Hello and welcome to our webcast MBA Student Insights: International Students at the GSB. My name is Tong Zhang and I'm a first year MBA student here at the GSB. I'm joined by my classmates Artem and Michael – also known by Hobbsy. We'll be talking about the student experience here at the GSB. And we'll answer as many of your questions as we can. To submit a question to ask about what it's like to be a student, just click the “chat” button at the top of your screen, enter the question, and click to send to “All Panelists”.

Please be aware that we won't be able to talk about the admission process, the applications, financial aid, or the VISA process today. You can consult the website or contact the MBA Admissions Office for that information. So let's begin with introductions: where we are from, what we were each doing before coming to the GSB, and what our goals after graduation are.

I'll start. I grew up in China. I came to the States six years ago to study journalism. Before the GSB I was a tech M&A reporter in New York. After the GSB I plan to move into tech and help tech-enabled platforms to help distribution of media content.

How about you?

Artem Barsukov: Perfect. Thank you, Tong, for the introduction. So my name is Artem. I'm from Russia originally. Most of my life I lived in Moscow. And career-wise before GSB I was mainly with Bain & Company. So I spent more than four years in management consulting across Europe and also South Africa. And regarding the post-GSB goals, I'm still considering my different options.

Tong Zhang: Hobbsy?

Michael Hobbs: Yes, so, thank you very much for the introduction. As Tong said, I'm from New Zealand originally. I was a professional rugby player for eight years before coming to the GSB – five of those years in New Zealand and then the last three in Japan. With regard to my post-graduation goals, I'm currently exploring a career in the real estate industry, which I'll be doing an internship over the summer and hopefully proceeding from there.
Tong Zhang: Nice. All right, so we'll start with some questions submitted by the audience. So the first question would be: did you guys consider schools outside the US when you were applying? What was your consideration between US schools and non-US schools? And why did you choose Stanford?

Artem Barsukov: I'm happy to start on this one. So, as I said, right, most of my life I spent in Europe. And, obviously I considered European schools as well. The way my decision process went – so basically since I spent all of the time in Europe, this idea of spending some time in America was more exciting to me because it was like new geography for me. And also when I thought about the value of an MBA, I thought what kinds of doors and business opportunities the MBA can open for me. And I had a perception that an American MBA opens some doors in America, but also in Europe and in Asia. It's kind of like a global degree, while European and Asian schools are still more kind of like one-region focused. So from that kind flexibility perspective, American MBA made sense to me.

Tong Zhang: Cool.

Michael Hobbs: Yeah, and I also explored some MBA programs outside of the US, mainly in the UK. I focused on Cambridge and Oxford. I think one of the biggest things – Artem touched on a few of them. The global reach – you know widening my network was a big one for me.

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But also the fact I really liked the two-year program versus the one-year sort of 12-month program. The reason for that coming from a nontraditional background, I like the idea of being able to spend my first year exploring industries, having a summer internship to explore together that to see whether that was what I really wanted to do.

And then having a second year where you could pivot to something else or to further continue down that track.

Tong Zhang: Definitely. So how about “why Stanford?” I can talk about my experience. So I've been working in the US before GSB. So my choice was mostly focusing at US schools. And I know I wanted to move into tech. And I felt Stanford's proximity to Silicon Valley will be a great place. And also I'm really drawn to the spirit of personal reflection and community building here at the GSB. So that was one of my main considerations. What about you guys?
Artem Barsukov: Yeah, so for me it's quite an easy question and I think the answer is going to be very similar to what Tong just said. So, first of all it's definitely about Silicon Valley to a large extent. It's just a very exciting place to live in considering how many cool things are happening around. And, also I was very fortunate to meet many people from the GSB community even before applying to school. And I just felt I clicked with those people, and I felt I share a lot with them, which is the idea of spending two years in the community of these type of people was very attractive to me.

Michael Hobbs: Yeah, I think, you know, many of the same points. A few that I'd add to that would be one, the class size. I really like the fact that it was a size of 400 a class and not 800 or 900 in some of the other top business schools in the US. I thought that intimacy, getting to know your classmates was a big thing for me. Second, location in California, and the campus – the amazing campus that we have. Take one walk around here. It's pretty hard sort of to turn away and say that you'd like to go somewhere else.

And then thirdly it was, just, you know, the caliber of students that I was going to be alongside. So for me coming from a nontraditional background, wanting to explore different industries, I felt that I would benefit from being around people (who are) really high caliber.

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Tong Zhang: Exactly. Yeah, let's see what other questions. So how has been the transition to the U.S. style of education been? Was it hard for you adjusting from what you were used to?

Artem Barsukov: Do you want to start?

Michael Hobbs: Yes, I can start here. So, I actually studied abroad in the US for one semester back in 2011. So, I'd had some exposure to it previously. But honestly for me it wasn't that big of a transition. I feel like I've done sort of higher education in New Zealand and Australia previously as well, and it was very similar. Teaching styles are very similar, curriculum. So it wasn't a huge transition to me.

Artem Barsukov: I would say for me it wasn't that difficult as well. So before for academic experience I studied at LSE, the master's in finance there. And, I would say that overall the experience is quite similar.
The only thing that surprised me quite a lot is that I would say like the intensity of the education at GSB in the sense that like – If at LSE, for example, we have one course that runs for the whole year and then we have an exam at the end. Here you have three quarters during one academic year, and within each quarter you have the final exam, you have the midterm, and you have a lot of group assignments.

So, like, the intensity of the overall process is something that surprised me quite a lot. But I assume that’s pretty much where the experience and the knowledge comes from.

_Tong Zhang:_ Yeah, I would just add one point. I felt the class participation or case discussion is probably something I did struggle a bit to adjust. Because coming from an Asian culture from China where you are supposed to sit there and just answer your questions when your teacher asked you. So, that way I feel I need to push myself a little bit to raise my hand and jump in.

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_Cool. So how about talk about how welcoming do you feel about the GSB community to international students._

_Artem Barsukov:_ I'm happy to start on this one. So, I think first of all 40% of people at GSB are from an international background, which makes GSB by definition kind of welcoming to the international community because it's an international community. I also would say that GSB has quite a lot of tools to involve people and to make them part of the broader community. By tools – what I mean by tools. So first of all sections, right? The fact that the start for the first quarter and we study in the section of 70 people who you get to know quite well over the first two months of the program. And then you have a squad which becomes your inner family – like 7 people who you know really, really well. And, also you have club activity. Like, most of the people live on campus so you bump into many people and build smaller communities within the residential area you live in. So there are quite a few tools that incorporate you into the broader community.

_Michael Hobbs:_ Yeah, echoing a lot of those points again. I think – You know I live on campus directly across the street from where we take classes. I think I’m sort of one of a couple of international students in my wing so there’s that forced interaction with U.S. students, with other international students which makes it such a welcoming community. And, then I'd also say the support staff we have in the
MBA office have been amazing, helping us get – if we need to talk to an immigration lawyer, putting on sort of different BBLs or different events if we have any questions that need to be answered.

And, then again the greater Stanford community having been an international student has just being a great resource. So yeah I felt very well looked after.

_Tong Zhang:_ Yeah, that's great. You guys both mentioned about the social aspects. How about the classroom settings? Like how do you think the academic experience and has incorporated

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international experience into or integrated? [Inaudible comment].

_Michael Hobbs:_ So, I'm in a class right now: _Strategy Beyond Markets_. It's essentially focused on everything international. We have one or two classes on the U.S. healthcare system, but besides that it's all around sort of international issues. You know, we did a case last week on Splash – sort of a mobile network with payment system in Ghana. So I feel that it has been incorporated in different classes, and they're always trying to incorporate at least a few international cases in the coursework.

_Artem Barsukov:_ And, just a couple of words from my experience, my experience – Like most of the classes I'm taking, yeah, I would say they are probably, like, more tilted towards the American company's cases. But at the same time I think like most of the cases they learn – they teach there – they teach quite universal lessons, which are applicable to the global issues. So, I wouldn't say that I personally consider that to be an issue.

_Tong Zhang:_ Yeah 'cause the knowledge where the skills, the framework is transferable.

_Artem Barsukov:_ Quite universal, yeah.

_Tong Zhang:_ Yeah.

_Artem Barsukov:_ Yeah.

_Tong Zhang:_ Yesh. Since we're talking about the academics maybe we can also touch about your favorite academic experience so far. I can start off. So I really love the group projects. A lot of the class ask us to do. So last quarter I took the _Data and Decisions_ pilot class. We
are supposed to help alumni's company and do a regression project. So, in the whole quarter I worked with four other classmates and like through the whole – our model – for me coming from a journalism background, that was a huge learning experience.

I enjoyed working with people, working with my classmates and see a project actually helping a company grow. So that's my favorite experience. Artem, do you have any?

*Artem Barsukov:* I think I enjoy most the classes that are heavy on the number of the guest speakers. In particular, two classes on the top of my mind would be *Product Launch*, which is

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the advanced marketing class, and also the *Money and Banking* class. So, the product launch one, we had quite a few entrepreneurial guest speakers, which every conversation with them I found being very insightful. And, also [in] the *Money and Banking* class there were quite a few guest speakers from the Federal Bank.

So I think these elements we have access to the practitioners from the industry – this is something I benefitted most from.

*Micahel Hobbs:* Yeah, I mean there is a couple of classes that come to mind for me. I really enjoyed *Organizational Behavior* in the first quarter. Frank Flynn I think is one of the greatest professors going around. I loved how applicable the material was to daily interactions with people. I really enjoyed the *Sports Business Management* class.

*Tong Zhang:* Oh, yes.

*Micahel Hobbs:* last quarter. Again, guest speakers were amazing. GM of the Warriors, owner of the San Francisco Giants, you know amazing, amazing guest speakers. And, I think that's one of the great things about Stanford is that the school has that ability to bring in that kind of talent. And then the class that I'm in right now – *Real Estate Investing* class -- we've been given 24 acres in Milpitas, which is just 30 minutes south from here. Having to put together a development plan, even an alumni mentor and sort of working through that process.

Like this real-world applicable skills, which I think has been really amazing.
Tong Zhang: Great. Let’s change gears a bit and talk about student activities. So talk about your favorite extracurricular activity so far. I can start off because last Friday we just had the GSB Show. I’m part of the leadership team – I was the stage manager. So a little bit of background, the GSB Show is a student-run, original musical. So we put together the whole script and the whole production. It was in the Fox Theater. We had 1,200 people coming. It was a great production.

I feel super excited to be part of that and just be in that experience with your classmates and see the whole thing put together - it’s just a great, rewarding experience for me.

Artem Barsukov: Yeah, the GSB Show was definitely a big thing and quite a success. Great job on that one.

Tong Zhang: Thank you.

Artem Barsukov: In my experience I would say that most of the activities organized by the clubs at GSB - like the Entrepreneurial Club and Finance Club – those activities were really very good. And this again connects to the point I made earlier on the guest speakers because most of those activities are somehow related to the people, the practitioners coming to the GSB. And also a couple of weeks ago we made a visit to the Slack office, which was very…quite insightful to see how their organization works on the inside.

And, also I can see how amazing the facilities are that we have here at GSB like the tennis courts, swimming pools and –

Tong Zhang: You’re using all that – the facilities. [Laughs]

Artem Barsukov: Quite a few of them. [Laughs] Not all of them but I’m doing my best.

Tong Zhang: Nice.

Michael Hobbs: And, I think, yeah, a big one for me was two weekends ago we had Challenge for Charity.

Tong Zhang: Oh, yeah.

Michael Hobbs: Which –
Tong Zhang: Do you mind sharing a little background?

Michael Hobbs: Yeah, a little bit a background – it's kind of a competition between the biggest, I think, six or seven West Coast business schools. There are a few different facets to it. They're sort of volunteer hours, fundraise money, and then there's the Challenge for Charity, which is held at Stanford every year. You know just amazing events: sports, spelling bees, trivia competition.

Tong Zhang: What sport do you play?

Michael Hobbs: So I did – Unfortunately, they didn't have rugby so I tried my hand at American football, flag football, ultimate Frisbee and the cricket. So I know cricket from back home but the other two are more so American sports that I tried my hand at. But, you know, also on the culture side having the Battle of the Bands, having the dance-off on Saturday night and then sort of a big event culminating in a bit of a social. We can interact with other business school students from the area, which is great to build your network. And you know looking at sort of career posts.

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Tong Zhang: Yeah, cool. It feels like you two already integrate into your culture pretty well. Yeah, so how about a question on the plan after GSB – so do you plan to go back to your own country? And not only after graduation, also summer plans, can you touch upon your plans – what’s your thinking?

Michael Hobbs: Sure, so over the summer I'm doing splits. I'm doing a global experience or GMIX doing Europe for six weeks and then coming back and doing eight weeks in the US in a sort of private equity on the real estate investing side.

Tong Zhang: Cool.

Michael Hobbs: Post-GSB I'd like to stay in the US. I think it makes a lot of sense with the amazing network that we have here. And honestly we get the one year OPT on our student visa. So I'd like to utilize that, and then make a decision from there.

Tong Zhang: Great.

Artem Barsukov: Yeah, in my case I'm definitely going to go home in June this summer. For the second half of the summer I plan to be in the Bay
Area in an internship here and then after graduation is to be decided.

**Tong Zhang:** Okay, cool. So, when you were looking for summer opportunities or thinking about your career plans, what are the resources from GSB that offer you as an international student? How do you feel supported by the career management system here?

**Michael Hobbs:** Sure. I can take this one to start with. They've been amazing. The CMC for me has been great. They probably saw far too much of me last quarter because without having the corporate work experience previously I was quite nervous about getting an internship. But they were great. You know, they have a wealth of knowledge, a wealth of context. You go in, do some different activities on the board, find out what you may be passionate about, or an industry which may be of interest.

And they reach out and put you in touch –

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with CEOs of companies. So for me they were great, and it was a great resource.

**Tong Zhang:** Yeah, I would jump in 'cause there was always an office specifically for international students, Laleh. So she will organize workshops for all kinds of work visa and the CBT, and how can you stay here in the summer and in the long run. And also she will pass on opportunities to specific international students. So I feel personally I got taken care of from the Career Management Center.

So, also, how supportive is the student body? Do you feel that it is a competitive environment? Or do you think it's pretty collaborative? How would you describe it?

**Artem Barsukov:** Yeah, so I'm happy to take this one.

**Tong Zhang:** Okay.

**Artem Barsukov:** I think there is a quite happy balance of the competitiveness and the support within the GSB community. About the competitiveness, I think by design when you put in one place 400 people with the average GMAT of 730, it kind of results in some level of competition. But, at the same time I think the way the admission process at the GSB works the admissions committee manages to select people who are quite nice and supportive. So at
the end of the day, it's quite a healthy balance of kind of like who fits here and helps you develop your personal and professional skills.

But at the same time it is supportive enough not to stress too much about the whole process.

_Tong Zhang:_

I feel that GSB is known for like pretty friendly and collaborative environment. I feel people are self-selecting in a way also to opt into the GSB experience. So for me I feel really supported because I feel here I think Hobbsy and Artem we all live together on campus across the street. So people treat you as a person, as a friend first and like a classmate second. Or like with all the contacts I feel here I can develop really deep relationships with all my classmates and become a really great friend.

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So that's something I feel is different or unique here at the GSB.

Yeah, so the next question would be: is it common for students' post-graduate school for their goals to change during the program for the two years? Maybe you can talk about your experience and whether what you were thinking of applying has anything changed?

_Michael Hobbs:_

Yeah. I think you know I've had an interesting experience coming in. Obviously I came in wanting to explore different industries. But I thought that I was going to get – I had some experience in internships in investment banking and sort of more traditional finance roles. And, I was thinking that I was going to go into private equity and I explored that. But you know once I got here, talking to people, meeting alumni, chatting with classmates I did change. And I sort of pivoted last quarter once I saw I had a real passion for real estate. I found that through classes and classmates. So I think it is very common. It's very common for people to try out a new industry or a new function over summer and then realize that that isn't actually what they want to do and come back and push the reset button and change track in their second year. I think it is extremely common.

_Tong Zhang:_

Yeah, exactly. I feel I came into the program really wanting to move into tech. I wanted to be a product manager. I wanted to move into a pure tech company. Also, I feel throughout talking to
people, through informational interviews I realized my true passion is still in journalism or publishing. So I want to kind of focus on my strengths, not just trying to learn coding and everything, but more work on a media product on their strategy or partnership side so I can leverage my background.

So that's kind of a pivot for me. So, you have anything to add?

Artem Barsukov: Yeah, again I have a couple of words. So I think again like this beauty of two years MBA it also helps a lot because the first year at least people can stay –

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really open-minded without any time pressure because it's a two-year program, right? And obviously people are coming from diverse backgrounds and they are exposed to new ideas constantly. And, that quite often leads to the change of the course throughout the two-year training.

Tong Zhang: Great. So we talk a lot about recruiting and career. Now we can come back. I think after you mentioned about Frank Flynn, the OB professor, can you talk more about your interaction with faculty? Like are there any personal stories or interesting --?

Artem Barsukov: Yeah, just overall I would say that I'm quite impressed by the level of faculty. I'm not only taking classes at the GSB. I'm taking quite a lot of classes across the street. So I experienced the Computer Science Department and I'm also taking some classes from the Department of Economics. And now I'm taking a class from the Department of Symbolic Systems. And I would say across Stanford overall, and in GSB, in particular, I’m quite impressed with the faculty level.

Tong Zhang: Yeah. I agree. I think I'm taking Touchy Feely which is another really famous course here at the GSB. And my instructor, Gary Dexter, he is really helpful and he also not only takes care of the content and structure of the course. And he understands and reads everyone's journal and has some one-on-one interactions. I think the personal attention from the faculty especially from him is something that I think is really valuable here.

Michael Hobbs: Yeah, I'll just quickly add something to that, too. I think one of the amazing things about the GSB and what they do so well is the balance between faculty and academics. The faculty are sort of industry leaders. I think they do a great job of having – whether it's
like teaching a class by themselves or co-teaching a class, having industry leaders that you've seen performing a job. Joel Peterson is a big one that comes to mind. They come back and –

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they come back and they share their knowledge for us.

I think that's something that Stanford GSB does so well.

**Tong Zhang:** Yeah, exactly. So, our next question will be: what support and guidance to alumni provide? I think you both touched on that when you were reaching out or even before GSB you met a lot of alums.

**Artem Barsukov:** Yeah, I'm happy to take this one. I think I leveraged the network quite a lot before coming on campus – so like in this window between me getting the offer and me coming to campus. I reached out to quite a few alums. I was quite impressed with first the response rate. So quite a few of them were happy to jump on a call or meet for a coffee to bounce some ideas. And I think that helped me to a large extent first to understand what type of experience I signed up for. And also to help me to shape what I want to do longer term like after GSB.

And just an anecdote on this one: so, a friend of mine is reaching to quite a few alums through calls or e-mails. And he told me that he was basically tracking how many responses he got. And he said that he got about 70 percent response rates on the call or e-mails, which I think is quite impressive. So like the majority of people were happy to jump on the call with him or again to meet for a coffee considering that they never met the person.

**Tong Zhang:** Yeah.

**Michael Hobbs:** Yeah, I did hear that as well. I mean pretty much to every e-mail that I've sent to alumni I've received a response. And they've just been willing to jump on a phone call and have a chat about anything, which is just really great.

**Tong Zhang:** Yeah. Just another data point I'm with the Asian Business Student Club, and we have a mentorship program. So I got assigned two mentors. And one of them is really, really helpful in terms of helping me to – landing a job for my summer internship. So actually my summer plan I'm planning through him. He's a real estate investor, and he knows I'm passionate about media. So he introduced me to a CEO.
So I feel not only just “e-mails” there are structured programs like a mentorship program that the CMC just brought out that will help you build a long lasting relationship, not just within the GSB, but also your relationship beyond.

Cool so our next question will be what global experience have you had? Well, at GSB, this is pretty funny ’cause the three of us went to the India Global Study trip together during the winter break. We had a great experience there and got to see India. It was my first time there. And the people and the meetings lined up was amazing. And I feel I got close to a lot of classmates including you two. So that was amazing.

Artem Barsukov: Yeah, exactly. So the trip itself, I think that was definitely one of my best weeks at GSB so far. It was quite an incredible trip. And this also brings us to the point I mentioned earlier on the kind of tools within GSB that help people to integrate into the community. I think that’s a fascinating tool because for ten days you travel with your classmates and you really have a chance to get to know them really, really well. So, if you like it will bring you close to those thirty people.

And, yeah, that was very fascinating integration into the community.

Michael Hobbs: Yeah, and obviously I’ve got the GMIX coming up this summer. I haven’t had it yet but it’s something that I’m really looking forward to – a six-week trip to Europe that GSB helps pay for makes so it’s cost-neutral for you.

Tong Zhang: Where are you going?

Michael Hobbs: I’m going to be in Prague. So, I’m really looking forward to that experience. Obviously I’ve been in India with you guys, and there's no shortage of trips throughout the academic year that are our fellow classmates put together that you can jump on to, you know, Whistler with a group over winter break. And, I know a bunch of people were traveling over spring break. So there is definitely no shortage of global experiences you can have.

Tong Zhang: Great. Our next question will be: what are the biggest challenges you have faced
[0:28:00] in your first year? I think I can start off. I think coming from a nontraditional background also as an international student I struggled to find my place here because I feel everyone here is so accomplished. I feel how can I get approved by my peers and classmates. So I feel there is definitely an impossible syndrome within me: “So how did I get here?” It took me some time to settle in. And I feel I felt overwhelming support from all my classmates, whether they’re international or American classmates.

And I feel – I mean it just takes time. So after the first quarter after I found a rhythm and ritual in my life, it got better and better. Now I feel like I can be myself here.

Artem Barsukov: In my experience I would say that for me the whole GSB experience to a large extent is a lesson around the importance of focus. And that was especially tough and important during the first couple of months at GSB. It's still an issue but there are so many things happening in parallel. And you constantly need to prioritize. And there are so many persons you need to answer to. Like what classes you prioritize, what types of communities within GSB you prioritize, how you approach your career this year.

There are so many questions you need to answer, and I think that was especially difficult during the first quarter.

Michael Hobbs: Yeah, I did think of that as well. I think coming from – you know having not sat in a classroom for a long time when I started – it’s like drinking from a fire hose from the start with all the classes. And obviously with the quarter system here, you know, it is extremely dynamic – ten weeks, six different new classes every ten weeks. So, for me it was really just getting into the flow of things and like you guys have touched on sort of balancing on the process in general which I think everybody has to some degree and to all of the other activities that are running in parallel and really coming to a realization that you don't need to do every single one of them. So I think just, yeah, getting that balance of the workload with your social life, and also taking some time to chill out and see to yourself.

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Tong Zhang: So, we're almost out of time today, but before we go, Artem and Hobbsy, any final words of advice for international students thinking about applying to Stanford for an MBA? Maybe you could give a couple of words.

Artem Barsukov: Yeah, okay, a couple of words to them I would say – I would probably say that as all of us mentioned it's to a large extent about the community. And I would suggest to spend some time studying the community and meet people from GSB who you can approach and just like try to understand for yourself whether these are the people you want to be around for the next two years of your life. And if the answer is ‘yes’ obviously apply because it's a fascinating place to be.

Michael Hobbs: Yeah, I think for me it would just be making sure that you have the best possible application for yourself prepared before you apply. I think whether that's GMAT, whether that's talking to current students, reaching out around your essays and how to shape them, doing research for yourself. I just think make sure that you're really putting your best foot forward before you apply.

Tong Zhang: Yeah. For me my advice would be just be yourself. Be authentic. I think only you know what you're truly passionate about. Only you know what kind of story you can tell. You are unique as a person. So don't be afraid to be different. Coming from a nontraditional background is not a problem. International students, also be proud of yourself.

Okay, great so now we'll wrap up. Thank you both for joining us. And thank you for everyone in the audience for participating. You can learn more about the MBA –

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Program and the admissions process on the GSB website. The application for the next application cycle will be available in June. Thanks again and have a great day.

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