

January '25 - January '26

Comparative Impact Analysis

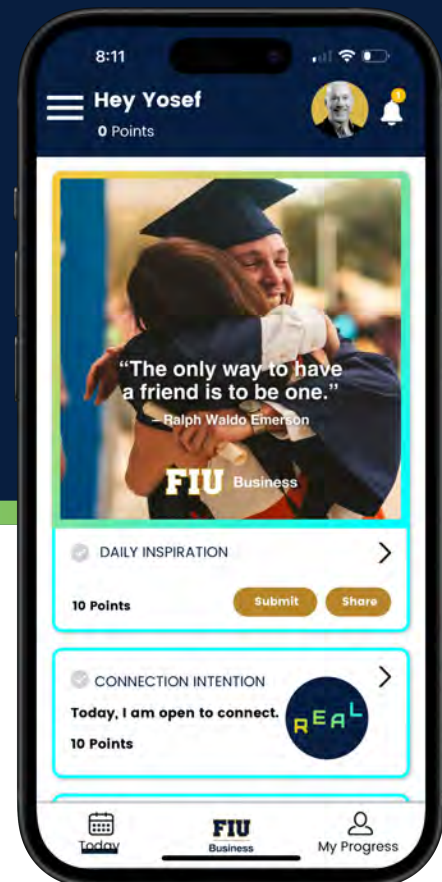
Real Connections Challenge

FIU Business —
Professional MBA Online Program

6 Cohorts - 327 Participants

FIU | **Business**
FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

gamechangersconsulting.com



Program Overview

The **Real Connections Challenge** is a 30-day, micro-reflection program designed to solve one of online education's most persistent gaps: **the absence of meaningful human connection**. By fostering authentic relationships from day one, this innovative solution turns the isolation of virtual education into a vibrant, connected, and engaging journey.

Using structured daily prompts, peer visibility, and shared reflection — **in just 5 minutes a day** — **the Challenge creates the conditions for authentic relationships to form**. Over 30 days, participants build self-awareness, take deliberate action toward connection, and develop a sense of belonging that carries into the program and beyond.

This report summarizes survey data from **327 participants across 6 consecutive cohorts** (January 2025 through January 2026), integrated as a Professional Development Seminar within FIU's Professional MBA Online program.

"This gave me a sense of community I didn't expect in an online program."

— January 2025 participant

327

Total
participants

93%

Positive
emotional impact

6

Consecutive
cohorts

89%

Took action to
build relationships

86%

Stronger sense
of belonging

~5

Avg new connections
per participant

95%

Would
recommend

The FIU Business Professional MBA Online Student Population



The Professional MBA Online program at FIU Business currently enrolls 553 students, with an alumni network of 3,947. The program serves working professionals: participants average 29 years old, bring 5.8 years of work experience, and maintain a 3.3 GPA.

The cohort is 59% female and 41% male. It reflects the diversity of South Florida's professional landscape — 60% of students identify as Hispanic/Latino, 22% as Black or African American, 9% as White, 6% as Asian, and 3% as Other.

This context matters. These are busy working adults, not traditional students with open schedules. The Challenge's 5-minute-a-day design was built for exactly this population — and the consistency of outcomes across 6 cohorts reflects that the format holds under real conditions.

553 Current students

3,947 Alumni

5.8y Avg work experience

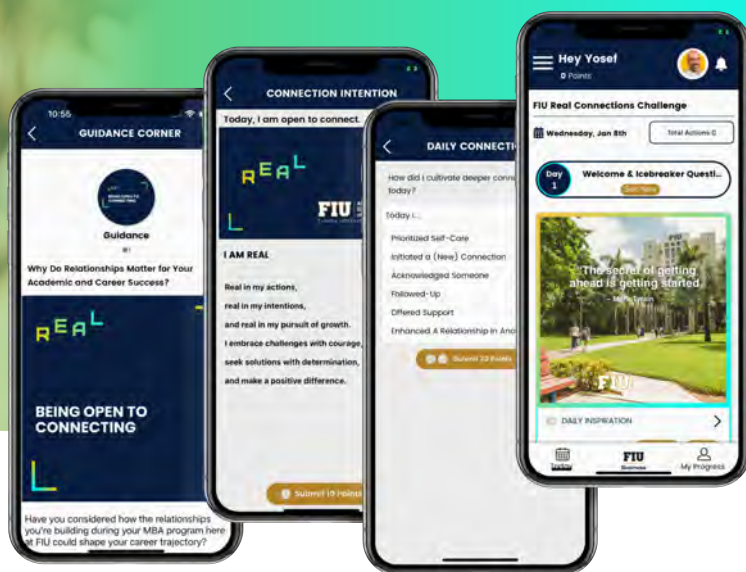
29y Average age

59% / 41% Female / Male

60% Hispanic / Latino

Source: FIU Business PMBAO program data.





The Long-Term Value

The Real Connections Challenge doesn't just build connections; it cultivates a lasting culture of engagement and belonging that extends beyond the classroom. Students develop essential networking skills, forge professional and personal relationships, and gain a deeper sense of community. This heightened affinity to the institution fosters loyalty, enhances alumni engagement, and equips students with the relational tools to thrive in their careers.

The program's scalable design ensures these outcomes are repeatable, making it a cornerstone for any online program aiming to humanize digital learning.

What Happens When Connection Is Missing

Without this student support layer, online students risk remaining disconnected, with zero to minimal individual connections per cohort and low institutional affinity. The absence of meaningful peer interactions leads to feelings of isolation, reduced engagement, and weaker ties to the university—undermining the potential for a transformative educational experience.

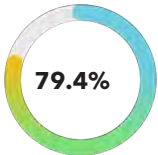
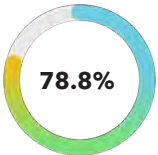
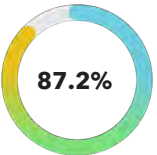
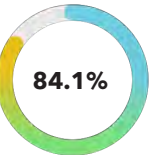
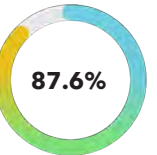
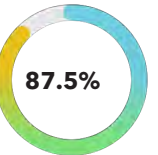
By contrast, the Real Connections Challenge's proven framework that uses the first 30 days to develop measurable gains in belonging, connection, and wellbeing, creating a vibrant, supportive community that elevates the entire online learning ecosystem.

The Data Shows Consistent Outcomes Across Every Cohort

Across six cohorts spanning 12 months, the core outcomes held. No single cohort was an outlier. No result depended on a particular facilitator, semester, or group size. The pattern repeated — which is precisely what a scalable behavior change program should do.

The overall normalized score ranged from 78.8% to 87.6% across all six cohorts. Emotional well-being, peer engagement, and willingness to recommend the program were the three strongest and most consistent outcomes — all averaging above 88% — and none dipped below 82% in any cohort.

Outcome scores by cohort — normalized to a 0–100% scale. Scores $\geq 85\%$ in bold. All questions used 5-point rating scale or Yes/No responses.

Outcome Measure	Jan '25 (n=78)	Mar '25 (n=32)	Jun '25 (n=35)	Aug '25 (n=80)	Oct '25 (n=31)	Jan '26 (n=71)
Self-Awareness	74.8%	71.9%	83.9%	80.3%	89.5%	86.7%
Emotional Well-being	92.3%	90.5%	97.5%	88.5%	91.2%	97.5%
Sense of Connection	67.2%	72.4%	78.9%	73.1%	73.5%	77.8%
Program Value	69.9%	66.7%	79.6%	73.8%	82.4%	79.4%
Sense of Belonging	78.4%	72.9%	87.1%	85.8%	86.3%	85.1%
Continued Reflection	83.6%	78.5%	89.2%	87.1%	91.2%	87.6%
Reflection Value	74.9%	71.0%	76.7%	80.9%	82.4%	81.6%
Actions Taken	78.8%	81.2%	88.7%	89.7%	94.3%	93.6%
Peer Engagement	82.1%	85.9%	90.3%	91.0%	88.2%	92.0%
Recommend	91.9%	96.8%	100%	90.9%	97.1%	94.1%
Overall Average						

Note: Scores are normalized across different question formats (text scale vs. numeric coding) to enable fair cross-cohort comparison.

From Strangers to Real Relationships in 30 Days

One of the most striking patterns in the data involves how participants answered two related questions: how many new connections they initiated during the Challenge, and how many classmates they felt they actually got to know as a result.

In every cohort where both questions were asked, the numbers were nearly identical. Participants didn't form shallow connections and report knowing more people than they did. What they initiated, they internalized. A connection made through the Challenge became a genuine relationship — not just a name added to a list.

This is significant context: every participant entered Day 1 as a stranger. There were no pre-existing relationships. By Day 30, **participants reported an average of 4–6 new connections — formed entirely through 5-minute daily reflections and shared visibility.**

Cohort Avg Connections With Classmates

Jan '25 (n=78) ~3.9

Mar '25 (n=32) ~5.4

Jun '25 (n=35) ~4.3

Aug '25 (n=80) ~6.3

Oct '25 (n=31) ~4.4

Jan '26 (n=71) ~5.8

4-6

**Avg connections
per participant**

Starting from zero on Day 1

≈

**Initiated ≈
Internalized**

What they made, they kept

5 min

Per day

The only time investment
required

Average values derived from open-text responses.



Publications



EDUCAUSE 2025 Recognition

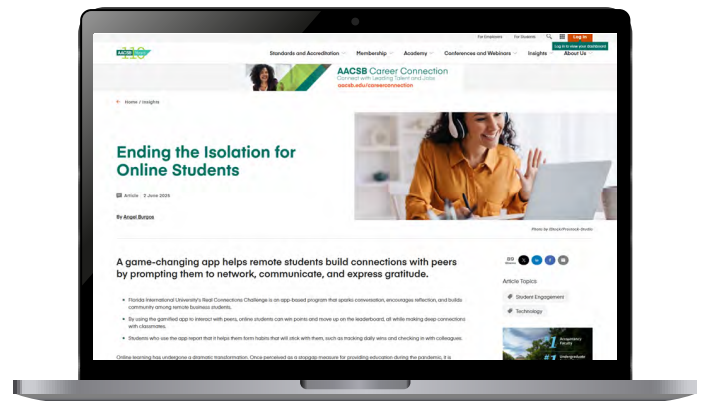
The Gamechangers Challenge platform has been featured in the 2025 EDUCAUSE Horizon Report: Data & Analytics Edition as a national model for mixed-methods research in student learning data.

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AACSB Publication

An article titled “Ending the Isolation for Online Students” about the Real Connection Challenge was published by AACSB.

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Conferences

Florida International University and Gamechangers Consulting were invited to speak at the conference on **“Boosting Belonging and Student Wellbeing Through Peer Connections.”**





In the students' words

"The challenge was a great way to get to learn more about my classmates. A lot of us had more in common than we actually thought." — [March 2025 participant](#)

"Because of the app I found myself going out of my way to make new connections every day — whether it was offering support, meeting someone new, or enhancing a relationship."
— [January 2025 participant](#)

"I was skeptic in the beginning and as days passed, I liked the positivity it brought to my days."
— [June 2025 participant](#)

"I am so grateful I had this opportunity because it affected me more emotionally than I thought. It also brought back my love for FIU and meeting new people."
— [May 2025 participant](#)

"This program helped me shift from a reactive to a proactive mindset." — [June 2025 participant](#)

"This program made it easier for me to connect with my work colleagues and even strangers I met throughout my day through meaningful conversations. I even took more initiative to connect with family and friends, my boss, etc." — [June 2025 participant](#)

"I took more initiative and lost that fear of reaching out first." — [October 2025 participant](#)

"When I get too absorbed in work, school, and life in general, it is easy for me to neglect my relationships. The app helped me stay consistent in following up with friends and family to the point that it is now a habit." — [October 2025 participant](#)

"I really appreciate the positivity everyone brought to my mornings — and the reminder that I am actively pursuing my MBA. It's easy to get lost in your day-to-day, but the app reminded me how excited I am to be here." — [January 2026 participant](#)



"We know that isolation in online learning doesn't just hurt student satisfaction. Such isolation also drives student attrition and further robs students of the chance to form meaningful relationships that grow more valuable over their careers. This isn't just about keeping students enrolled; it's about building a relationship with FIU that lasts a lifetime. By those standards, the Gamechangers App is a home run!"

- Angel J. Burgos,

Executive Director, Graduate Programs,
Florida International University

Consistency Proves the Model

In behavior change programs, **variability is the norm and consistency is the signal**. Outcomes that fluctuate wildly across cohorts suggest a method that depends on particular conditions — a skilled facilitator, a motivated cohort, the right semester. Outcomes that hold across different groups, sizes, and time periods suggest something more durable.

The Real Connections Challenge produced consistent results across all 6 cohorts. The outcomes that matter: belonging, peer engagement and emotional well-being, never dropped below 82% in any cohort.

Conclusion

Connections were made. Across 6 cohorts, **participants averaged 4–6 new connections per person** — each formed from zero, with the same classmates who were strangers on Day 1. The number they initiated closely matched the number they felt they genuinely got to know.

Belonging was strengthened. An average of **86% of participants reported a greater sense of belonging to FIU and their cohort** — a result that held across every semester and class size.

Students took action. **89% reported taking deliberate steps to strengthen relationships** — not just reflecting on the idea of connection, but acting on it.

Emotional well-being improved. **93% of participants reported a positive emotional impact** — in a program that asked for 5 minutes a day.

Implementation was seamless. **94% rated the platform easy to use.** The challenge fits inside a busy schedule by design.



Together, these results confirm the Real Connections Challenge as a **scalable, repeatable, and measurable solution** for student isolation in online programs. The model works because it starts where students actually are — and moves them forward in small, visible, daily steps.

Start the Conversation

Scan to schedule a meeting





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