

# Higher Influence

HOW A FREE CERTIFICATE  
PROGRAM CONNECTED 135,000  
PEOPLE TO ONE UNIVERSITY



## INCREASING ACCESS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

**L**ike universities across the country, the University of South Florida quickly pivoted in March 2020 to a virtual environment.

As part of its role as an urban research university, USF is dedicated to addressing local and global societal issues. One way it embraced this role in the virtual environment was through free online certificate programs accessible to the public and industry professionals.

The USF Muma College of Business offered its first two free certificates to help leaders navigate the COVID-19 crisis in 2020. Its “Post-Crisis Leadership” certificate drew a cap of 11,000 registrants, and the “Post-Crisis Hospitality Management” certificate drew 6,000.

## LAUNCHING THE DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE CERTIFICATE

Following societal unrest in 2019 and 2020, conversations about the importance of a similar certificate program focused on diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace began among Moez Limayem, dean of the USF Muma College of Business; the leaders of Jabil, a Fortune 200 company headquartered in St. Petersburg; and the Tampa Bay Lightning, the region’s National Hockey League franchise.

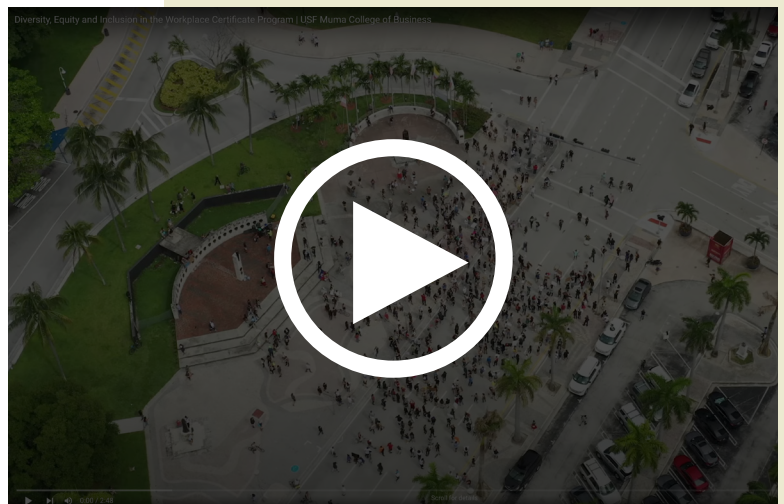
Initially the organizers thought success would be a few thousand registrants. However, that benchmark was surpassed just hours after announcing the program. Within weeks and without a marketing budget, 135,000 people had signed up. This program breaks the mold of what might be traditionally expected from higher education institutions and could open the door to a new model of adapting quickly to deliver timely, relevant courses in the future.

## IN THIS CASE STUDY

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“As a business school, we want to educate employees at all levels on tools and practices that can help companies build and implement sustainable diversity, equity and inclusion programs.”

–Moez Limayem  
Lynn Pippenger Dean,  
USF Muma College of Business



[Click to watch the video overview](#)

# Section 1 | Audience insights

In addition to looking at the number of participants and completion rates, USF sought a more complete understanding of its participants. A post-program survey brought several key audience insights to light, including their preferences, impressions of the program modules and view of the university before and after the program.

## WHO PARTICIPATED

The certificate drew 135,000 registrants and a waiting list of 20,000 once the program reached capacity. Participants represented a variety of companies and institutions of higher education across the U.S. and 14 other countries.

AMGEN

Big Brothers  
Big Sisters  
OF AMERICA

BOEING

Bristol Myers Squibb

DUKE  
ENERGY

Girl Scouts

JABIL

MOFFITT  
CANCER CENTER

NORDSTROM

WALT DISNEY

U.S. AIR FORCE



135,000

SIGNED UP



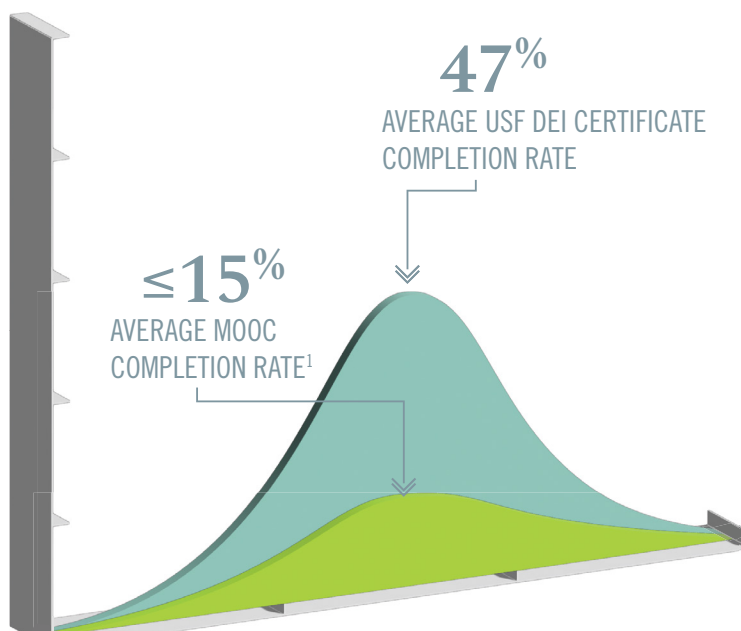
20,000

PLACED ON WAITING LIST



63,000

CERTIFICATES EARNED



## COMPLETION RATE COMPARISON

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) traditionally see low completion rates, with many averaging 15% or lower.<sup>1</sup> Sixty-three thousand participants completed the coursework to earn their certificate, giving the program a completion rate of 47% – more than three times the average.

<sup>1</sup> "Benefits and Costs of MOOC-Based Alternative Credentials," Fiona Hollands and Aasiya Kazi, CBCSE, Teachers College, Columbia University

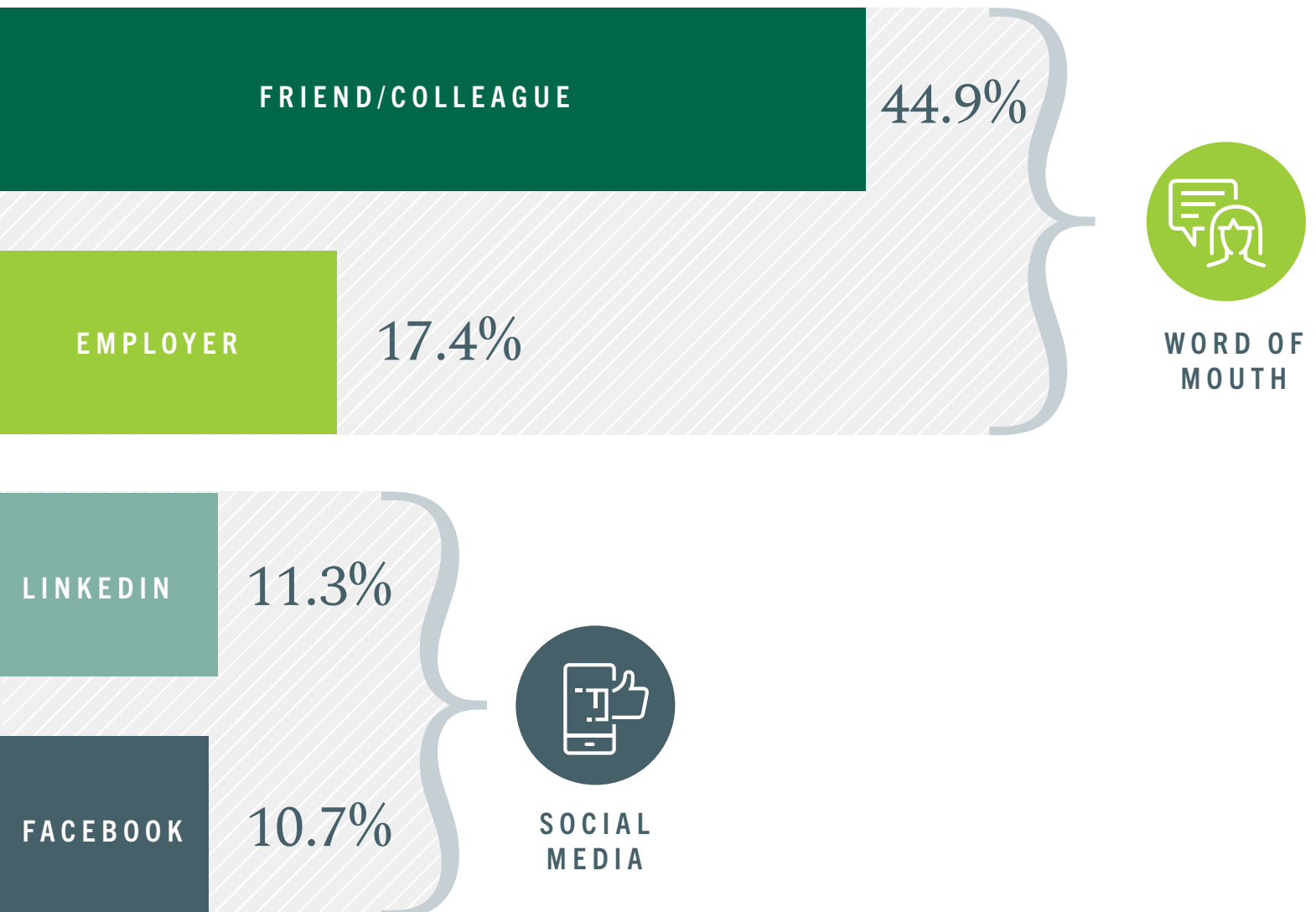
## HOW DID PARTICIPANTS FIND THE PROGRAM?

Marketing  
budget: \$0

Having accomplished creating the program on a shoestring operational budget, the university promoted the program through targeted organic marketing efforts including email and social media. As word spread through those free mediums, employers and individuals shared the program with their contacts, resulting in 135,000 participants.

## THE POWER OF WORD OF MOUTH

Survey respondents indicated that word of mouth through friends, colleagues and employers was the primary way that they heard about the program, followed by social media platforms. Other responses included email and e-newsletters.



## AUDIENCE PREFERENCE: LIVE VS. RECORDED

While participation during the live sessions was strong, 75% of those surveyed preferred to watch recorded sessions on their own schedule instead of tuning in live.

25%

MOSTLY WATCHED LIVE

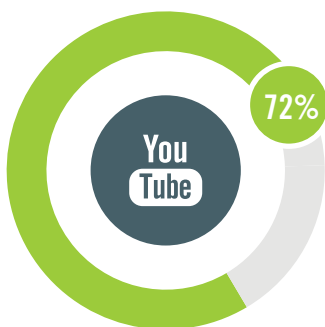
75%

MOSTLY WATCHED RECORDED



## AUDIENCE PREFERENCE: VIDEO PLATFORM

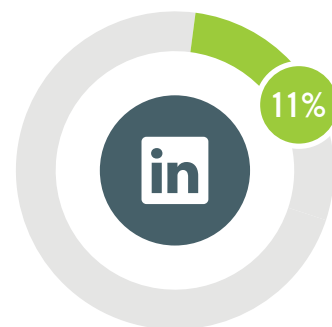
The program gave participants the flexibility to watch lessons on three platforms: YouTube, AcademiaCentral and LinkedIn. Participants overwhelmingly chose to watch on YouTube, likely the most familiar video platform of the three.



YOUTUBE



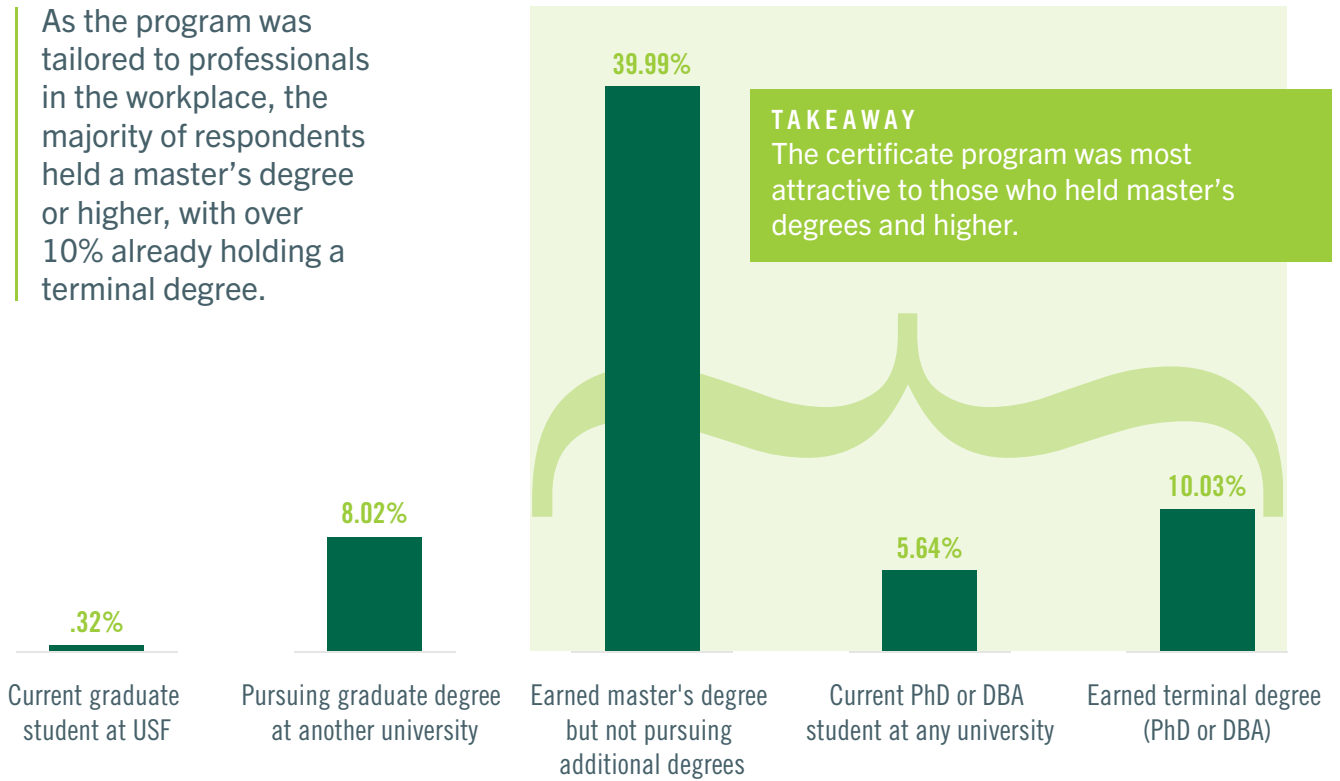
ACADEMIACENTRAL



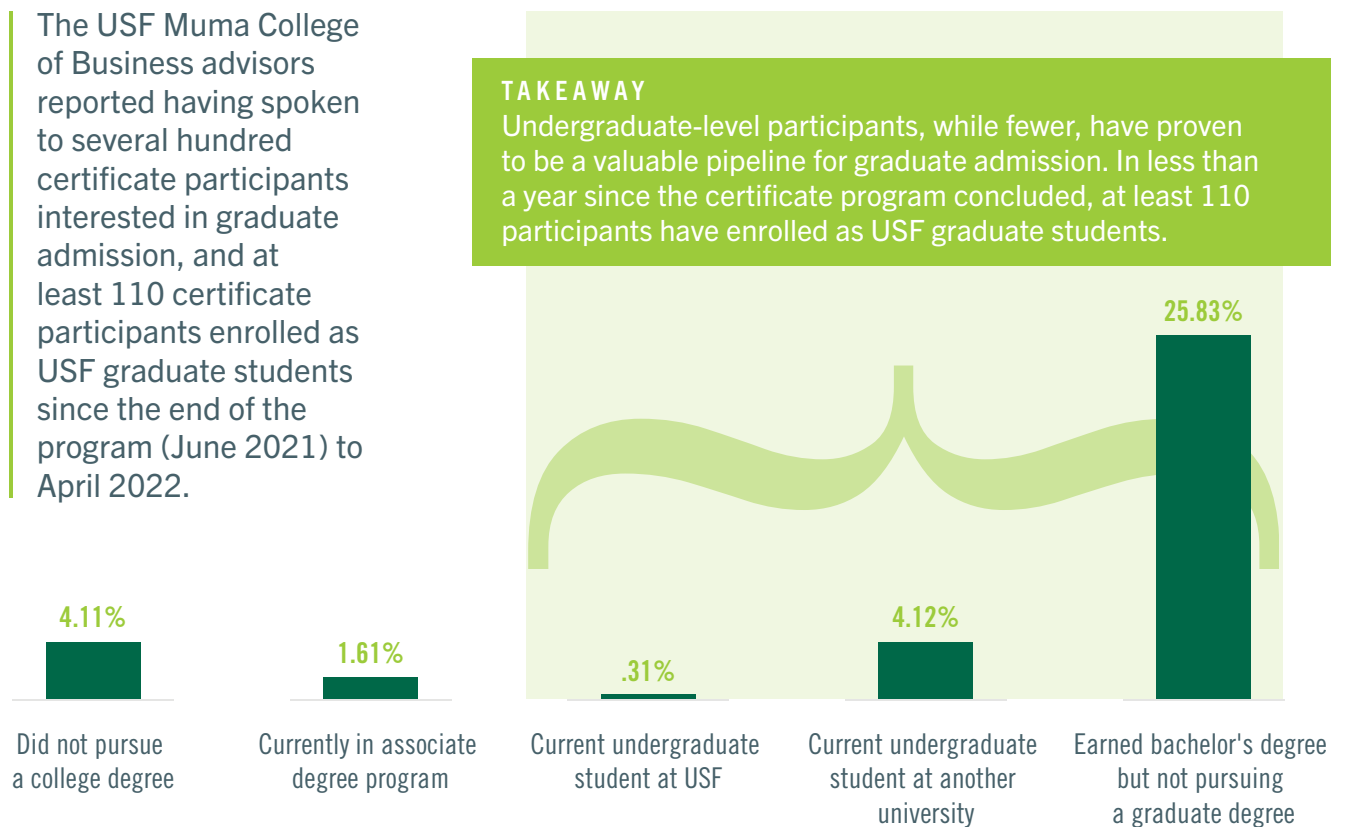
LINKEDIN

## PARTICIPANT EDUCATION LEVEL

As the program was tailored to professionals in the workplace, the majority of respondents held a master's degree or higher, with over 10% already holding a terminal degree.



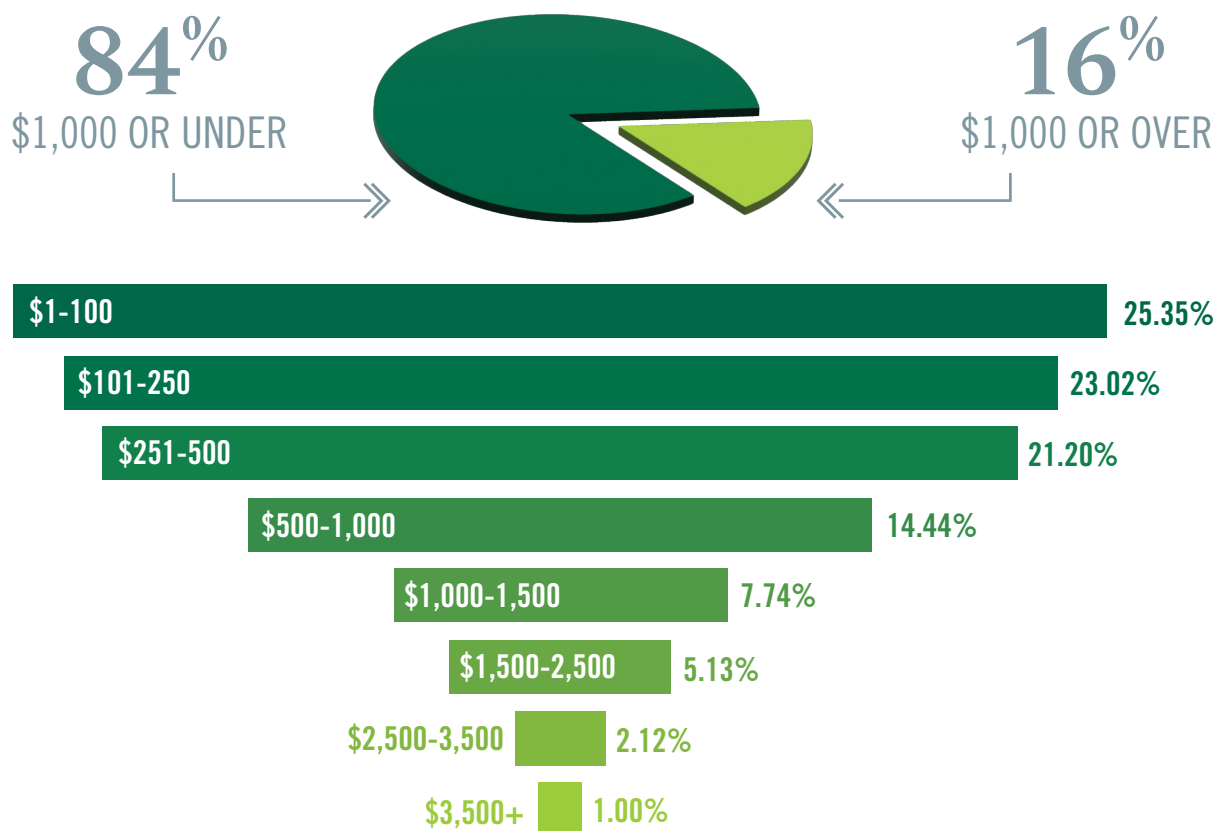
The USF Muma College of Business advisors reported having spoken to several hundred certificate participants interested in graduate admission, and at least 110 certificate participants enrolled as USF graduate students since the end of the program (June 2021) to April 2022.



As part of the post-program survey, participants answered questions that pertained to the value of the program – both monetarily and in the usefulness and relevancy of the topics.

### FAIR PRICE AS PERCEIVED BY PARTICIPANTS

Participants were asked, “If USF were to charge for such a program, what would you consider to be a fair price?” and given eight price points from which to choose. While the results were split, 84% of the respondents selected a price point of \$1,000 or under, with just over 25% selecting \$100 or under. Sixteen percent selected a price point of \$1,000 or over, with 1% selecting \$3,500 or more.



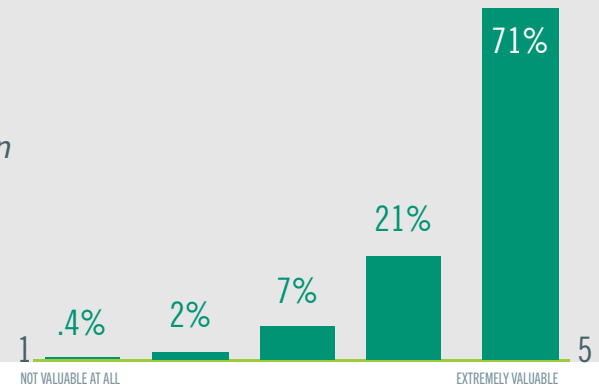
## VALUE OF EACH MODULE

Participants ranked each module on a scale of 1 to 5, with “1” representing “not valuable at all” and “5” representing “extremely valuable.” See the results and brief overview of each module below.

### MODULE 1 - EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

*Learn the key skill of leading diversity, equity and inclusion*

Introduction to self-awareness and empathy, the core to diversity, equity and inclusion leadership strategy.

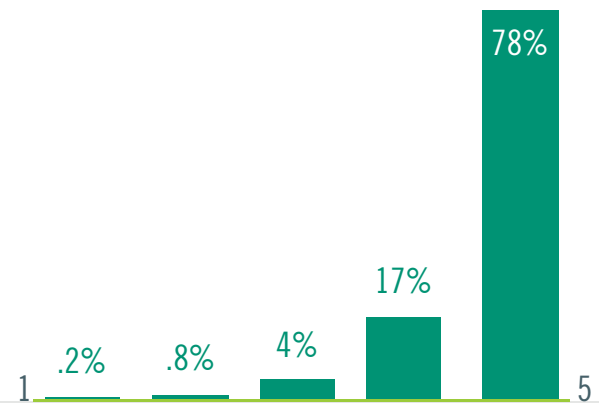


#### HIGHEST RATED

### MODULE 2 - STEREOTYPES AND BIASES

*Understand how your brain works*

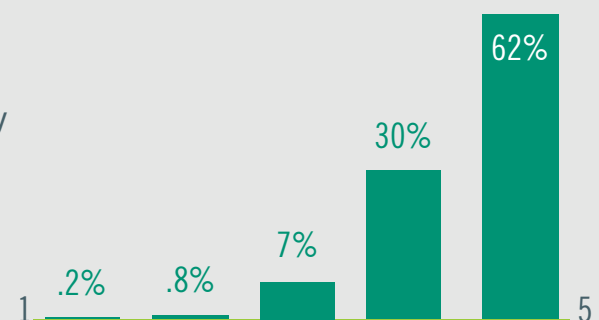
Build more insightful awareness in the workplace around biases and systemic discrimination against any group of people.



### MODULE 3 - UNDERSTAND YOUR ORGANIZATION

*Analyze your current organization's progress*

Tools to analyze your organization's diversity, equity and inclusion mission and be aware of customer/vendor policy expectations.

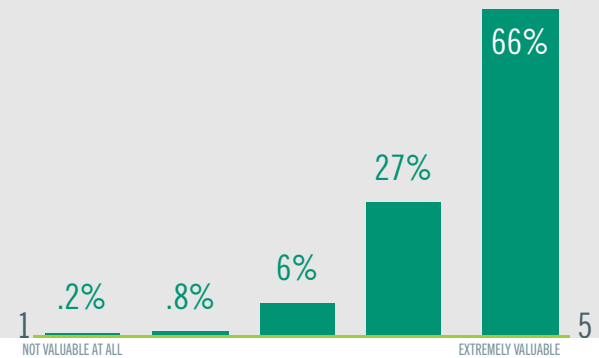




## MODULE 4 - FUTURE OF YOUR ORGANIZATION THROUGH DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

*Shift from awareness to action*

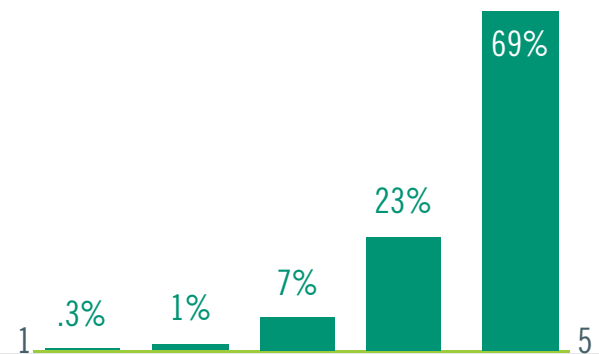
Discover what your organization can look like when your mindset shifts from understanding diversity, equity and inclusion to putting it into action.



## MODULE 5 - RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

*Diverse talent is key to an inclusive culture*

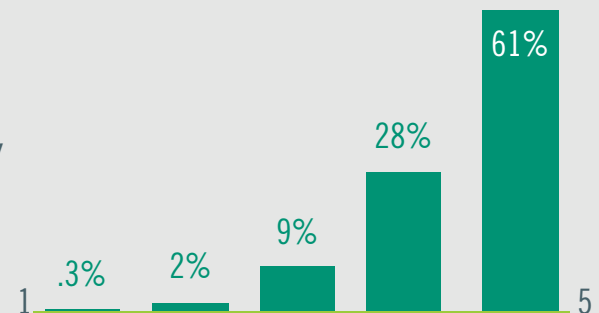
Learn strategies to bring in diverse talent and retain your diverse workforce.



## MODULE 6 - COMMUNITY OUTREACH

*Support diversity, equity and inclusion in and out of the organization*

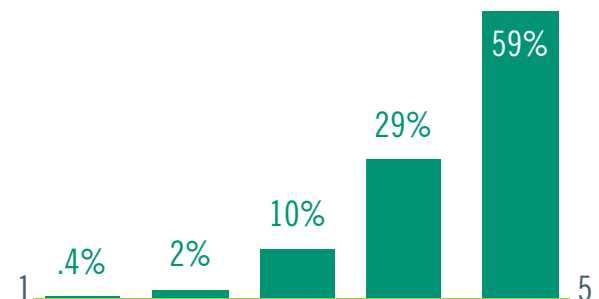
Support diversity, equity and inclusion in your community to align with your CSR goals and employer branding.



## MODULE 7 - SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

*Build a diversity, equity and inclusion future that will last*

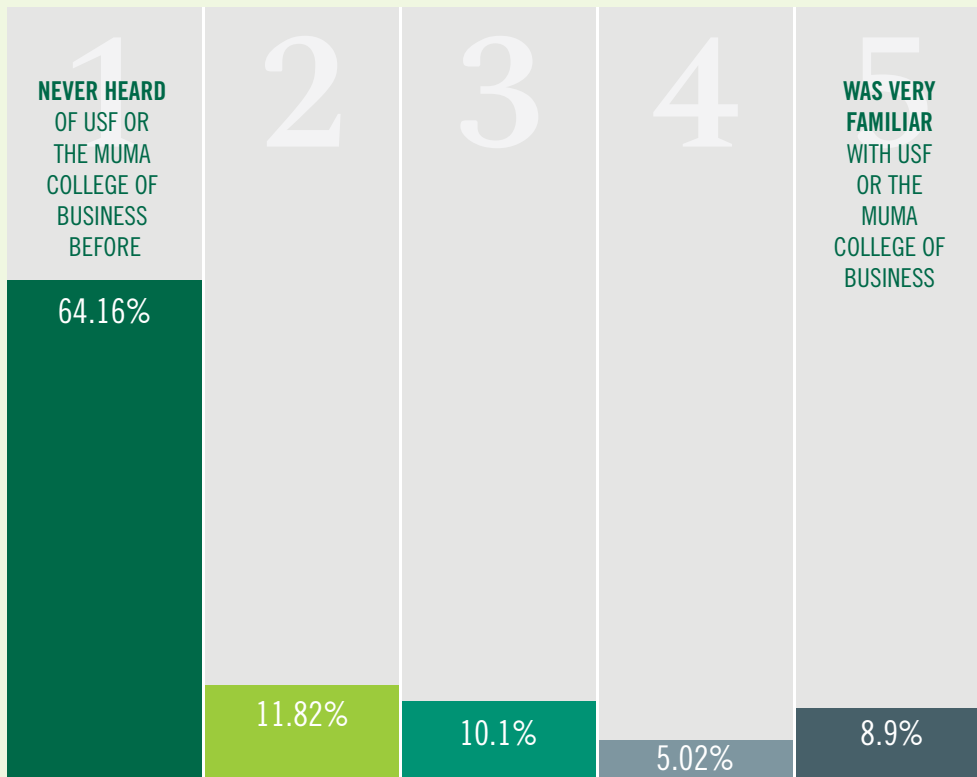
Design an all-encompassing sustainability model for ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion are part of your organization's long-term focus.



# Section 3 | Enhanced reputation

## ▼ WHAT WAS YOUR FAMILIARITY WITH USF BEFORE THE PROGRAM?

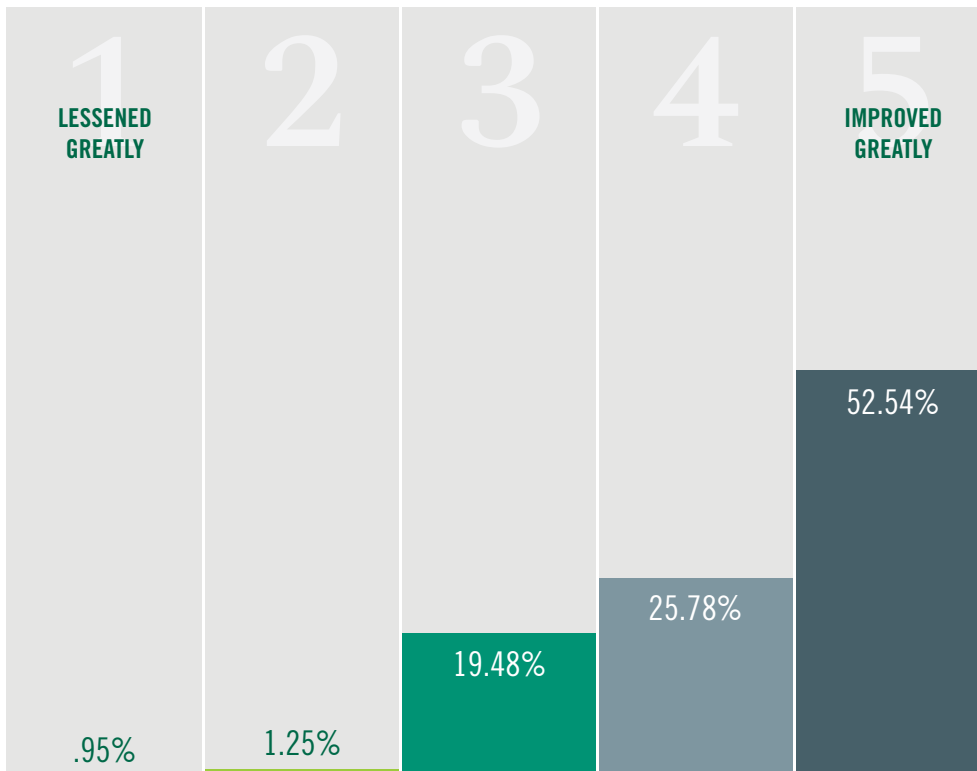
Before



Over **86%** of participants reported having little to no familiarity with the university before enrolling in the certificate program – with a 64% majority having never heard of USF or the Muma College of Business at all.

## ▼ HOW DID THE PROGRAM IMPACT YOUR PERCEPTION OF USF?

After



Overall, the certificate program had a significant impact on participants' perception of the university. Over **78%** of participants reported that their perception of the university improved, with 19% remaining unchanged in their opinion.

## RECEPTION AND RECOGNITION

The program was well received by external outlets during the program's launch, which included coverage from Florida Trend and the Tampa Bay Business Journal, as well as at the program's conclusion, which included a Yahoo Finance article spotlighting Duke Energy employees' participation in the program.

As individuals progressed through the program and earned certificates, the response on social media was overwhelming. Certificate earners were given a verified digital badge through Credly to share on LinkedIn with the hashtag #USFDEICert, and many shared their takeaways and thoughts on the program.



Since its conclusion, the program has received awards and recognition that include:

- AACSB International's "Innovations that Inspire" recognition (2022)
- Anthem Awards: Gold recognition in "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Community Engagement: Partnership or Collaboration" category (2022)
- LiFT Florida's RISE Community Commitment award (2021)
- LiFT Florida's RISE leadership award, recognizing USF Muma College of Business Dean Moez Limayem (2021)



