From Pixels to People



2026 GRADUATE BUSINESS CURRICULUM ROUNDTABLE SYMPOSIUM

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What makes an online MBA student say the residency alone justified every dollar of tuition?

Our answer: design, not luck



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Belonging is a program-level design

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01

BEFORE CLASS

Signal
“You belong here.”

02

WEEKLY ONLINE

Create repeated contact + trust

03

TEAMWORK

Build interdependence under pressure

04

RESIDENCY

Convert familiarity into depth

05

AFTERWARD

Carry the network forward

The experience works because each stage increases the probability that the next one matters more.

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Belonging starts before the first Zoom

Welcome box

A personalized package arrives before the first class. It makes the program tangible, creates anticipation, and signals that the student is already part of something.



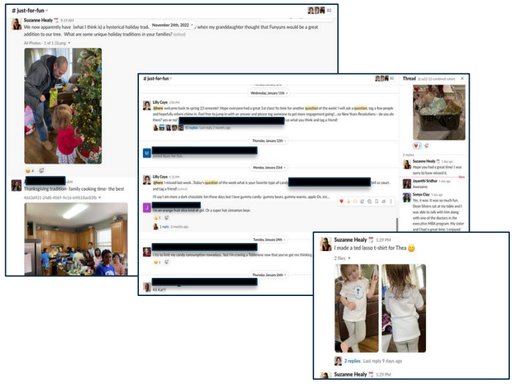
Personal advising

A consistent advising relationship gives students a human connection to the program — someone who knows their story, not just their enrollment status.



Virtual student union

A shared online space sustains peer community between formal sessions. It makes connection available even when class is not in session.



Small moments build trust

Weekly Zoom is a community-building environment

1	**Camera's On!**	Seeing each other is critical to building trust and community
2	**Structured icebreakers**	Low-risk prompts move the conversation beyond job title and function.
3	**Randomized breakout rooms**	Students repeatedly encounter people outside their default circles.
4	**Active experiential exercises**	Students do things together — not simply watch faculty talk.

Design principle: repeated, varied, purposeful interaction beats a single "community-building" event.

Small moments compound



By Cleveland, students are not strangers meeting for the first time.
They are a cohort ready to go deeper.

THE TURNING POINT

Then the cohort comes to Cleveland.

Where community arrives

The four-day residency is not where community begins. It is where it arrives. By the time students land in Cleveland, they are a cohort ready to go deeper.

FAMILIARITY

→

DEPTH

Shared place + shared time + shared challenge

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Four days, designed as an immersion

Welcome dinner

Faculty + staff + alumni
“You belong here now.”

4 half-day site visits

Distinct health systems
C-suite access

Industry panel

Learner → peer
Professional identity

Student showcase

Work gains an audience
Contribution becomes visible

Formal celebration

A landmark cultural center
A shared milestone

The bus ride is pedagogy

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A site visit creates the content.

The ride back creates the meaning.



Structured experience	Unstructured processing
Site visit	Bus conversation

The strongest design often lives in the connection between scheduled events.

Do not optimize away the in-between.

Build Opportunities to Deepen Connection

Where Community Grows

The evening co-curricular events help students deepen their personal connections with each other, with faculty, and offer an opportunity to network with alumni and organizational employer partners

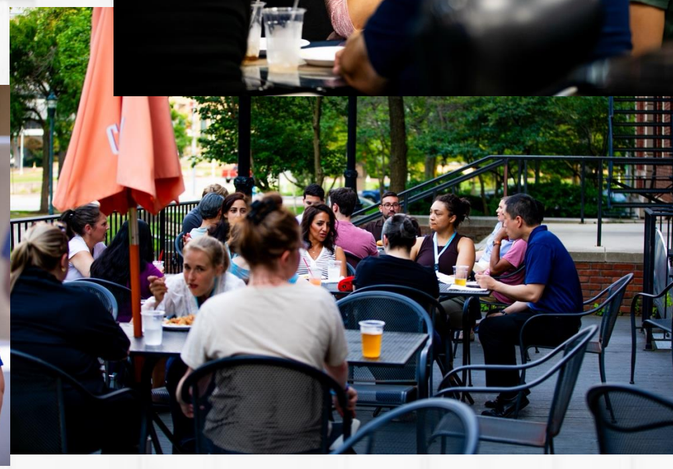












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The shared hotel is not a logistical detail

Past midnight, laptops open, mostly just talking.







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What we are actually designing

PROXIMITY

1

More chances to encounter one another

Repeated contact • shared spaces

PERMISSION

2

Safe ways to move beyond surface talk

Icebreakers • advising • informal time

PURPOSE

3

Meaningful work that requires one another

Team projects • site visits • reflection

PRIDE

4

Moments that make membership visible

Showcase • celebration • alumni connection

THE TAKEAWAY

Four days can change a cohort — when the months before them were designed to make those four days matter.

Build belonging early. Create repeated contact. Protect the in-between. Then let the residency go deeper.

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Questions and discussion



SCAN TO CONNECT

Hello, I’m Suzanne!



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Ideas • Teaching • Creativity