



ARMANDO ALEJANDRE JR.  
FEBRUARY 24, 1996  
MEMORIAL FOUNDATION

## 2023 Changemaking Education Awards

September 23, 2023, Miami Springs, FL

*Education is not the filling of a pail,  
but the lighting of a fire.*

William Butler Yeats

### Changemaking Education Award Committee

- Ana Ciereszko — RPCV, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
- David Garcia — RPCV, Kenya
- Mary Lamberts — RPCV, Thailand
- Precious Symonette — Co-president, Teacher of the Year Coal.
- Linda Telfer — RPCV, Kenya and The Gambia
- Linda Whitmyre — RPCV, Malaysia
- Josh Young — RPCV, Mali and Paraguay

Recognizing K-12 and college/university educators who are building a new generation of informed and engaged citizens through changemaking education.



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Sponsored by:

- The Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of South Florida
- The Miami-Dade County Teacher of the Year Coalition
- The Armando Alejandro Jr. Memorial Foundation



Miami-Dade County

TEACHER OF THE YEAR COALITION



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## **Changemaker Education**

..... sparks a sense of agency in students and provides real-life opportunities to understand problems and practice creating positive social and/or environmental change.



### **Higher Education—Honorees**

**Darrell Arnold** — MDC North Campus

**Kimberly Coffman** — MDC Kendall Campus

**Nikki Fraser** — Florida International University

**Daphnee Gilles** — MDC Wolfson Campus

**Mirsad Krijestorac** — Broward College

**Katsiaryna Matusevich** — Barry University

**Carmen Mise** — MDC North Campus

**Jason Mizell** — University of Miami

**Rachel Pauletti** — Lynn University

**Emily Sendin** — MDC Kendall Campus

**Sebastian Terneus** — MDC Eduardo J. Padrón Campus

*No one is born a good citizen; no nation is born a democracy. Rather, both are processes that continue to evolve over a lifetime. Young people must be included from birth. A society that cuts itself off from its youth severs its lifeline.*

Kofi Annan, Former UN Secretary

### **K-12—Honorees**

**Lisa Deyarza** — Miami Lakes Middle School

**Asia Fernandez** — Ludlum Elementary School

**Dwanita Fields** — Miami Jackson Senior High

**Jennifer Simeon** — Miami Lakes K-8 Center



*Educating the mind without  
educating the heart is no education  
at all.*

Aristotle

## **Honorees**

(in alphabetical order)

### **Darrell Arnold**

Miami Dade College - North Campus

Professor Arnold teaches a variety of critical thinking, ethics, and philosophy courses. He works closely with MDC's Institute for Civic Engagement and Democracy on voter and civics education initiatives, including integrating the Motivote program into all of his courses and engaging many of his students in the Unify America Challenge. Motivote provides students with voter and civics resources to encourage civic responsibility and especially voting, and helps them be election ready. Last Fall, 188 of his students participated in Motivote. Many students from these courses also participated in the Unify America Challenge, a nationwide initiative that pairs students from around the country for a dialogue across the political divide. The initiative intends to help overcome the political divisiveness of the country by facilitating civil discussion underlining common values that we have despite potentially differing cultural backgrounds and political orientations.

### **Kimberly Coffman**

Miami Dade College - Kendall Campus

Professor Coffman includes changemaking education strategies in all of her Introduction to Psychology classes. Her students have the opportunity to complete actions on MDC's Civic Action Scorecard, participate in the Unify America College Bowl where they have guided conversations about goals for America with another student different from themselves, participate in the Motivote election readiness program, and more. She also includes a number of intentional strategies intended to foster students' consideration of their own and others' perspectives across various gendered, familial, ethnic, social, and cultural frames which are essential to their development as changemakers. Professor Coffman is also a leader of Project Based Learning at MDC, and is on the Changemaker Education Faculty Leadership committee.

**Lisa Deyarza**  
Miami Lakes Middle School

Ms. Deyarza is a staple of Miami Lakes Middle School. With 40+ years of teaching experience she has had an impact on thousands of students. She leads the school's Mock Trial, Project Citizen, We The People, and Model UN teams. Her We The People team became the first middle school team in Florida history to win the national competition in Washington, D.C. Her Project Citizen team has placed #1 in the state of Florida many times and has led to two municipal ordinances being implemented in the Town of Miami Lakes - all written by her students. Ms. Deyarza has sparked a sense of agency in students and provided real-life opportunities for students to fix community problems. Her students attend the nation's top universities and are widely respected by South Florida elected officials for their advocacy work and ability to shape public policy to address community problems.

**Asia Fernandez**  
Ludlum Elementary

Ms. Fernandez is passionate in sharing environmental lessons with her students and working to spread the message of sustainability schoolwide, and she brought the Green Schools Challenge to her school. Last year Ms. Fernandez wore a variety of hats, including serving as a math and science coach for teachers and students, filling a vacancy in a 1st grade class while continuing math/science coaching. Part of the science coaching was preparing the 5th grade students for the FL Science Standard Assessment test. Her students developed and maintained an edible garden, and used hydroponics to grow plants and aquaponics to raise fish. The peppers, tomatoes, and collard greens went home with the students along with a recipe, and the community was invited to tour the garden. She is the school's lead for Dream in Green and participated with ECO Schools to create a Pine Rockland Garden where the students not only learned about the Pine Rockland ecosystem but also involved them in budgeting to establish it and providing tours for their fellow students. Promotion of sustainability, conservation, recycling is a foundation of her teaching.



***The future will not belong on those who are content with the present. The future will not belong to cynics and people who sit on the sidelines. The future will belong to people who have passion and who are willing to work hard to make this country better.***

Senator Paul Wellstone



*Ask not what your country can do for  
you – ask what you can do for your  
country.*

John F. Kennedy

### **Dwanita Fields**

Miami Jackson Senior High

Ms. Fields teaches 9th grade and is the founder of a nonprofit organization called Leading with Love - a cultural leadership program designed to develop the leadership skills of young girls, empowering them to become change agents by providing mentorship, leadership development, and cultural immersion experiences. Ms. Fields takes students on international cultural immersion and service trips through her program "Global Love Leaders." This summer, she took eight of her students to work with 100 young Dominican girls in one of the DR's poorest provinces. Her students led social emotional workshops, facilitated aerodynamic STEM workshops, volunteered at an animal shelter and much more. She created this program to provide her students with the opportunity to explore the world through discovery and service.

### **Nikki Fraser**

Florida International University

Professor Fraser's students in the Public Policy and Service program partnered with students from Brazil to tackle real-life problems and create solutions. She partnered with the Maurice A. Ferre Institute for Civic Leadership and Fundacao Getulio Vargas, the class compared and contrasted individual briefs in teams (2-3 students) and developed a new policy brief with an infographic to address Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #3 or #11 (Healthy and Sustainable Cities). This class is a "collaborative online intergenerational leaning" designated class. Students exchanged knowledge while sharing their previous assignment about SDG in their city; they also co-created knowledge while designing a new policy brief and infographic to address the chosen SDG; and acquired knowledge while developing new skills and competencies to work together across cultures.

## **Daphnee Gilles**

Miami Dade College - Wolfson Campus

Professor Gilles infuses changemaking into all her courses - including teaching students learning English, as well as Honors Leadership students. Her students come from diverse backgrounds; many are first-generation college students, while others are recent immigrants, and most are not engaged in the community outside their social media circles. She challenges students to be change agents and move outside their comfort zone. Students dive deep into service-learning, volunteering at local not-for-profit organizations, and within the college community, as they serve and learn. Students hone their leadership, personal, social, and academic skills, including their writing and communication skills, which are essential for academic success as they complete multiple actions on MDC's Civic Action Scorecard in the areas of Democratic Engagement, Arts & Culture, Environment & Sustainability, Community Well-being, and Social Innovation.

## **Mirsad Krijestorac**

Broward College

Professor Krijestorac has built experiential education and a focus on environmental justice into his POS 2041 (American Nat. Govt.) courses and Social Science Club program. His students plan, organize, and implement an annual Environmental Justice Fair & Symposium held at Broward College's North Campus. This event focuses on multiple aspects of environmental justice, especially those that are relevant to our local community in South Florida. The event is greatly anticipated on campus and is attended by over 150 students and community members every year. Some of the themes covered are water justice and rising sea levels, food deserts and organic farming, and workers' rights and community gardens. Many activists, elected officials, and city officials speak to us about these topics and set up tables for students to learn more their work. Students are also encouraged to bring their resumes and CVs to this event to share it with organizations they may be interested in working with for either internship or job positions. The program opens students up to a world of issues and opportunities that many weren't aware of.

## **About the Award**

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of South Florida Inc. (RPCVSF), the Armando Alejandro Jr. Memorial Foundation, and the Miami-Dade Teacher of the Year Coalition are committed to building a better South Florida by encouraging a new generation of informed and engaged citizens. We celebrate and recognize K-12 and higher education teachers who create educational experiences that intentionally prepare students for informed, engaged participation in their communities' civic and democratic life by providing opportunities to develop civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions through learning and practice.

This type of teaching and learning increases student empowerment, commitment to meaningful civic engagement, while building a better South Florida/global community and creating a new generation of changemakers.

We aim, through this award, to shine a light on exceptional educators in S. Florida who are doing this important work. We are grateful, we are honored, and we are inspired by their work, and we want more educators to follow their lead, and ultimately more students to have this type of transformational educational experience.

For more information, visit:

[www.rpcvsf.org](http://www.rpcvsf.org) and select "Programs"

## **Sebastian Terneus**

Miami Dade College - Eduardo J. Padrón Campus

Miami is ground zero for the problems posed by climate change. Despite this daunting scenario, Professor Terneus helps his College Composition students use their voices and perspectives to tackle local environmental issues. His students combined their writing skills and civic actions to lessen the impact of extreme heat in Miami. Initially, students took field trips throughout Little Havana to see how the lack of infrastructure does not protect residents from rising temperatures. Undergraduates used infrared photo apps to take pictures of how Miamians must endure these debilitating conditions. These images were then used to create photo essays to inform the MDC community about the risks of extreme heat exposure.

Dr. Terneus' classes then wrote emails to commissioners to advocate for infrastructure improvements to help residents deal with extreme heat. Students researched peer-reviewed articles to propose climate change adaptation strategies such as increasing tree canopies and installing covered bus benches in high density areas. The academic year ended with a community art installation – The Tree Haiku Project - that drew attention to tree inequity and extreme heat in Miami. Each student took a photo and wrote a haiku about a tree in their area to highlight how nature improves a neighborhood. Students installed these poems in the campus' Slash Pine trees so residents and commuters could see how tree canopy differs throughout the county. Signage in the eco-art installation informed visitors how low-income and communities of color often have the lowest percentage of tree canopy and endure related health risks. The signs also provided a QR code for residents to scan and discover their neighborhood's tree canopy percentage.

## **Katsiaryna Matusevich**

Barry University

Professor Matusevich's students in the Master of Science in Human Resource Management serve as human resource development (HRD) consultants to nonprofit organizations. Her students have provided over 2,500 hours of service to 40 organizations across Florida and the Bahamas. Students engage with the leadership and employees of the organization to identify needs related to employee performance, development, and well-being with a view to co-creating evidence-based interventions. The experience equips students to build more-inclusive, employee-focused, and equitable organizations that honor the wider community's cultural and social diversity. This hands-on endeavor aids organizations in supplementing their learning, talent, and leadership capabilities, and this enables the organizations to make a long-term impact on the communities they serve. Simultaneously, the students make significant strides in their personal and professional advancement, embodying the true essence of HRD—developing human capacities to their fullest potential.

## **Carmen Mise**

Miami Dade College - North Campus

Professor Mise's ENC 1102 course is organized thematically around "Food Matters" and global sustainability and earth literacy. Her students become better writers, critical thinkers, and learn to fine tune research skills. In addition to the core course competencies, students, through the thematic nature of the class, also spend time learning about the complex and delicate nature of the food production chain, agriculture and the environmental impact of animal husbandry, in addition to food science, social justice, and equity, among other food related issues. To enhance the curriculum of the course, students complete 100 points on the MDC Civic Action Scorecard, with a focus on food and the environment. For example, students completed ES-1: "Know the native plants of your community," they also completed ES-3: "Attend a farmer's market." A favorite was ES-14: "Eliminate consumption of meat, fish, & animal byproducts for 7 continuous days." Using the Scorecard, students gained an appreciation and deeper understanding of the topics discussed in class.

## **Jason Mizell**

University of Miami

Professor Mizell designed a children's literature course, TAL 203, in order to help his students critically reflect not only on books they had read as children but also to help them think about how they could use books to think critically about their world, as well as how books can be used as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors. Windows in that his students and K-12 students could see and understand the lives of others, mirrors because books can serve as a reflection of students' lives so that they know that they are not alone and sliding glass doors due to a book's power to allow people to at least temporarily look at and even step into the lives of others. Students did a variety of projects, including working with local community organizations to select and secure books for the children they served, as well as implementing art and music projects based on these books. For example, students worked with the Linda Ray Early Intervention Center that serves babies and toddlers who were born to mothers with substance abuse issues. The UM students assisted the Center and its staff to select more than 100 books that served as windows, mirrors, and sliding glass doors for the children at the center; and to design art and musical projects that allowed the children at the center to create representations of themselves and their families.

## **Rachel Pauletti**

Lynn University

Lynn University's Citizenship Project is an important annual tradition when first-year students give back to the community through an initiative of their choice. Professor Pauletti's class took a unique approach to the project this academic year. In a class full of psychology majors, it was no surprise that mental health advocacy became the heart of their initiative. Her students gathered insights directly from their peers—asking questions about their emotions and well-being and sharing mental health resources. Students in the course used design thinking to develop and implement a “wellness wall” on campus. The wall was an interactive experience for students to express positive and negative emotions in a public place, with the goal of destigmatizing “bad days” and elevating “good days.” Over 500 students interacted with the “wellness wall” in February and March to demonstrate the power of positivity.

## **Emily Sendin**

Miami Dade College - Kendall Campus

Students in Professor Sendin's leadership, composition, and literature courses engaged in academic service learning and civic engagement projects. In the leadership courses, students envisioned and implemented a variety of capstone projects, which included teaching English and STEM to Chacrasecan children in Nicaragua through online programs, raising awareness for childhood cancer and good health and well being, and developing a website and guide for incoming MDC freshmen to learn to navigate the demands of college. In English Composition II, students conducted research on environmental concerns and social change, developing informative and persuasive writing skills and creating a podcast. The project collaborated with various organizations and resulted in a new Advocacy Page in the campus' literary magazine. The podcast segments raised awareness about conservation and sustainability issues in South Florida. Additionally, literature students worked on educational escape rooms that fostered storytelling, critical thinking, and communication skills for social impact while participating in Amnesty International's Write for Rights Campaign.

## **Jennifer Simeon**

Miami Lakes K-8 Center

Ms. Simeon is an exemplary teacher who dedicates herself to uplifting her students to become the next generation of leaders. She is the law studies teacher at Miami-Lakes K-8 Center where she provides students with real-life opportunities to get involved in their communities and understand the American system of government by participating in events like Model United Nations conferences and the Virtutem Populo Civic Knowledge Bowl. She is also the student council advisor where she engages students in active civic engagement education daily by allowing students the opportunity to be agents of change in their school site and make a difference through action. Ms. Simeon is an inspiring educator who provides students the opportunity to grow, learn, and become changemakers.