

Launching Students into High-Demand Cloud Careers



Bryant Pickford saw an ad for free classes at Miami Dade College (MDC) in cloud computing and thought, “Why not?” Now on his way to completing his bachelor’s degree, Pickford was excited by the possibility of where cloud computing training could lead his career.

He decided to enroll and, after graduating from MDC’s cloud computing certificate program, he almost immediately secured a job at Amazon Web Services (AWS) as a solutions architect. The cloud computing program at MDC became a career accelerator for him: “I feel like this program specifically is just another key for me to be able to walk a lot freer in the world.”

The collaboration between AWS and MDC is at the heart of what makes the program so successful for students. The sustainable workforce development model focuses on students from the largely immigrant and low-income communities in Miami, enabling them to access higher education and connecting them to cloud computing careers with local businesses. This meets local workforce needs and promotes economic vitality by building talent that is committed to remaining in the community. The MDC cloud computing program is designed to support students to be successful in entry-level positions in cloud computing, helping them take the first step toward a career in the growing cloud sector. But it does so much more than simply provide the training. Students who may lack resources of time, financial support, or large professional networks face significant obstacles trying to break into the tech sector. This program helps students gain relevant experience with the cloud computing industry and develop meaningful connections with potential employers. The program also works with local employers to reorient their education and experience requirements for entry-level positions toward a skills-based approach.



“I was able to get mentorship from folks at AWS which, to be honest, at the time I hadn’t really thought was a big deal. But it has shaped my career to be able to have that kind of access to people in the industry.”

— Aimee Reyes, MDC Cloud Computing graduate and Software Security Intern at Intel

Connecting Students to Industry Mentors

AWS works with local employers to connect MDC students to cloud computing industry professionals in workshops where students get résumé writing tips, interview preparation, and mentorship. AWS also works with MDC faculty and administrators to coordinate industry events where students make connections and employers get exposure to the skills and creativity of the students. Over the last three years, they have held multiple Game Day events where industry professionals, faculty, and students worked together in teams to solve real-world problems while competing.

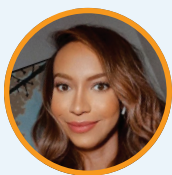


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— Bryant Pickford, MDC Cloud Computing graduate, AWS Solutions Architect

Bryant Pickford feels that the program was the “key for the gatekeepers to get out of my way and allow me to do the things that I want to do, get the job that I want in a very highly competitive technical field.” And that is the intent, according to Selenis Leguisamon, AWS Enterprise Account Manager. “We are helping companies to understand the demographic of the students and encouraging them to be a little more flexible in their minimum qualifications, focusing more on skills than on degrees earned or years of experience.”

AWS also shows that students meet their hiring standards when they hire students who have completed MDC’s program. This communicates to other companies that the students are exiting the program well-trained and ready for the workforce. Belle Fleur Technologies is one of those companies. President Tia Dubuisson, who has hired over 200 MDC cloud computing students as interns, states, “We’re allowing the junior talent to actually come in, learn, and really get expansive knowledge in a very short period of time.”



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Working with Industry to Change Entry-level Requirements

The cloud computing industry, like many others, often inadvertently presents barriers for well-qualified candidates who may not have the requisite years of experience or level of education demanded in job postings. AWS is working with AWS Partners and clients to remedy this problem. By researching the projects and tasks required of entry-level positions by a variety of companies, AWS is able to show that students in MDC's cloud computing program are completing the same projects and succeeding in similar jobs at AWS and other large companies. "The industry-aligned curriculum provides candidates with the skills needed to perform in these entry-level roles," states Rebecca Allyn, the U.S. Business Development and Workforce Engagement Lead at AWS.

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Companies, including AWS, are rethinking their qualifications for education and years of experience and finding ways to make sure that their requirements match the skills needed. Dubuisson notes that cloud computing is so new that people working in the industry are always learning. Because of this, she states: "It's not always about the years of experience that the person has, but it is really what they're willing to invest in themselves." This approach to recruiting provides companies with a larger, more diverse pool of candidates from both traditional university pathways and newer community college cloud computing certificate and degree programs.



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— Tia Dubuisson, Belle Fleur Technologies President



Students are Dreaming Big and Achieving

“I’d never really looked at myself doing anything impactful in an enterprise environment that’s of such consequence at an organization...this program has gotten me to dream big, and not just dream, but to achieve,” says Reyes, while reflecting on the evolution of her accomplishments. She went from struggling with housing and employment to earning a six-figure salary through the training, mentorship, internships, and networking opportunities she received through the MDC cloud computing program. Now Reyes states proudly, “I am basically going to be able to provide generational wealth for my family.”



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The collaboration between MDC and AWS brings opportunities for MDC students to show what they can achieve when provided a fraction of the support afforded to college students at elite colleges. Students are succeeding, excelling, and supporting their families and communities. This workforce development approach supports community and economic development for Miami by providing its largely immigrant and low-income community with an attainable ladder to economic freedom and its local businesses with a desperately-needed IT workforce.



For more information, visit
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