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Building Belonging with InScribe at Rio Salado College

College Innovation Network Evaluation and Impact Report



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Executive Summary

Modern higher education is becoming increasingly dispersed and asynchronous: students can now complete their education from anywhere in the world, on their own schedule, with little interaction with peers. Students, however, still want genuine connections to their peers and a sense of belonging within their institution.

Given that online, dispersed learning in higher education is here to stay, institutions face a growing problem: **How can modern higher education institutions create opportunities for students to foster belonging and connectedness with their peers?**

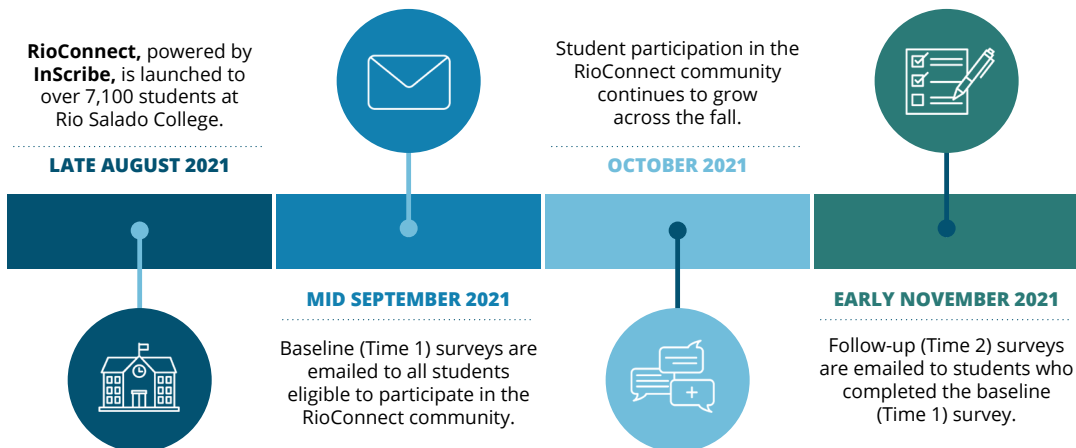
Rio Salado College addressed this challenge by partnering with InScribe to create RioConnect in Summer 2021 – a custom designed virtual community to provide online students a space to engage in qualitatively rich discussion around resources and tips to succeed in a self-paced, high-flex online learning environment. The RioConnect community was built with

the exclusive intention to provide online students at Rio Salado College a space to connect, share resources, and learn from one another – on their schedule.

The College Innovation Network (CIN) at WGU Labs collaborated with Rio Salado College and InScribe to evaluate the impact of RioConnect on student belonging and peer connectedness over a six-week study period using a pre-post, quasi-experimental survey design.

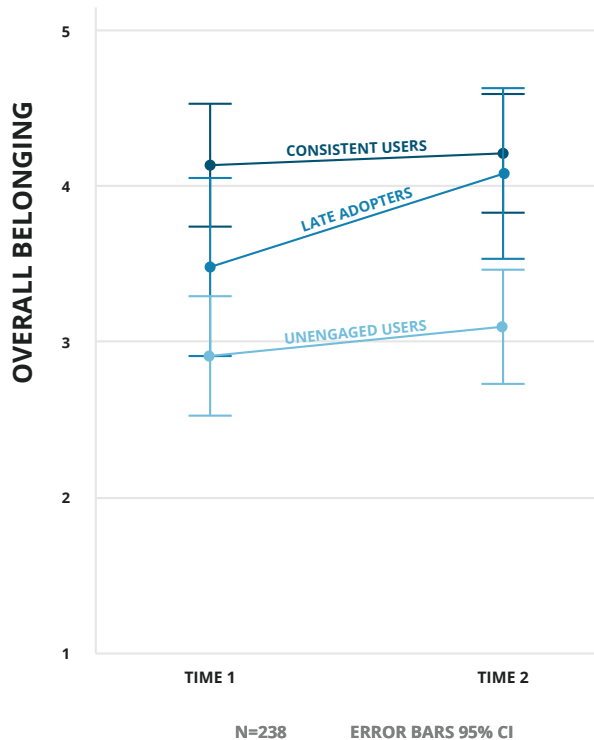
Our analyses show that students who engaged with the RioConnect community reported greater belonging and greater peer connectedness over the course of the six-week study period than students who had not engaged with RioConnect. We measured students' self-reported belongingness and peer connectedness *over time* (comparing Time 1 responses to Time 2 responses within user groups); and *between user groups* (comparing responses across user groups at Time 1 and across user groups at Time 2) to evaluate the impact of RioConnect participation.

TIMELINE OF RESEARCH EVENTS: AUGUST - NOVEMBER 2021

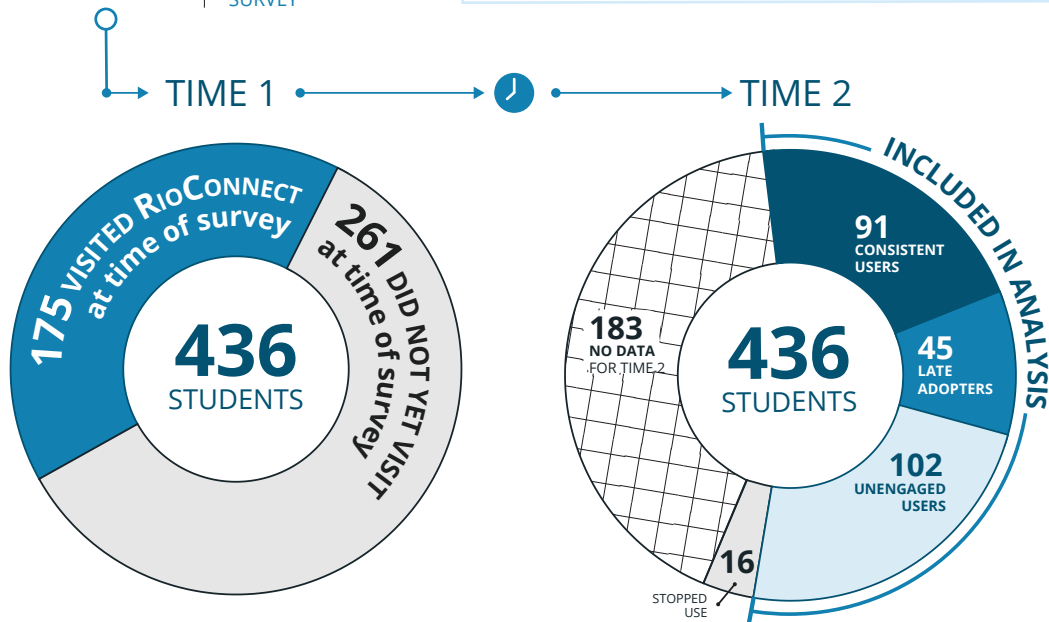
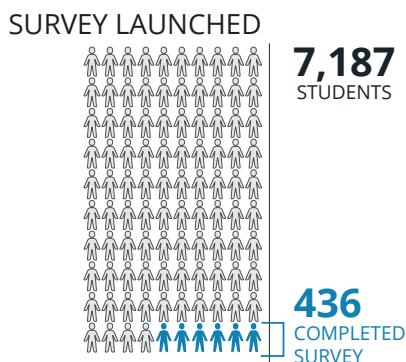


The findings of this research suggest that virtual communities can provide students with opportunities to have meaningful experiences with their peers. Creating spaces for students to connect is an actionable strategy for higher education institutions motivated to foster belonging and connectedness among students, and may have impactful long-term outcomes as well. The overall pattern of results suggests that **student participation in the RioConnect community, powered by InScribe, is associated with positive changes in overall sense of belonging and peer connectedness for students** at Rio Salado College.

CHANGES IN STUDENT BELONGING ACROSS RIOCONNECT USER GROUPS



FINAL SAMPLE SIZE COUNTS OF RIOCONNECT USER GROUPS.



Consistent Users = Students that reported participating in RioConnect at both Time 1 and Time 2; Late Adopters = Students that did not report participating in RioConnect at Time 1 but did at Time 2; Unengaged Users = Students that did not report participating in RioConnect at either Time 1 or Time 2

KEY TAKE-AWAYS:

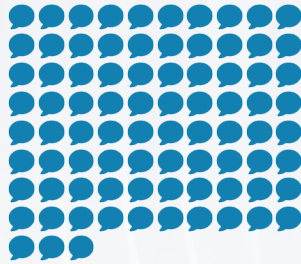
- Rio Salado College faced the challenge of connecting their online students who learn asynchronously and dispersed across the country.
- Rio Salado College collaborated with InScribe to build RioConnect: A virtual community “for students, by students” that provided a space for students to connect, offer support, ask questions, and share resources.
- CIN implemented a pre-post, quasi-experimental survey design to observe changes in student belonging for Rio Salado College students over the course of the six-week study period.
- RioConnect users reported significantly higher belonging and peer connectedness than students that never engaged with RioConnect.
- Virtual communities appear effective at promoting belonging in online learning environments. ■



RIOCONNECT HIGHLIGHTS

83

conversations started by students on RioConnect



56

requests by students for help on RioConnect



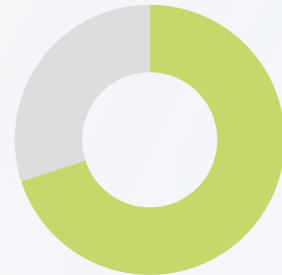
64%

of students would recommend RioConnect to other students looking to connect with peers



70%

of students said the InScribe platform was easy to use



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THE COLLEGE INNOVATION NETWORK (CIN) at WGU Labs is a network of higher education institutions committed to addressing the core challenge of promoting belonging and engagement in the modern higher education environment. We're leveraging technology to build highly engaged learning communities from enrollment through graduation – and beyond. CIN supports educational institutions by identifying areas of need, implementing effective education technology for students, and demonstrating impact through research.

JOIN US AS WE BUILD LEARNING COMMUNITIES WHERE ALL STUDENTS BELONG.