

## **Miami Dade College and the Engaging Power of the Arts**

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### **Abstract**

In this essay, the president of Miami Dade College describes the anchoring role that the institution plays in the Miami metropolitan region, with a particular emphasis on the many arts and cultural contributions. These efforts, combined with the economic and workforce development endeavors, make Miami Dade College a model anchor institution.

The Cuban revolution unfolded throughout the 1950s, culminating on January 1, 1959, when Fidel Castro's forces rolled into Havana and took control of the island nation. In the 2 years that followed, more than 200,000 Cubans landed in Miami, beginning a dramatic demographic change for South Florida (*United States Census Bureau, 2012*). In the ensuing years, additional waves of Cuban, Haitian, and other immigrants from Central and South America forever changed the landscape of South Florida.

Another event occurred in 1959, in Miami, that would prove essential in providing a pathway to economic and social integration for this enormous influx of new residents. The State of Florida gave formal approval to launch a new junior college in Miami. Classes opened in 1960 with 1,428 students. By 1967, Dade Junior College had become the largest institution of higher education in the state of Florida, enrolling more than 23,000 students. It was also the fastest growing junior college in the nation. It enrolled more freshmen than the University of Florida, Florida State University, and the University of South Florida combined.

We often speak of anchor institutions in economic terms, justly emphasizing the potential to leverage real estate holdings and procurement for overall economic impact. But Miami's history suggests an even broader understanding: The institution proved an anchor for countless lives. Its not hyperbole to suggest that this nascent community grew up and was enriched in the classrooms of its community college. Dade Junior has grown up to become Miami Dade College, the largest institution of higher education in the United States. In the coming months, the College will welcome its two millionth student, likely a member of the third generation of Latin immigrants who have transformed the economic and

cultural landscape of South Florida (*Motel & Patten, 2012*). It is nearly impossible to find an economic or civic arena in this community that is not led by a Miami Dade College graduate.

Miami Dade College has remained the anchoring mainstay of education and workforce development in the Miami metro region. Forty-six percent of Miami Dade College students live beneath the federal poverty level, and 67% are classified as low income. Equally significant, 56% are the first in their family to attend college (*Miami Dade College Office of Institutional Research, 2012*). The institution's educational reach stretches from college preparatory classes (71% of entering students are not ready for college-level work in at least one basic skill area, i.e., math, English, or reading) to 300 areas of study that culminate in specialized workforce certifications, as well as associate and baccalaureate degrees, many designed in collaboration with industry experts. The Honors College sends graduates to Ivy League and other top-flight institutions each year.

Many of these students are graduating in the disciplines of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), consistent with the trend throughout 21<sup>st</sup>-century higher education. While this may be the dictate of the job market, Miami Dade College has lent an ear to the CEOs (chief executive officers) who lead the STEM trailblazing companies. This source has offered a surprising counterargument, touting the humanities and the social sciences. "Give us people steeped in cultural diversity," they will tell you. "Give us people who are thoughtful and observant."

At Miami Dade College, the humanities and social sciences have remained a foundational element of the curriculum. Furthermore, our cultural programming has been our open invitation to the larger community, extending the classroom and a unique chance to learn through the arts.

Miami Dade College brought higher education to downtown Miami, Florida, in 1970 to a chorus of naysayers. Miami had lost its luster, and downtown was downright downtrodden. Engagement with the business community was essential to proving Wolfson experiment viable. In the 1970s, Miami Dade College's first foray to engage Miami's business community was with a concert series called Lunchtime Lively Arts. It was a successful college-community engagement endeavor, with denizens of the office towers flocking to the sunlit concerts and dance performances. The Lunchtime Lively Arts series inspired the establishment of today's Jazz at Wolfson Presents, which was founded in 1998 and remains among the longest-running jazz series in Miami-Dade County.

## **Miami Book Fair International**

In the 1980s, Miami Dade College launched a citywide book fair in downtown Miami. It was met with raised eyebrows and even outright derision. This was 1984, the days of Miami's cocaine cowboys, racial strife, and paradise lost. Miami's capital crime drew far more attention than its intellectual capital. But our little band of believers—a couple of independent booksellers and a few dreamers at Miami Dade College—ignored the catcalls.

We called that first book fair *Books by the Bay*, and as the saying goes, “If you build it, they will come.” Did they ever. That first year (1984), upward of 25,000 people who did not believe the negative headlines about their city strolled among the booksellers' and publishers' booths, and whiled away the 3-day inaugural book fair chatting with authors. We had almost proved the naysayers wrong, and for Year 2 our hard-won confidence inspired us to rename this event the Miami Book Fair International (the Book Fair). The event began to take on its full identity, adding a roster of Spanish-language authors headlined by Mario Vargas Llosa. In 1985, Garrison Keillor, Allen Ginsburg, and 50 other writers and poets joined in. Miami Book Fair International was officially on the map. The talk among authors was, indeed, that Miami's book fair was great fun and the place to be in November.

But it was not just fun in the sun that would draw authors from around the globe year after year. The Miami community had descended on this event and embraced it. More than 1,000 community volunteers joined Miami Dade College staff to produce the Book Fair. In 1998, Tom Wolfe would call Miami Book Fair International the “literary mecca of the Western World” (*Gerard, 2010*).

## **The Arts and Humanities and College-Community Engagement**

When we think of the great cultural centers of the world, we typically think of places like Paris, Vienna, Prague, London, and Buenos Aires. And, while we will always have our cultural bookends of Los Angeles chic and New York City sophistication, for better or worse, the recent branding of American cities and regions more often than not highlights their economic sectors. We are all aware of Silicon Valley, California; the Nike empire of the Portland, Oregon, region; Microsoft's influence in Seattle, Washington; and the research triangle of Raleigh-Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina. These cities and regions and their remarkably successful

product brands are a reflection of America's historic ingenuity and entrepreneurship. Arts and culture are not tangible assets like economic sectors; they are not easily monetized, and consequently it is far too easy to ignore their rich contributions to the well-being of communities.

Far from the cultural wasteland that some had portrayed it as in the 1970s and 1980s, Miami was a community that just needed a chance to demonstrate what it valued. Further, the Book Fair and many of Miami Dade College's arts and culture initiatives continue to be the means to fulfill the college's mandate to engage the community. While I would never downplay the importance of math, science, and communication skills, learning via the arts is incomparable. What can occur as witness to great art is a moment to change the course of a life. In the end, is that not what our institutions are all about?

The Miami Book Fair International has doubtless been catalyst to many such moments. The year 2012 marked the 29<sup>th</sup> edition of the Book Fair, now an 8-day event that draws a remarkable half million fairgoers from South Florida and beyond. It is not only the Miami community's most beloved cultural event, but also a tourist attraction that does, indeed, generate a monetary benefit. The Book Fair is supported by public and private sponsors. There was no admission charge until 2007, when we began charging \$5. It remains free of charge to the more than 20,000 children who attend; it is still the best bargain in town. But it should be noted that sponsors, some 60 in 2012, have been essential in powering the Book Fair through the years. Today, the Book Fair's sponsors include Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Florida, American Airlines, and the Children's Trust.

I knew the Book Fair had truly arrived many years ago when I noticed a young boy, maybe 7 or 8 years of age, tucked against a wall on the Miami Dade College campus, legs folded, book in lap, oblivious to the swirling crowds around him. To this day, that image is crystal clear in my memory bank. If he had managed to pull his eyes from the page, he would have seen what we call the Street Fair. It is a scene to behold: The streets surrounding Miami Dade College's downtown Wolfson Campus are closed off to host more than 300 colored tents, sheltering the tomes of publishers and booksellers of every ilk: Antiquarian Annex, with its trove of weathered volumes; International Village, showcasing the art and literature of that year's highlighted countries; Comix Gallery, with an array of graphic novels and vintage comic books; and, of course, Children's Alley, jumping off the page with Harry Potter, Disney

characters, and more, as well as plays and readings from authors who have spent the week prior to the Book Fair visiting Miami-Dade County's public schools.

Every available meeting space on campus hosts the 300 authors and poets, including a Spanish-language contingent, who grace the Book Fair each year. Since 1984, the authors and poets participating have included 12 Nobel Prizes, 60 Pulitzer Prizes, 30 National Book Awards, 35 American Book Awards, 12 PEN/Faulkner Awards for Fiction, and 10 Premio Miguel de Cervantes Prize recipients. The Book Fair has also welcomed authors and U.S. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, as well as U.S. First Lady Barbara Bush. Miami Book Fair International is truly the place to be in November.

## **The Center for Literature and Theatre at Miami Dade College**

Miami Dade College established the Florida Center for the Literary Arts in 2001, with the intention that the Center would promote the appreciation of literature, in all forms, throughout the entire year. A generous grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation helped to establish the Center as well as a permanent endowment. This support provided a strong foundation, and full programming began in January 2002.

Renamed the Center for Literature and Theatre, the Center is a college-wide academic and cultural initiative that serves both students and residents of Miami-Dade County. The Center is now an umbrella organization with year-round programming that embraces authors and writing, reading and literacy, as well as the administration of Miami Book Fair International and Miami Dade College's Spanish-language theater initiative, Teatro Prometeo.

Well-known and emerging writers offer presentations to the community and visit Miami Dade College classrooms to dialogue with faculty and students. Each May, the Writers Institute presents renowned authors who offer 4 days of intensive workshops on poetry, fiction, nonfiction, journalism, publishing, and more. Non-credit creative writing courses are offered throughout the year as well, providing anyone in the community the chance to polish the writing craft and share the work with a supportive community of writers. Literacy initiatives include Story Time, Spanish Authors in America, and Current Voices in Literature, encouraging appreciation for books and enhancing reading skills of children and adults.

One of the more extraordinary community engagement projects of the Center has been the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation–supported Miami: City of Refuge project in 2011. The Cities of Refuge North America program provides safe haven for writers exiled under threat of death, imprisonment, or persecution in their native countries. Miami: City of Refuge writer-in-residence was exiled Zimbabwean poet, educator, and champion of social causes, Chenjerai Hove. He was available to students, faculty, and the Miami community at large throughout 2011, speaking on topics of global literature, writing, human rights and social justice, and freedom of expression. Or, as he put it, “freedom after expression.”

The close relationship between theater and literature prompted the Center to embrace Teatro Prometeo in summer 2006. Prometeo was founded at Miami Dade College 40 years ago with the mission of preserving the Spanish language and Hispanic culture. Besides a yearly calendar of plays and children’s theater programs, Teatro Prometeo offers classes in acting, voice and speech, movement, singing, playwriting, and camera-acting technique. Prometeo’s 2-year Professional Actor Training Program is unique in the nation for offering conservatory-style actor training in Spanish.

## **The Art Gallery System**

In the midst of too many fiscal crises and legislative skirmishes, meeting with students is the built-in reminder of why all those battles are worth fighting. As I was making my way to my office one day, one very excited student, just returned from study abroad, intercepted me for an impromptu meeting. “Dr. Padrón, you wouldn’t believe what happened to me.” He went on to describe how he had found himself suddenly in tears before a painting in the Rembrandt House Museum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. “Suddenly, I was seeing it. I never knew I could see like that.”

In the 5 years following enactment of the No Child Left Behind legislation, 44% of public school systems in the United States had reduced or eliminated classes in the arts, music, history, social studies, and physical education in the frenzy to ready students for standardized tests in math and English (*McMurrer, 2007*). This is understandable, given that federal and state dollars, school status, and teacher and principal evaluations are often contingent on student performance in these areas. This approach, however, narrows the definition of what it means to be smart. I remember a young interior designer of immense talent who could walk into a room and immediately see the potential in light, space, and color. Yet she

often lamented her lack of intelligence because her abilities did not fit traditional academic expectations. That we are systematically eliminating the arts as a context for learning is preposterous.

The painting that the returning study abroad student referred to was Rembrandt's *Jeremiah Contemplating the Destruction of the Temple*. Jeremiah is humanity's universal mourner, and that study abroad student was surely not the first to shed tears in front of him. The same day I met that student, another temple—a mosque in Iraq—exploded, killing scores of people. In front of which temple, I wondered, would parents around the world want their children to stand?

Not exactly a temple, but a shrine of sorts, Miami's Freedom Tower was donated to Miami Dade College in 2003. Dwarfed now by towers of steel and glass, she is no less a work of art, her steeple a tribute to the culture of old Seville, Spain. Stories of Miami have unfolded in the Freedom Tower's corridors, dating back to 1925 when the tower was home to *The Miami News* (a daily newspaper from 1896 to 1988) as it chronicled the early boom days when Henry Flagler's Florida East Coast Railway brought the rest of America to the Florida tropics. In 1958, however, the Freedom Tower became Miami's version of Ellis Island, greeting wave after wave of Cuban exiles about to reinvent their lives and forever change the landscape of South Florida. I was 15 years old, wondering what would become of me, when the Freedom Tower was the most beautiful building I had ever seen. She was my Statue of Liberty.

Today, the Freedom Tower is the centerpiece of Miami Dade College's Art Gallery System. And like the Book Fair, the galleries at each of Miami Dade College's campuses have opened their doors to a world of experience for people from every corner of the community. Young students, accompanied by teachers and parents, have been exposed to expressions of beauty and passion that they might otherwise never encounter. The building's lower levels have been transformed into museum-quality space, hosting a permanent photography exhibit of the exile experience in Miami. The Freedom Tower is also home to an immense and colorful mural of the world that is etched in the memory of each new arrival who has looked up to trace his or her own path. This mural was restored and unveiled in 2009 to the delight of a nostalgic and appreciative audience.

The Freedom Tower has already hosted some of the world's most renowned artworks. In partnership with the celebrated Caixanova Bank collection of Spain, a collection of 218 of Francisco Goya's engravings made their Florida premiere in 2008. This exhibit

included the rather disquieting portrayals from his *Disasters of War* series. These are compelling images that fulfill the promise of art – to inspire reflection on the state of our world and our beliefs.

In 2009, a second exhibit on loan from the CaixaNova Bank's collection included Salvadore Dali's *The Divine Comedy*, a commemorative series commissioned by the Italian government to honor the 700<sup>th</sup> birthday of one of Italy's greatest poets, Dante Alighieri. It is a remarkable collection of some 100 prints for each canto of the poem, and again, most in the Miami-Dade County community likely would live their entire lives without the chance to stand in front of this quality of art. These shows and all the exhibits at Miami Dade College's campus galleries are free to the public or accessible at a minimal cost.

Beyond the renown of Goya and Dali, all manner of installations have offered a treasure trove of experiences for Miami Dade College students and members of the Miami-Dade County community. A few additional examples are worth recounting. The 2009–2010 season at the Freedom Tower opened with *Under a Brilliant Sun*, 80 paintings, drawings, and sculptures from Cundo Bermudez, one of Cuba's most beloved artists, with members of the Miami community loaning several pieces from their personal collections to enrich the exhibition.

The 2009–2010 season continued with *Invasion 68 Prague*, which introduced South Floridians to the work of Josef Koudelka. Koudelka was a 30-year-old theater photographer who had never photographed a news event until the night of August 21, 1968, when his camera gave witness to Warsaw Pact tanks drawing a dark shadow across Czechoslovakia's Prague Spring. Forty years after the invasion, nearly 60 of these searing images have obvious resonance. The images for this exhibit, at which most of them were shown for the first time, were personally selected by Koudelka. The artist, whose work has been shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Hayward Gallery in London, among others, was not only present for the exhibit's opening, but also met with young photographers and their professors at Miami Dade College.

Finally, in 2011, *The Etruscans in Latium* brought a vision of 700 B.C. to this very modern community, with contributions from many of the most important Etruscan museums in Italy, including Cerveteri, Tarquinia, and Vulci. Artifacts included pottery, a sarcophagus lid, and a specially re-created three-dimensional tomb complete with re-creations of the paintings as they were discovered in situ.

The availability of these works of art makes a statement about value. Each of these exhibits and the constant flow of art and culture that Miami Dade College is committed to bringing to the Miami community challenges the definition of popular culture. Cannot Goya and Dali be popular? Should not great artists be accessible to the entire community? As the former chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, Dana Gioia, suggested in his Stanford commencement address in 2007, “The marketplace does only one thing—it puts a price on everything.” He went on to say that culture should instruct not on the price of things but on their value. “Culture should tell us what is beyond price” (*Gioia, 2007*).

In that regard, Miami Dade College’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration in 2009 called upon the art world in support of this anchor institution’s most basic mission, opening the door to college to anyone in the Miami community seeking a college education. Through a series of anniversary events, highlighted by a specially curated exhibition and sale of artworks from throughout the Americas, Miami Dade College was able to raise \$5 million in the single most successful charitable event in the community’s history. This was a clear case of one value enhancing another. The American Dream Scholarship was established, providing graduates of any Miami–Dade County high school, public or private, who had a 3.0 grade point average and college-ready entrance exam scores, access to a 2-year full tuition scholarship to Miami Dade College. At a moment of economic recession and limited funding to public educational institutions, the arts played a significant role in providing access to a college education for many of the young people in our community.

## **Art in Public Places**

Beyond Miami Dade College’s galleries, our campuses have become venues for art in public places. The North Campus, our largest at 245 acres and located in northern Miami–Dade County, offers 14 dramatic and large sculptures, and 79 mid-size pieces. The campus is now one of the largest sculpture parks in the state of Florida and showcases the Halebua Collection, monumental sculptures that reside in 33 museums and public places worldwide, including the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. Both our downtown Wolfson Campus and the Kendall Campus in the southern region of the county also host impressive sculptures.

## **Miami Live Arts.**

Celebrating its 23<sup>rd</sup> season in 2013, Miami Dade College's Miami Live Arts performance series reflects the excitement and diversity of the College and the larger South Florida community. The series has a celebrated history of featuring international and culturally specific work, both traditional and contemporary, which would not otherwise be seen in this region.

Although Latin American and Caribbean performances have dominated the yearly calendar, artists from throughout the world have delivered to Miamians a striking array of artistic expressions. They have included India's Ali Akbar Khan, Ravi Shankar, and the Nrityagram Dance Ensemble; Argentina's Teatro del Sur; Russia's Alla Demidova, performing with Claire Bloom; Susan Sontag with Min Tanaka from Japan; Brazil's pop mega stars Gilberto Gil and Gal Costa and the legendary Astrid Gilberto; Anna Teresa de Keersmaeker's Rosas Company from Belgium; Farafina, a dance and music company from Burkina Faso; Urban Bush Women; John Kelly and Company; Ralph Lemon; Mario Bauza and the Afro-Cuban Jazz Orchestra; Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company; Miranda July; Paquito D'Rivera Quintet; Stewart Copeland; Philip Glass and Robert Wilson; the Spanish Harlem Orchestra; Branford Marsalis; and many others.

Less visible than the performances, the residency component of Miami Live Arts is nonetheless vital to the mission of Miami Dade College's Cultural Affairs Department, which strives not only to present excellence in the performing arts, but also to develop future artists and audiences through educational outreach. Most of the artists who perform each season share their experience and talent during extended residencies. Some residencies aim to build new audiences; some provide professional development opportunities to local artists. Others address the social issues explored in an artist's work, while still more focus on technique or history.

Miami Dade College strives to make its programs accessible by choosing performance venues and residency partners in neighborhoods throughout Miami-Dade County, presenting work from diverse cultures and in different languages, and providing low-cost group sale tickets and free tickets to select organizations. Miami Live Arts artists reach young audiences in Miami-Dade County Public Schools, students of Miami Dade College, and the community at large through neighborhood community and cultural centers.

One of my favorite performances was by the New Orleans ReBirth Brass Band. The band often marches in the funeral processions so characteristic of the New Orleans traditions, but that night in 2002 they played in the concrete courtyard of an arts complex that provides work space to dozens of emerging artists in the African American Overtown neighborhood in Miami. What they created that night was more than a sound, more than the motion of hundreds of people. It was a communion of sorts, the horns seemingly blowing down the separation between strangers. It was an event that left an impression—one that got under the skin in the best possible way. I am insistent that Miami Dade College provide a home to such experiences.

### **Center for Cultural Collaborations**

In 1996, with seed money from the Ford Foundation, Miami Dade College created the Center for Cultural Collaborations International to gather human and financial resources needed to assist artists in creating new work and making lasting, meaningful ties to the community. For 2010–2011, Miami Dade College’s Cultural Affairs Department provided commissioning funds to artists, supporting the creation of new work via a local developmental residency that emphasized engagement with the community in the art-making process. The Cultural Affairs Department also provided marketplace advocacy on the benefits to the community of a thriving arts sector, professional administration services, financial management, and other support to these projects during the creative process. Several of these supported initiatives found their way to expression via the Miami Live Arts performance series.

### **Miami International Film Festival**

Between the traditions of Hollywood cinema and emerging digital media, the call of “let’s go to the movies” has never held a broader appeal. And as the geographical and cultural crossroads of the Americas, Miami is fertile ground for a rich blend of cinematic traditions. The Miami International Film Festival (the Festival) is one of only a few film festivals in the United States operated by an educational institution. It has become a world-class platform for film and filmmakers, offering the best of emerging and established film. The Miami International Film Festival, however, is the natural gateway for the discovery of Ibero-American talent, and is an unparalleled educational venue for filmmakers of every stripe. It affords professionals, both emerging and seasoned, an

opportunity to discover, discuss, and develop the art and business of Ibero-American cinema. In doing so, the Festival serves to promote Miami, Florida, as an educational and international film destination. Considered the most prominent Ibero-American-centric film festival in the United States, the Miami International Film Festival attracts more than 40 world, U.S., and East Coast premieres. In addition to 70,000 audience members, it is attended by over 250 industry-related individuals, including filmmakers, producers, talent, press, and industry executives every year. The 2013 Festival saw the screening of 117 feature films and 12 short films from 41 countries.

*Encuentros*, or Encounters, is the cornerstone of the Miami International Film Festival's Industry Program. It annually brings together influential industry professionals from all corners of the globe to meet with filmmakers in the Iberian diaspora (Spain, Portugal, South America, Central America, the Caribbean, and Spanish- or Portuguese-language audiences in the United States) who have culturally interesting and commercially viable feature film projects in various stages of development. In addition, the festival's REEL Education Seminar Series, presented in partnership with the University of Miami, consistently attracts top executives from Warner Bros. Entertainment, Sony Pictures Classics, IFC (Independent Film Channel) Films, Fox Searchlight, DreamWorks Animation, and HBO (Home Box Office) Films/HBO Latino.

Students, film buffs, and aspiring filmmakers pack these events, made free to the public via sponsorship support. Sponsorship, of course, is a crucial aspect of the Festival's success, allowing Miami Dade College to make the films and the educational events available at minimal cost. Overall, 50 sponsors lent their support at varying levels to the 2013 Festival, led by The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, American Airlines, Comcast, the Miami Beach Visitor and Convention Authority, the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs, and HBO Latin America. In addition to the industry and educational aspects of filmmaking, the Festival's organizers do their best to roll out the red carpet and bring the excitement of the movies to the Miami community. Career tributes and yearly awards have recognized some of the most creative and enduring names in film as well as up-and-coming filmmakers. Career honors have gone to the great Swedish actress Liv Ullman, as well as Danish filmmaker Susanne Bier, whose film *In a Better World* captured both the 2011 Golden Globe Award and 2011 Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film.

## **New World School of the Arts**

A visit to this inner-city arts haven in downtown Miami turns up a band of neo-bohemians dressed in tights and a range of old hippie garb. You recognize them by the eager conversation, spontaneous dance steps down the sidewalk, and sudden bursts of song. This is New World School of the Arts, a quintessential dream factory for the young artists of Miami. New World School of the Arts is one the country's premier conservatories, providing a comprehensive program of artistic training, academic development, and preparation for careers in dance, music, theater, and visual arts. It is a long-standing partnership between Miami-Dade County Public Schools, Miami Dade College, and the University of Florida, offering training to students beginning in high school and culminating in a bachelor of fine arts degree.

New World School of the Arts is a wonderful example of what public education can achieve. Students apply via audition and/or portfolio, and while their talent is honed they also receive a first-class liberal learning foundation. The high school division is repeatedly among the nation's most highly rated, with its college-going rate near 100% each year (*U.S. News*, 2012). Both high school and college graduates of the New World School of the Arts are everywhere today, gracing stages from Los Angeles to New York City. But while they are learning their way through school, they are on stage and in galleries for the entire Miami community, showcasing a dazzling collection of young talent.

New World School of the Arts students are not the only young people at Miami Dade College putting their talent on display. In-depth programs in the visual arts, music, dance, and theater are offered at every campus of Miami Dade College. Moreover, each campus hosts a range of events, from the Latin Jazz Concert at the Kendall Campus in the southern part of Miami-Dade County to the Festival of the Arts at the North Campus. The Wolfson Campus offers one of higher education's most respected Spanish-language theater programs, Teatro Prometeo, engaging students in theater productions each semester.

## **Miami Leadership Roundtable**

Arts and cultural programming help us to support a community of quality, one that is able to cross boundaries of thought and belief to find commonality. Another example of this support is the Miami Leadership Roundtable, Miami Dade College's speakers series, which has contributed a remarkable range of speaker perspectives. The speaker series provides members of the Miami

community and the College's students with the essential raw material for understanding world events in new ways. For example: "In the final analysis, the main source of our troubles is not outside, but within us, in our attitudes toward one another, toward society and nature." That was 2006, and the speaker was President Mikhail Gorbachev, daring his audience to consider a new perspective.

President Gorbachev was preceded at the Roundtable in 2006 by another global pioneer, the former president of Poland (1990–1995) and leader of the Solidarity movement (an independent trade union), Lech Walesa. Both Gorbachev and Walesa challenged their listeners to see beyond ideologies and borders. For the Miami community, a community woven from the most diverse fabric, it was a message with personal resonance. Past Roundtable speakers have included Al Gore, Bill Clinton, Dan Rather, David Brinkley, Eugene McCarthy, George Will, George Soros, Gerald Ford, Indra Nooyi, Jehan Sadat, Jimmy Carter, Madeleine Albright, Oliver Stone, Ralph Nader, Robert McNamara, Shirley Chisholm, Terry Waite, Tip O'Neill, and Tom Wolfe, among others.

## Conclusion

Anchor institutions have emerged as critical drivers of the economic dynamic, spurring investment in local and minority entrepreneurs through procurement and contracts as well as expanding employment in the region. And of course, beyond economics, the basic missions of the educational, medical, government, and civic sectors support a seemingly boundless range of quality factors.

Institutions like Miami Dade College hold special relevance, as suggested by their designation as "community colleges." For these colleges, the mission statement invariably offers a commitment to be responsive to the needs of the residents and workforce elements within the community. Again, the latter suggests strong economic support, such as developing specific educational and training programs that are relevant to regional workforce needs. But a much deeper impact occurs under the rubric of responsiveness. In Miami, for instance, poverty is an intractable community challenge that demands attention. The City of Miami, according to the U.S. Census, is the sixth-poorest large city in the United States, based on median family income (*United States Census Bureau, 2009*). In turn, as noted earlier, two thirds of Miami Dade College's student population falls into categories of poverty or low income, and more than half the students are the first in their families to attend college. Miami Dade College's motto reads, "Opportunity

Changes Everything,” and such a sentiment might well be extended to anchor institutions overall.

As anchor institutions demonstrate, the quality of life in a community is determined by many factors. Miami Dade College’s effort to ensure that the arts are accessible throughout the community suggests that the most refined and wondrous of qualitative elements can become a reliable ingredient in each community member’s life. We should view these opportunities, just as we should view the chance to gain a college education, as far more essential than we do now, something akin to a birthright. These opportunities imply that anchor institutions are affecting not only the macro spheres of economics, health, and education, but also the subtler realms of experience that occur in a darkened theater, in front of a rare masterwork, or long into a page-turning night. Anchor institutions, indeed, have the chance to play an unparalleled role in the rebirth and growth of cities across America.

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## **About the Author**

**Eduardo J. Padrón** is president of Miami Dade College, located in Miami, Florida. He is a past chair of the Board of the Association of American Colleges and Universities and the Board of Directors of the American Council on Education. During his career, he has been selected to serve on posts of national prominence by six American presidents. Most recently, he was named chairman of the White House Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans by President Obama. He is widely recognized for his visionary leadership in defining higher education's role in America, and his groundbreaking success initiatives with underserved and underprepared students.