is comprised of hourlong online modules focused on key faculty skills in class and course design, classroom environment, active learning techniques, higher-order thinking, and assessment.

Any effort to redefine the classroom and how we engage with students must be met with the technology to support such innovations. It is worth noting that 62 percent of students enrolled at two-year institutions are age 24 and under. We are serving millennials, a generation shaped by its connection to technology. Colleges must not simply keep up with student's technological trends but take them to the next level and prepare them to be active players rather than passive subjects of this tech-driven world that truly is theirs.

Combined with a robust evaluation framework, these training and technological resources can ensure quality and lend credibility and sustainability to collegewide effort, and provide evidence to external stakeholders that we are good stewards of the resources provided to us to strengthen the scholarship of teaching and learning at colleges.

We have been presented an opportunity to enhance students' academic experiences at our institutions. We have transformed students' pathways to success. Now it's time to improve the quality of their educational experience by transforming the way our classrooms engage, challenge and support students.