

Miami Dade College president, a Princeton reject, fulfills his Ivy League dream

BY ANNA EDGERTON

aedgerton@MiamiHerald.com



Denise Applewhite / Princeton Office of Communications

Miami Dade College President Eduardo J. Padron receives an honorary degree from Princeton President Shirley M. Tilghman.

Fifty years ago, student Eduardo Padron got a rejection letter from Princeton University.

Now, educator Eduardo Padron has that Ivy league degree.

“When I was very young, in high school, I always wanted to be a Princetonian,” said Padron, president of Miami Dade College. “In higher education, Princeton is seen as the real ivy, the bastion of the best academic tradition in the U.S.”

On Tuesday, Padron, 65, was awarded one of six honorary degrees at Princeton’s commencement ceremony, sharing the

stage with Aretha Franklin, who received a doctorate of music. The honor fulfills a lifelong dream.

As a high school graduate only three years after he came to the United States from Cuba in 1959, Padron applied to colleges and universities all over the country. Miami Dade College was the only school that accepted him.

After graduating, he went on to earn his doctorate in economics from the University of Florida. He returned to work at MDC and became president of the college in 1995.

Since then, Padron has helped build MDC into one of the most respected colleges in the country, known best for its high academic standards and its open-door policy for students.

Princeton is one of the most exclusive universities in the country with an undergraduate admission rate of 8.5 percent. Miami Dade College is the largest in the country, with more than 170,000 students, and accepts anyone with a high school diploma.

“I really feel that Miami Dade is at the other end of the spectrum from Princeton,” Padron said in a phone interview from Princeton before receiving his degree.

More than half of the students at MDC are the first in their families to attend college, and MDC graduates more minority students than any other institution of higher learning in the United States. Padron describes the college's incredible diversity as a strength, he said, "because if the student body reflects the demographics of South Florida, it means we are serving the community well."

For Padron, the new Princeton degree is yet another honor to hang in his office. He has received many other awards and honorary degrees, and he was appointed by President Barak Obama as the chairman of the White House Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans.

Princeton President Shirley Tilghman described Padron as "an influential and inspirational advocate for opportunity," also recognizing that he speaks "persuasively and persistently, not only to his institution, but to the entire nation and the world."