

Varied education vehicles drive road to success

Miami has experienced tremendous growth and prosperity over the last few years in spite of our rank as one of the poorest communities in America. The changes that have positively impacted our future are largely dependent on the continued success of our educational offerings.



Daniel Diaz Leyva

That said, higher education is too often associated exclusively with a bachelor's degree aimed at only certain types of "white-collar" jobs. The reality of our current economic landscape is that we have demand in a number of different fields, many vocational, that can help drive our economy, empower our citizens and improve our lives.

In June of 2015, I was appointed by Gov. Rick Scott to the Board of Trustees of Miami Dade College, the largest and most diverse public institution of higher learning in the country.

I am privileged to serve with several high-impact leaders, some of whom graduated from the college and countless others who dedicate their time and treasure in furtherance of its mission to change lives through accessible, high-quality teaching and learning experiences.

In an effort to immerse myself in that mission and serve as a responsible steward for our state, I committed to visiting each of its campuses right off the bat. I wanted to learn about its leadership, its students and the benefits of vocational training for career development. Through that experience, I became more aware of the relationship between vocational training and jobs that are immediately in dire need across our society.

The Writer

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During my visits, I found a student body mostly made up of recent immigrants with an infectious thirst for knowledge, hunger for opportunity and pursuit of the American Dream. The talent I saw was extraordinary.

The Honors Program in particular consists of some of the best and brightest our community has to offer. Their graduates go on to the best universities in the nation, mostly having earned scholarships. That said, are they being trained for the jobs that exist out there?

The unemployment rate for young adults is around 12%, close to double the overall rate. It translates to about 2 million unemployed young adults. Yet, there are 3.9 million job openings, many in health care and social assistance, leisure and hospitality, and manufacturing, all industries that seek out vocationally educated graduates but can't seem to find them.

MDC's healthcare programs housed in the Medical and Homestead Campuses help to train most of the able nurses, technicians and physician assistants in our community's dental and doctor's offices, clinics and hospitals.

The science labs in the Hialeah, North and West campuses are comparable to some of our nation's best performing cutting edge research. The aviation programs in Homestead equipped with some of the latest technology help to train and staff our air traffic control systems at our airports.

The education program at the InterAmerican campus in particular, its

programs focused on early childhood learning and the developmentally disabled, are the leading providers of teachers to our school system.

Our public safety programs at the North campus produce most of the police officers and firefighters that keep us safe.

The arts and entertainment programs are fundamentally part of the MDC culture. The programs for aspiring artists, chefs, musicians and studio technicians exist across campuses, particularly in Kendall, North and Wolfson, including the New World School of the Arts, which is truly one of our most amazing cultural institutions.

Programs such as the Miami Animation and Gaming International Complex (MAGIC), the hub for entrepreneurship at the IDEA Center and the School of Engineering and Technology (EnTec) reflect a college committed to innovation and the development of new academic programs set by the constant evolution of our global economy to prepare its students to compete for the jobs of the 21st century.

There are other institutions in Miami and our state that are also committed to preparing the workforce of the future and do an excellent job with limited resources. The goal is to make our community a better, safer and more prosperous place to live. It's just important to remember that education can take many shapes and forms, but is always the first step on the journey to success.