



AFC TECHNOLOGY COMMISSION

2023 EXEMPLARY PRACTICE AWARDS

Theme: "Moving Forward to Creative & Innovative ways of using Technology in Education"

Submission

Complete and submit this form with a brief written summary (not to exceed 1,000 words) and any supporting documentation to the committee by 5:00 p.m. Tuesday, August 1, 2023.

Title of Nominee's Project: We Learn 366 Institute

Nominee's Name: Dr. Belkis L. Cabrera, Director

Nominee's College: Miami Dade College

Campus: Padrón

Nominee's E-Mail: bcabrer2@mdc.edu

Nominee's Project Website: <http://www.welearn366.com>



Effective professional development (PD) for educators is arguably the most impactful and verified method for ensuring student success (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017; Burroughs, et al., 2019; Fletcher-Wood & Zuccollo, 2020). In fact, research suggests that teachers who receive substantial, high-quality PD can boost their students' achievement by roughly 21 percentage points ([IMSE](#), 2022). However, effective, high-quality PD is not a one-shot workshop, nor is it a series of disconnected periodic presentations; rather, effective, high-quality PD necessitates expert support and must be rooted in relevant, evidence-based teaching and learning needs and interests (Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2015; Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner, 2017).

Certainly, as we stand at the edge of another evolution in education with artificial intelligence (AI) and extended reality (XR) at the center, it becomes imperative that we reconsider our PD models for educators. In this context, the WeLearn 366 Institute (an equity-focused, Title V grant at the Miami Dade College in Miami, Florida) has partnered faculty with instructional designers and developed a comprehensive, innovative, and high-tech PD process, complete with a [state-of-the-art, collaborative, and multi-functional workspace](#). From the One Button Studios and Revolution Lightboards to the VR Lounge, SMART Conference Room, and the Collaborative Stations, students and faculty use the WeLearn workspace to co-plan and co-create.

In short, the WeLearn 366 Institute bridges [course redesign](#) and student academic support services with evidence-based pedagogy and innovative educational technology to improve retention, progression, and completion rates for Hispanic and low-income students. Apart from redesigning courses, creating open educational resources, supporting conference travel and publications, partnering with Learning Resources, the Earth Ethics Institute, the Institute for Civic Engagement and Democracy, and a handful of departments and programs across the college, WeLearn has also spearheaded and co-built collegewide policy and initiatives around all-things tech, such as the Metaversity Training Program and the Instructional Design and Technology certificate program. WeLearn has also been key in fostering professional learning communities and communities of practice around high impact practices, artificial

intelligence, and virtual reality and has been instrumental in institutionalizing a Grant Collaborative and Adjunct PD Series – spreading awareness, deepening understanding, and expanding the implementation of promising practices with ed tech tools across the eight campuses that make up MDC. Within only two years, WeLearn has become a hub and model for PD and tech-related initiatives and programs.

All of our work aims to continue to shift the focus and conversation of teaching and learning from content-centered to learner-centered. This gains urgency with the enticement of immersive technology and the lure of AI; while faculty, departments, and entire institutions may delve, full-fledged, but floundering into these tech-tempting tools and landscapes, WeLearn is helping to rethink, replan, and redevelop pedagogically-sound structures that leverage these tech tools for student (and teacher) success and satisfaction. Our course redesign project, for example, begins with the introduction of a warm, humanizing, liquid syllabus and can end anywhere from course-specific OER Vyond learning objects to a co-facilitated fully-immersive “Butterfly World” that engages students in a dry forest ecosystem with butterflies, plants, and invasive species.

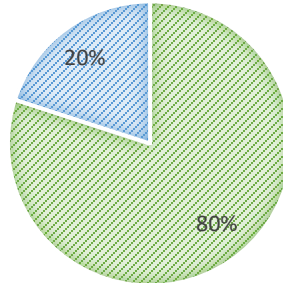
In just two years, WeLearn has surpassed all of its goals and targets (see Table 1). However, our most notable achievements cannot be quantified. We are proudest of the energy and excitement that we have generated around technology across the campus and collegewide and the visible smiles and palpable satisfaction and confidence we have fostered while integrating innovative technologies in the teaching and learning process. We welcome others to adopt or adapt our systems and are constantly revisiting and revising based on feedback, data, and emerging scholarly research.

Table 1. WeLearn Accomplishment Highlights 2021-2023:

Highlighted Activities	Performance Data								
<p style="text-align: center;">Course Redesign Project</p>	<div style="text-align: center;"> <p>68 Redesigned Courses</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Data for 68 Redesigned Courses</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Number of Courses</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Year 1</td> <td>24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Year 2</td> <td>44</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Total</td> <td>68</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <p><i>Quantitative Highlights:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In just 2 years, surpassed 5 YR goal of 66 courses • Engaged faculty in over 750+ hours of course redesign with technology <p><i>Qualitative Highlights:</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>“It is an excellent hands-on training in a super supportive environment that is equally high tech and equally focused on the pedagogy and the philosophy and the quality of the content.”</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid #ccc; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0;"> <p>“I enjoyed working with WeLearn 366 because they helped me understand my students’ perspectives better. From syllabus to course shell, I was taught effective strategies to improve student success in my remote classes.”</p> </div>	Year	Number of Courses	Year 1	24	Year 2	44	Total	68
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FACULTY PARTICIPANTS

■ Fulltime ■ Adjunct



Additional Professional Development

Quantitative Highlights:

- Offered 30+ PD sessions, including High Impact Practice Faculty Learning Communities
- 600+ fulltime faculty participated in PD to-date
- 150+ adjuncts participated in PD to-date

Qualitative Highlights:

“The **pedagogical ideas, technical and intellectual support** WeLearn 366 provides are significantly valuable in helping me update and redesign the learning environment in my science classes.”

“I love the **collaborative nature of the workshops and space.**”

Direct Student Support

Quantitative Highlights:

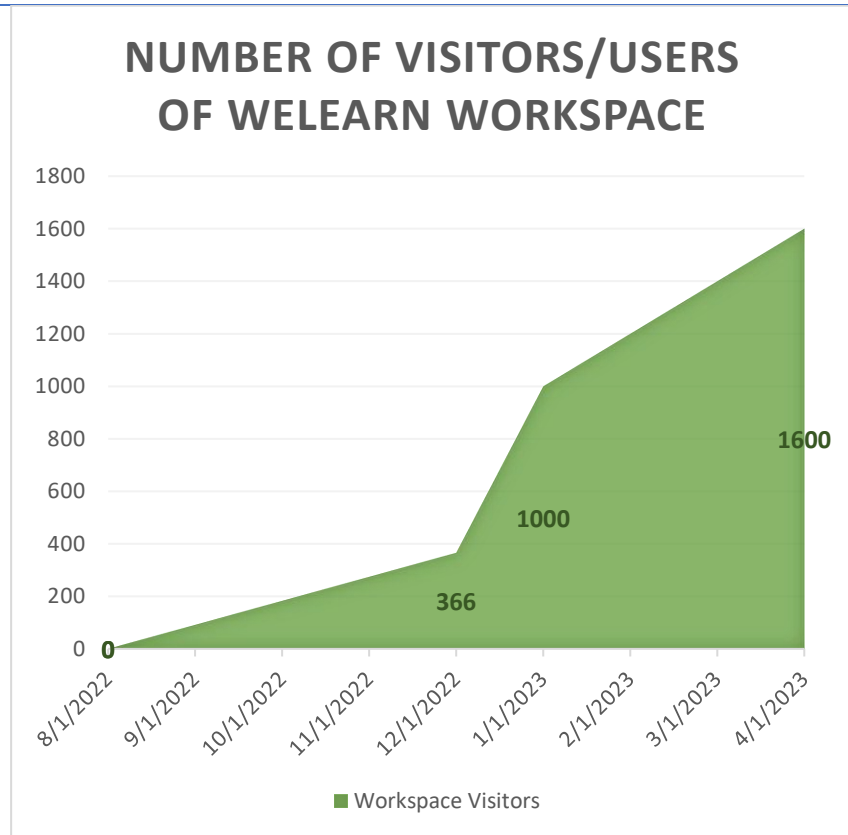
- 1,500+ students impacted by course redesign
- 10 student workshops provided, including Peer-Led Team Learning Training & “Achieve the College Dream”

Qualitative Highlights:

“WeLearn 366 Institute is constantly looking for ways to **help students have a successful experience in college and beyond.**”

“I love the staff and **really cool physical space.**”

Workspace Usage



Quantitative Highlights:

- 1,600+ visitors to-date
- 1,300+ students
- 150+ faculty

	<p><i>Qualitative Highlights:</i></p> <p>“[What I love most about WeLearn is] the technology and the space, but above all the amazing staff that supports faculty.”</p> <p>“Honestly, everything about WeLearn 366 Institute is useful for everyone - students, faculty, and 'other.' The space is loaded with great, useful technology, the physical workspaces are modern and very well planned, the private booths are terrific for conducting serious administrative work or have small conferences. The staff COULD NOT BE more pleasant, knowledgeable, and helpful. I thank each and everyone of the staff members of the Padron campus WeLearn 366 Institute!”</p>
<p>Retention Goal: Increase retention rates for WeLearn students by 1% (per year) over 60% baseline</p>	<p>Goal was to achieve 62% retention rate by Year 2; achieved 67.2% retention rate in our redesigned courses.</p> <p>WeLearn Pass Rates vs. non-WeLearn students (Fall 21):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4% increase in ENC 1102 • 8% increase in MAC 1105 • 9% increase in SPC 1017
<p>Progression Goal: Increase 24-credit progression rate to 34%</p>	<p>Achieved 48% 24-credit progression rate</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15% increase from baseline
<p>Completion Goal: Not Measured Until YR 3</p>	<p>However, WeLearn already achieved a 16% completion rate with its 1st cohort, which means that 16% of students graduated faster than anticipated – in less than two years.</p>

Top 3 Tech Tools: Snapshots & Recommendations from the Field

Vyond Platform: WeLearn invested in 8 Vyond seats/licenses in order to support faculty's creation of engaging, animated videos. We have found that Vyond is an easy-to-use, flexible tool that allows us to deliver trainings and simplify complex content. Although our faculty work with an instructional designer on the more sophisticated designs, some of our faculty have created their own content using the templates and basic features of the application. While investing in Vyond can be costly (as with most emerging tech), we highly recommend Vyond as a way to generate personalized "open" or free content for students.

Lessons Learned: We have found that our faculty wanted to adopt OER, but they felt that the OER material was either too advanced or too basic, Vyond allows our faculty to create an MDC-student tailored lesson. Moreover, coupled with Nearpod or PlayPosit, these videos can become interactive.

Our Mission

RAISE RETENTION, PROGRESSION, & COMPLETION RATES

The WeLearn 366 Institute's Course Redesign process focuses on developing **evidence-based high impact practices** that are competency-based, include a wide range of learning environments, and are adaptable to the needs and potential of each learner to support the highest possible outcome.

Course Redesign Program

EQUITABLE & LEARNER-FOCUSED PEDAGOGY

Based at MDC's Padrón Campus, we work on a first-come, first-serve basis that prioritizes faculty at Padrón, as well as High Impact Low Pass (HELP) courses, with funding available to support up to 30 cohorts per academic year (Fall to Spring).

Compensation

Faculty who enroll can receive **10 Task Points**:

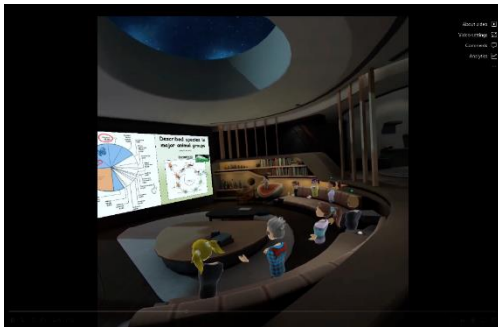
- **\$500** at the end of Fall upon completion of developing a practice and
- **\$500** at the end of Spring upon completion of implementing a high impact practice.

Faculty that participate in the course redesign can choose among five different high-impact practices to develop and implement into the **Blended** or **LIVE** courses.



VR & Engage: WeLearn invested in 6 meta quest pro headsets and partnered with departments across campus to utilize class-sets of Oculus headsets to immerse students and faculty in VR teaching and learning. Apart from offering trainings, presentations, and workshops in our VR Lounge, WeLearn is partnering with Learning Commons and our Metaversity department to root the VR curriculum in sound pedagogical practices. WeLearn is also working with Engage to assist faculty in creating their own VR lessons and experiences.

Lessons Learned: We have found that departments, programs, and entire institutions are leaping into the VR realm, but there is little to no conversation on what kinds of experiences are best/better-suited for VR. Because of social presence, VR is quickly replacing the online modality. However, when it comes to its implementation across all modalities, careful attention should be given to “why” the VR tool/approach would be a better option. As we document and share our learnings, we encourage others to join the dialogue.



Revolution Lightboard: WeLearn invested in two “One Button Studios” with Revolution Lightboards. These studios with ultra-clear glass, have allowed faculty to engage their students in immersive conversations and presentations without ever turning their backs. Faculty use this space to record their 10-15-minute lectures and pull images and videos into the backdrop. They can also illustrate or draw across the glass freely superimposing web content or pre-recorded/pre-prepared content with on-the-moment information and illustrations.

Lessons learned: We found that our faculty love to host their LIVE sessions in this space. And students also love recording and collaborating in these studios. The biggest challenge with the studios is managing the “traffic.” We recommend “Bookings” or any other appointment application. We also recommend having clear “norms” for tidying up after usage; the glass and glass frame should be cleaned or wiped down after each use to avoid smudges on the glass surface and remnants from the neon expo markers along the table top. This is a big investment, but since it is only pieces of hardware (no software required); it has limited to no security risks, which was a plus for our IT department. Lastly, RevLightboard’s customer service is very responsive and professional.

