

Major investment in Miami Dade College solidifies area's commitment to artificial intelligence and technology development

By David L. Snelling / Special to Islander News Mar 24, 2022

Miami Dade College just took a major step to becoming an international technology hub.

A total of \$15 million was pumped into MDC by The Johns S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Miami-Dade County, the City of Miami and the Miami Downtown Development Authority (DDA). MDC is expanding its technology innovative programs in applied artificial intelligence (AI) data analytics and related emerging technologies.

According to the College, the gift comes at a time when enrollment in tech programs is reaching all-time highs. It will allow the school to increase by over 20 percent its School of Engineering and Technology (EnTec) faculty – focusing on AI and emerging tech disciplines, as well as develop new courses and professional development programs in these fields.

“With these historic investments and support from key partners, we are expanding (our) mission, preparing students for top jobs in emerging and growing technology careers, helping residents ups-kill to attain economic mobility, and driving the growth of businesses in South Florida while fueling local talent for the jobs of tomorrow, today,” said Madeline Pumariega, MDC’s president.

MDC will also implement “AI for All,” an initiative that aims to train all MDC students in applied AI, regardless of their degree track. MDC will be the first college in the nation to implement an artificial intelligence course in its core curriculum.

The funds will also allow MDC to build an AI Center to foster experiential learning and collaboration between industry and academia, which will join existing MDC technology centers focused on animation and gaming, cloud computing and cybersecurity.

The expansion of the school’s technology programs comes when they launch “MDC Tech,” a gateway to connect students, community members and employers. Through MDC Tech, students will have access to all tech courses, programs and professional development opportunities. Tech companies and other Miami employers will also find a direct platform to reach MDC students with the most sought-after tech skills.

Over the past five years, MDC’s EnTec has garnered the attention and support of top global industry leaders in emerging technologies, including IBM, Amazon Web Services, Microsoft, Google, Cisco and Oracle. As a result, EnTec’s programs in areas like cloud computing, cybersecurity and data analysis are among the most market-aligned.

Since 2017, enrollment in tech-related programs at EnTec has grown by 120%. Today, EnTec serves more than 5,000 students each year across more than 30 degrees.

Here is a breakdown of the \$15 million investment:

1. \$7 million from the Knight Foundation
2. \$5 million from the county
3. \$2 million from the City of Miami
4. \$1 million from the Miami DDA.

“Miami Dade College is a cornerstone institution in Miami, offering high-quality, accessible educational and workforce training programming,” said Raul Moas, senior director of the Knight Foundation Miami program. “With this new investment ...MDC is significantly growing its ability to meet the growing community demand for careers in tech while fueling industry with needed talent.”

Since 2012, Knight Foundation has invested more than \$55 million in nurturing Miami’s tech and startup ecosystem by connecting entrepreneurs, attracting investments and growing the city’s talent base.

This latest investment builds on Knight’s support of Miami Tech, including a \$15 million commitment in Florida International University (FIU), the University of Miami (UM) and Baptist Health South Florida, announced in February 2021.

In September 2021, Knight announced \$510,000 in investments to four local organizations and entities that help boost a sense of community among tech practitioners in the city. In November 2021, Knight Foundation announced a \$2.25 million investment in CodePath to expand and launch programming at FIU, Florida Memorial University and MDC to connect students to tech careers.

“We are an extremely talented community with a vibrant entrepreneurial spirit that could take the current tech boom to the next level if given an opportunity to do so,” said Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava. “It is an honor for Miami-Dade County to partner with our local college community to invest in our residents.”

Francis Suarez , mayor of the City of Miami, said the college is deserving of the grant’s infusion. MDC is an “invaluable partner” in Miami’s development as the “Capital of Capital, and during a time where human capital is just as, if not more, valuable as financial capital.”

Added City of Miami Commissioner Manolo Reyes: “Downtown Miami has become a fertile ground for innovation and a high-tech cluster is taking shape before our eyes.

“Recognizing that Artificial Intelligence (AI) is already playing a critical role in our daily lives and that its impact will grow with time, the Miami DDA is making a \$1 million investment to help put Downtown Miami on the global map as one of the top places to learn and develop the science behind AI,” said Reyes, who is also chairman of the DDA.

Siemma Lallenmamd, a Key Biscayne resident and a 10th grade student at MAST Academy, will start her SAS HS during the 2022-2023 school year. This will allow her to take Miami Dade College courses and graduate high school with college credits.

“The money provides great opportunities for students in technology programs and I'm excited because it could overlap with other programs for students taking college classes,” said Lallenmamd, who has a 3.94 GPA in high school. She is also an intern for Islander News.