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MDC President Eduardo Padron, Latino workforce and higher education



Dr. Eduardo Padron poses for photos at the Miami Dade College in Miami. (AP Photo/J. Pat Carter)

If you are one of the 20 million students attending college this year, and needed to borrow cash to pursue your higher education, you are not alone. You are just one of 12 million students who face a short-fall in their graduation dreams.

An alarming increase in the amount of student loans has surpassed the national credit card debt (\$693 billion). The outstanding student loan balance now nears \$870 billion, also beyond the total auto loan balance (\$730 billion), according to a [report](#) from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. Another \$150 billion are outstanding in private student loans, according to the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau.

Overall, 37 million borrowers are in repayment of their student debt and at least 5.4 million are behind their obligations. The average student owes \$28,000 for their undergraduate degree and carries his/her debt well after turning 30 years old and into their forties.

Reality says these students not only are in arrears on their obligations but also unable to invest in buying homes, starting new businesses or even saving for their children's education or their own retirement. It is bad for them and bad for the economy.

But some have it worst than others.

With higher unemployment rates and lower median incomes, Latino families are faced with a difficult decision. Sending a child to college means to lose a potential extra income for the household while getting into additional debt, not an attractive option. Is college still a valid alternative for Latino youth?

"Absolutely," Dr. Eduardo J. Padron, PhD, President of Florida's Miami-Dade College (MDC), told VOXXI. "In today's world, a high school diploma can only guarantee you a job flipping hamburgers," he said.

Dr. Padrón has presided over MDC since 1995, taking the once small local institution to a national presence. With over 174,000 students, the school carries the largest undergraduate enrollment in the nation, and the largest Hispanic student rate.

The reality of a new workforce

The days when most Americans worked at a factory or an office for 30 years with little education and earned a good living –enough to buy a family home, a couple of cars, pay for their children's college and still save some money for their own retirement– are long gone, Dr. Eduardo Padron believes.

Today, younger and middle age workers change jobs every three to four years on average, looking to improve their income, career opportunities and upward mobility. A [college degree](#) allows most professionals not only to earn a better living but also decreases the odds for unemployment.

Latinos will comprise three-quarters of the future labor force in the United States by 2020, according to projections from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), the highest participation of any other group. The increase in birth rates and new immigrants raise the number of Latinos looking for work at 67.5 percent – compared to 64.7 percent that of whites.

But [Hispanics unemployment rates](#) are higher about two to three percent in average –depending on their state of residence– while the median income per household stands at \$38,039 compared to \$51,861 for whites (2009 data).

In his work "*A Deficit of Understanding: Confronting the Funding Crisis in Higher Education and the Threat to Low-Income and Minority Access*," Dr. Eduardo Padron indicates that tuition and fees rise disproportionately for families who earn less.

Financial aid originally intended for children of these low-income families has changed from grants and subsidies to loans and tax credits, allowing an increased access of higher earners who can deal with repayment and in detriment of those with lower incomes or nearing poverty levels.

The cost for attending college has risen 71 percent for low-income families compared to 5 to 19 percent for upper to middle-income families, as percentage of family income. Many Hispanic families believe a college degree is unattainable or unaffordable for their children.

“The main obstacle for Latinos in acquiring a higher education is lack of information,” MDC President asserts. “There are plenty of opportunities to get financial help in scholarships, loans and grants. Latinos need to make all necessary sacrifices to get a good education, the only real passport to getting out of poverty and into a better life. They need to see education as an investment,” he said.

Dr. Padron knows this struggle first hand

Eduardo Padron fled from Cuba at age 16 with his younger brother to look after. Working several jobs and with no English under his belt, he finished high school with the intention to fulfill the promise made to his mother to attend college in the United States.

But no institution would accept his application other than Miami Dade College –former Dade County Community College–, at the time a one-college campus with around 5000 students. He continued to pursue his education to earn a doctorate from the University of Florida in 1970, returning to his alma mater to pay forward all the benefits he had received.

After holding several teaching and administrative positions, he has served as MDC President for over 17 years.

During his tenure, the small community college has grown to a nationally recognized institution, providing access to higher education for working students, some 69 percent working part-time and 20 percent in full-time jobs. The college provides assistance to 46 percent of students whose families earn incomes below the federal poverty level.

The American Dream Scholarship (ADS) offered by MDC pays for up to 60 college-level credits of in-state tuition and eligible class fees remaining after all other scholarships, financial aid, grants, and Florida Prepaid College Plan funds have been applied.

Students are required to have earned a standard high school diploma, GED, or home school diploma in Miami Dade County and have a GPA of 3.00 or above. “This requirement means pressure for children

and their parents, who need to understand that achievement starts before going to college,” Dr. Eduardo Padron said.

The Florida college also ranks as the largest recipient of Pell Grants in the country among public and private colleges and universities, covering a range of 300 major areas of study that provide unparalleled educational and workforce opportunities.

In 2012, 13,000 students graduated from MDC with an Associate degree in Arts, Science or a Bachelors degree. Many are transferring credits to over 80 of the best colleges and universities in the country.

Dr. Padron believes higher education is the cornerstone of democracy, and the opportunity to learn must be protected. “For young people, there is always the temptation to get a job and have a few material things. However, Latinos need to be well-prepared when they compete as the largest workforce of the country,” he concluded. He has done it, it can be done.

Source: VOXXI News