Online MBA program celebrates first graduating class

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Jamari Tansmore, Connor Pellerin and Hunter Ball, left to right, are among the first graduates of the Freeman School's Online MBA program.

In the fall of 2023, the Freeman School admitted its first cohort in a newly launched program: The Online MBA.

Modeled on Freeman's flagship full-time program, the OMBA combined a rigorous, future-focused curriculum with innovative instructional design, bringing Freeman's nationally recognized excellence in business education to a new modality.

This week, five of those students — Hunter Ball, Henry Gonzalez-Cruz, Connor Pellerin, Ahmad Smith and Jamari Tansmore — will march in the Freeman School's Diploma Ceremony, becoming the OMBA program's first graduating class.

Making the occasion even more special is the nature of the program: While the students have taken multiple classes together and built friendships over the last two years, they're currently spread across four states. The graduation ceremony will be their first opportunity to meet each other in person.

"I've loved the program since day one, and we've all gotten pretty close," says Pellerin, who lives in Texas and works as a data analyst with a hydration drink startup. "It'll be cool to see each other in person and not just behind a camera."

"I'll be in town all week and I signed up for the graduation crawfish boil," adds Tansmore, who lives in Eugene, Oregon, where he works in student athlete development for the University of Oregon. "Hopefully, I'll get the chance to meet everyone."

The Freeman School had previously offered hybrid programs, which combined in-person and online classes, but the Online MBA is Freeman's first fully virtual degree program, with all content delivered online. A significant portion of the coursework is done asynchronously, with students completing assignments on their own time, but an important feature of the program are the weekly live "roundtable" sessions led by the professor in which the students discuss the week's assignments, ask questions and interact in a virtual classroom setting.

The roundtables were designed to maintain the rigor of the coursework, but they also turned out to be a highlight of the program for students.

"The biggest worry with virtual learning is losing that peer-to-peer element," Tansmore says. "One thing I loved about this program is that there was a lot of project work and opportunities for interaction between cohort members. Even though we weren't in the same location, that interaction still took place, and it was very beneficial for my learning."

By its nature, the program attracts students from diverse locations and with diverse professional experience. Students say that diversity also contributed to a positive learning experience.

"Having people from different industries — I'm in the beverage industry, Hunter's in real estate, Jamari's in higher education, another student was in the automobile industry — collaborate during the roundtables was great," Pellerin says. "It was interesting to see the different perspectives everyone brought based on their

industries.”

Most of the students had the option to enroll in a part-time in-person MBA program in their home city, but they say the OMBA program's convenience ultimately made the difference.

“The online platform was really enticing to me,” says Ball, who owns a commercial real estate firm in Texas. “I have a young family, so being able to plug into business school and still be a room or two over from my kids was a big plus. It felt like they were bringing the Tulane MBA directly to my house.”

Pellerin echoes that sentiment. A former professional baseball player who spent two years in the Yankees and White Sox organizations, he credits the program’s asynchronous format with enabling him to start preparing for life after baseball while he was still on the road with the team.

“The biggest thing for me was the flexibility,” he says. “I always knew when I got into baseball that it wasn’t going to be my be-all and end-all. I wanted to have a backup plan, and having the opportunity to start my MBA while I was still playing was fantastic.”

The program also offered alumni like Pellerin — he received his undergraduate degree in finance in 2021 — an opportunity to reconnect with Freeman despite being located out of state.

While Freeman offers a number of tracks for working professionals, including the Executive MBA and the Professional MBA, the graduates say the Online MBA fills a valuable niche in the market.

“The OMBA allows you to advance your education, get a great MBA from a phenomenal business school like Tulane’s, and you don’t have to sacrifice the time commuting to and from class,” Ball says. “You may get more interaction with other students in an in-person program — that’s probably the biggest plus — but everything else, from my perspective, weighs in favor of an online program. It’s a great option.”