Valerie Rivera: Hello and welcome to our webcast, MBA Student Insights, Military Veterans at the GSB. My name is Reed Wildman and I'm a second year MBA student at the GSB. I'm joined by Valerie Rivera and Jacob Sheehan.

Like me, they served in the military before becoming a student here. We'll be talking about the student experience here on campus and answer as many questions as we can. To submit a question to us about what it's like to be a student, just click on the chat button at the top of your screen, enter your question, and click send to all panelists.

We won't be talking about the admission process, the application or financial aid, but staff from the MBA admission office will answer those types of questions directly in the chat box. So let's begin with introductions. Valerie, Jacob, you want to tell us a little bit about yourselves?

Valerie Rivera: My name is Valerie Rivera and I joined the Air Force right when I was 18. I enlisted as a linguist and served for 15 years. And right when my enlistment ended, that's when I joined the GSB.

Jacob Sheehan: Hi, I'm Jacob. I went to WestPoint, class of 2006, and then on active duty for the last eight years. Army Special Forces Officer. Deployed to a lot of different places around the world and decided to come to the GSB. I'm actually still on active duty for at least a few years after graduation, in conjunction with a teaching assignment at WestPoint. So I'll be doing that for three years after this.

Reed Wildman: Thank you. And as for me, I was an Air Force Academy grad in 2007. Went from there to the Kennedy School to do a Masters in Public Policy. And then as a code writing guy, I ended up being a finance officer and did some cost analysis on satellites in LA. Deployed for a year to Kabul headquarters for ISAF [International Security Assistance Force] working on strategy, and then went out to Korea for a year to do a tour as the budget officer at Osan [South Korea].

From there, I just decided to get out. I took a year off. I spent some time with family, I travelled around, had a lot of fun, and then decided that coming to the GSB would be a really good way to get back on track. And came here and I'm gonna go take a job with Bain and Company Consulting after I graduate, starting in July.

So, now let's get started with some questions submitted by the
audience. First one is, "How is the transition from being in the military to being in school?"

*Jacob Sheehan:* All right. Well, I don't think it's as big of a shock as, I guess, I thought it would be.

*Reed Wildman:* Well, you're still in.

*Jacob Sheehan:* Yeah, I'm still in so I guess so.

*[Laughter]*

*Jacob Sheehan:* I think the biggest thing for me is there's a very strong emphasis here at the GSB on social activities. And so I think in the military, there's a lot of social stuff integrated throughout the workday. But there's a very clear time of night where it's like, okay, it's six or seven pm, time to go home and then everyone has sort of their life there. And it all just blends together at the GSB. It's just one big academic, social, and professional spectrum the whole time.

*Valerie Rivera:* I guess for me it was a huge change. I actually did my degree over ten years. So that was night classes, online classes. And so being at the GSB is actually my first time really being on a college campus. So that's pretty much a very intense change.

I guess I thought because I was working full-time and doing school at night, that it would be very easy to fit in all the things that are here at the GSB, but I found that it fills up my day quite a bit more than I expected.

*Reed Wildman:* I think here, probably more unlike anywhere else I've ever been, there's so many opportunities of good things to do in a day, it becomes a lot about being strategic about time management and saying no, which is something I thought I was good at in the military, but you really continue to improve in that while you're here. But it can be done.

So if you're worried about the transition, I'd say dive in and have faith that the skills you built are going to carry you through and it's going to be a big learning process, but it's worth it on the backside.

So, number two. What are you learning about leadership that you didn't already know from being in the military?

*Jacob Sheehan:* I'm in a class right now with Andy Rachleff called Aligning Startups with their Markets. And one of the things that he talks
about in the class is there's leadership by example, which I think we're most familiar with in the military. And there's leadership by design. And one of the interesting points that he makes about it is a lot of people strive to be leaders by example. And I think that's again, something that the military helps us master.

But leadership by design is a little bit more thoughtful in that the only way you're going to allow an organization to scale is if you can be a leader by design, or you can design successful organizations for other leaders to succeed in. And leadership by example, I think, we probably all burned ourselves out a lot in the military just trying to be really good leaders by example. So that's the biggest learning I've taken away from here at the GSB with that.

Valerie Rivera: I think for me there's more of an emphasis on the diversity of different kinds of leadership for the different kinds of organizations. In a lot of ways, I didn't feel like I necessarily fit the mold of a military leader but here I feel like I have more opportunities to explore what makes me really unique and what I really bring to the table without ruffling as many feathers. So that's been really nice.

Reed Wildman: Excellent. Thank you guys. Number three, what are your career plans? And how do you think about how your post-military background helped or hurt you in job interviews for summer or post-MBA jobs?

I can take this. I would say that my career plans have changed significantly since I came here. I originally thought I wanted to figure out another way to address problems associated with terrorism by creating economic opportunity for people in developing markets. And I think that's a big thesis and thing to bite off and chew, but I think what happened is that I'm evolving.

So I'm gonna go into consulting for a couple years and continue to build out a robust skill set. And then probably – and potentially stay there for a long time, but maybe transition into another career after I build those skills. And so I like to look at it in terms of building blocks and sort of three to five year plans.

And in terms of my post-military background, I think the military's getting a stronger brand where people like the discipline. People like the fact that we are just willing to sit and get things done and not complain about it. And so when you learn to translate the things you've done and the skills you've built, and just put it in the
right language, that was the hardest thing to transition. But when you figure out how to put it in the right language, I think people are responsive and they're really receptive to the idea of hiring vets.

Valerie Rivera: On a related note, I'm not looking for a job yet, but in the different groups I've worked with, a lot of my classmates have remarked how working with veterans has been so wonderful. We start on time, we end on time, we get the job done, and they really appreciate that. So I'm glad to help bring that to the table.

But also, as far as career plans, I'm taking some of my frustrations with the bureaucracy, and dovetailing on what Jacob said, helping organizations that struggle, build the kind of environment where people really thrive. So I'm using my past experience with the government and military, and then taking what I'm learning here to gain the confidence to start my own consulting firm.

Jacob Sheehan: The first day of class, I showed up 15 minutes early and I was the only one in our 70 person, or 70 seats in the room. And eventually, five minutes before class the professor walked in and said, "Oh, what are you doing here? How come you're not outside socializing?" I'm like, "But I thought class started at 10:00." He's like, "Oh, but most people just show up a few minutes after the class starts." So even the professors sort of acknowledged that.

So it was an awkward start from that standpoint. But for career plans, I'm still active duty. And so I'll be going back to teach for a little bit. And I think, I did do an internship over the summer and what I thought was interesting, working for a tech startup, was there's a lot of things that in the private sector there are habits that people learn and military candidates do not have to unlearn them.

So there can be some bad habits from previous organizations and I think that we come in with a completely open mind, having transitioned from one organization, say, to the private sector or a different organization.

Reed Wildman: What do you find most rewarding about your Stanford experience?

Valerie Rivera: I think by far, it's the opportunities. I feel that we've won this platinum ticket to see things that we've never seen, get the access to different people, organizations, speakers that come here are just incredible. And stuff that you would have to look forward to in six months – I'm gonna see something really cool. I feel like that's
happening every day here. And the hard part is just trying to decide what to do every day.

Reed Wildman: For me on that same note has been the people. I'm surrounded by consistently the most talented people I've ever been around in my life and career. And I feel like I've seen a lot of different organizational contexts. And that is both a pressure, because then you're surrounded by people who are making you feel like you're not very smart every day, but it's also, I mean, it's changed my life in so many ways. And it's really upped the bar for me in terms of what I expect of myself and my ability to perform.

So that has been incredibly rewarding. And people really care about each other and there's a nice community that I think – I mean, that's a huge understatement.

Jacob Sheehan: I think the ability to have some time to experiment is really valuable. I think in the military we get really focused on just performing on the function that we have and the task at hand is – the stakes are usually very high, particularly if you're deploying a lot.

So I think having some time for reflection and experimentation and to really figure out what it is that you’re uniquely good at, and thinking about some of the opportunities that Valerie talked about to be able to apply those skills in the future.

Reed Wildman: Nice. And I think we're – there's a lot of questions rolling in, so I'm going to try and have just one answer for here on out, but this has been good. So are there any active duty students at the GSB? Also how has your experience been different from military vets and peers at other schools? So we've got Jake.

Jacob Sheehan: All right. I've got this one. So yes, so there are two of us in the class of 2016. I don’t think there are any in the class of 2017. Okay.

As far as experience being different, I just know specifically at Stanford what differs, and I've experienced the difference, is the amount of collaboration that goes on here. And that's just part of the Silicon Valley ecosystem, but it's pretty unique to the academic experience here. So I think that's a really large benefit for an active duty student to come here and have those two years be focused on collaboration and reflection instead of a mentality that is just, ‘I need to get ahead during my time here for two years.’ So I think
it's a great place to think about how you can apply your skills to the military afterwards.

**Reed Wildman:** Thank you. “Valerie, I'm relieved to see a prior enlisted graduate student. Thank you very much for being here. As a prior enlisted member, were there any unique challenges you had to overcome as a graduate student that perhaps prior or current officers were not faced with?”

**Valerie Rivera:** I think number one is just the background, not having that consolidated four-year kind of degree. And I guess a lot of my peers that are officers have gone to service academies, so there's that bond that I didn't necessarily experience.

So I see that there's fewer enlisted service members. There are two in the class of 2017. And I'm just really proud to see us there and I would love to see more prior enlisted people here. I think sometimes there's a perception that you're blue collar, or you can't hack it, and I don't think that's true. I think if you work hard and you have this dream then you can really sell it and get yourself here then go for it. So that's what I think.

**Jacob Sheehan:** Yeah. I'd say one of the more successful guys in our class, Andy Turner, is a prior enlisted Marine. And he's done phenomenally well as has Valerie. So throw your hat in the ring.

**Reed Wildman:** Okay. What are you studying or specializing in?

So we have essentially a generalist track here as opposed to having a more specialized degree. And so with that, there's a lot of flexibility in the second year to sort of take whatever it is that interests you. So in the first year, there's a pretty strong core set of requirements, and you can take a couple of electives. So that's fairly set because they want to have you come out of the MBA as a – they want you to have the standardized product to a certain degree to know that you've got the skills you need to be versatile.

But beyond that, they've got a lot of offerings. I think probably the strongest curriculum here is centered around entrepreneurship, just because of the environment we're living in. But there's also really strong financial skills. There's a financial modeling class we took that I think was pretty foundational. And then there's a lot of leadership and role playing that I've been focusing on as well.

There's lots of information on the website about classes that are out there.
Who did you have write your references?

*Jacob Sheehan:* I can talk about this. So I think a good thing to consider is someone who can write about you at a snapshot in time. That was my company commander when I was in Iraq on a combat deployment. And then I had a mentor who had sort of seen the larger arc of my experiences – so to be able to zoom out and contextualize a lot of different experiences that I had in different jobs and sort of show how that affected my personal development.

I think references should be written by people who know you incredibly well and can talk about why you're wired a certain way rather than based on title or a position.

*Reed Wildman:* Are there GSB students who are in the reserves? How easy it is to balance reserve component obligations with GSB academics and extra-curriculars?

*Valerie Rivera:* So, I can take this one. I'm still learning the ropes. But what I've been able to do is enroll in the IME program through the Air Force Reserves. And that allows me to put my reserve duty in the summer. So there's a trade off with that. I can't do an internship for example, but I've been able to work with a great supervisor who's found a way to get a job for me over the summer that's uniquely in line with my strengths and what I want to do.

So that's pretty exciting. The other thing is that there is a really interesting unit in the local area called The Defense Innovation Unit Experimental, down at Moffett Field. So that may be an option for people who are looking to come to school here too.

*Reed Wildman:* Excellent. Let's see. Besides the Vet's Club, what other social and professional clubs are you involved with? Can you talk about your experience with the Vet's Club?

There's no shortage of extra curriculars around here. We've said before, it's really a monumental task trying to figure out what to say no to. I mean there's the Energy Club, we just set up a Virtual Reality Club. There's I think 38 student clubs. So all sorts of either diversity clubs or any other flavors you name it. There's an Entrepreneurship Club, Venture Capital, Finance.

There will be a club centered around the industry that you're interested in going into, and if not, you can make one. And there's always a group of interested students that will join you in that. And
that provides an amazing platform you can leverage to bring in
cutting edge speakers in those fields. So I've been very, very happy
with those.

And specifically with our experience with the Vet's Club. I think
the Vet's Club is growing in terms of its platform here at the GSB.
When I got here, it was kind of a low-key thing. It was a little bit
of a social. There wasn’t a lot of program around it because I think
to a lot of us, it's a smaller community. There's probably 20 of us
between the two classes, roughly.

And so people were kind of getting here and going out and
exploring a lot of other things versus spending a lot of time with
other vets, but I think this, the class of 2017, is really upping the
game there.

Valerie Rivera:
Yeah. Absolutely and we had a military service banquet this year
that had 300 people. I was shocked because it's bigger than some
of the military events I've been in when I was active duty. So it
was great to see, not just military and veterans, but also our
classmates attend. And I thought that was really wonderful.
They're just really curious about us and our heritage and everybody
wanted to see us in uniform too. So that was very interesting.

Reed Wildman:
How certain were you on the career you wanted to pursue prior to
starting your MBA? I ask because I'm wondering how essential
your internship is to getting the job you want upon graduation.

So, this probably applies for me since I've had an internship. So a
lot of people come here, do their internship, come back from their
second year and realize that they didn't like their internship at all.
And there's a lot of our classmates right now that are two weeks
out and are still looking for jobs.

And it's not because there's not jobs available; it's because they're
really trying to find the right fit. And I had a thesis about what my
career would be. And I think it's important to have a thesis and
build that together and make that show through in your application.
But I think what they're looking for in the application process,
we're not going to talk about that too much specifically, I think
they want us to show that you can build a vision that's coherent.

But there's also an understanding that you're going to get here and
you're going to meet all kinds of new people, and that's going to
change. And that's okay. So I think it's important to have a vision
and build that, but you don’t need to be anchored to it.
Do vets go the entrepreneurial route?

Valerie Rivera: I think so. I mean, that's my plan. And for me, it's a lot about having that freedom that I was craving while I was in [the military] to make my own choices about what to do, where to live, who to work with, all of those things. So I'm excited about the process. And I'm excited about testing it out while I'm here. And I think that's going to give me more confidence, that yes, this is the path. And just step out as soon as I graduate.

Jacob Sheehan: So there's a popular class here at the GSB called Entrepreneurial Acquisition. And I see a lot of vets interested in the entrepreneurial route where they work with investors to acquire small business and then they grow it. There are a lot of veterans who did that last year as a percentage of how many vets are here.

And I just think in general, we're comfortable with risk taking, particularly from a lot of our deployment experiences and we're looking to do so in a way that's not part of a larger bureaucracy. And so I think a lot of us come here with something to prove and want to test themselves as entrepreneurs. And so I think that's why it's a good fit to come here.

Reed Wildman: And one notable GSB alum, I forget his name but founded TRX coming out of here, and now you see him in bases everywhere. So if you guys have used TRX bands, that was a GSB incubated experience.

During what class, group, or experience have you most heavily relied on your skills or training required in the military?

Valerie Rivera: I think this is tough one.

Jacob Sheehan: Well, I think that spending a lot of time overseas working on negotiation, I think. There's a very popular class here, interpersonal dynamics, known more colloquially as Touchy-Feely. And so it's a very unstructured, ambiguous class where you're trying to learn about group dynamics and the absence of authority structure.

So you’d think that my military background wouldn't necessarily lend itself to that but I found that having a lot of negotiations with travel chiefs or with civilians on deployments, actually gave me an advantage of putting myself out there a little bit more with that class and getting the most learning possible from it.
Reed Wildman: All right. Have you encountered any people who are hesitant to hire or work with veterans because of your nontraditional background?

I think the hardest industry I've seen or heard about to break into here seems to be private equity. And that is not a wall that is impenetrable, but it's just a more challenging thing to get into because mostly it tends to be people who've come from private equity that they go back into it. But it's doable but I haven't seen anyone do it yet. There's a guy in the class among us that is.

But otherwise, I think that people are eager to hire veterans. They're either eager or indifferent. I think that there's a lot of nontraditional backgrounds that come here, probably half. And I think that with the time here and working with the Career Management Center and talking to your peers and classmates that have been in these industries, you can figure out how to shape the narrative that you need to be able to then sell them on hiring you for the job.

But a lot of it comes down to the things you're good at, which is being responsible, being diligent, being a good planner, getting things done, leading people. That's been a message that's been reinforced to me time and again since I've been here.

Jacob Sheehan: To build on that, there are professors here who, if you're trying to break into an industry where veterans don't traditionally go into, you can form relationships with and definitely have access to giving a shot during your summer or in any way. So everything's possible.

Valerie Rivera: Yeah, and I was actually struck by how many veterans are in the local area in that intersection between tech and the GSB and all of the different things. For example, we just finished this class called Hacking for Defense that pit a lot of different students with, whether it's business background or law school students or engineering students, to tackle tough problems being faced by the Department of Defense. So that was really, really fun to see what the challenges were.

Reed Wildman: Did you run into any challenges during your application process while being in the military, and how did you overcome those?

Valerie Rivera: So, I'd say the biggest challenge was translating my military experience into civilian lingo. Like far and away. And I'd never really had to do a resume so that was something that took me a lot
of time. I had to do my research. I had to figure out how to translate those things and sell myself. And I would definitely give yourself enough time to do that.

Reed Wildman: On that, there's a couple secrets that are helpful in terms of doing that effectively. One is, reach out to the Vet's Club. We have veterans here, you can find our email, who are always willing and helpful with sort of talking you through the process more on the side. I was helped by a veteran that was a former graduate here, when I was trying to think about my application process.

So for any schools you're thinking about applying to, reach out to those resources. They're there, available and waiting for you. We've all benefited from that. So people are willing to pay it forward.

Okay. How do you manage your time to explore the various post-MBA options available to you?

Jacob Sheehan: That's hard coming up a few weeks away from graduation, so let me give you my personal example. I'm going back to the military and I still feel stressed out about when I eventually transition out of the military. There's so many post-MBA options that I'm thinking, how do I make sure that I have all this sorted out in my head so I know who to contact when that happens. And I can imagine it's probably more stressful for other people who are entering their workforce right afterward.

So I think the thing is just to be willing to be experimental right when you show up and to have contacts within the industry that are people you can rely on later on.

Reed Wildman: For an enlisted Marine looking for a more diverse peer demographic compared to a veteran-heavy MBA program, can you speak to the educational and networking value?

Valerie Rivera: I can absolutely do that. I think one thing I've seen here is that people are here to learn and they're here to share their background and experience with others. We have people in our class that, you might be reading a case about the SEC [Securities and Exchange Commission] and somebody will raise their hand and say, "I was actually a lawyer working there at the time, and this is what really happens." It could be anything and somebody's got some unique experience to bring in there.

That's been fascinating. And there are worlds I didn't even know
existed. So I think this gives us the opportunity to really, really get out there and see what the world has to offer, in a way that I worry if I were at a more veteran-heavy organization, it might fall into some of those old habits and patterns where we're kind of racking and stacking each other and those kind of things happen. Maybe they don't but I imagine they could. And I don't have to worry about that here and I really enjoy just learning from my peers, for sure.

Reed Wildman: And I'll reiterate to the network, community has been the most valuable aspect and part of this experience by far. I am just blown away by classmates and they have experience, like you said, in so many different areas and there's just a collegiality here – the willingness to either take a phone call or to connect you with someone. And it just really broadens the reach what we can do with this ______ as a platform.

Jacob Sheehan: I totally agree.

Reed Wildman: Okay. Have you seen students with families strive at the Stanford GSB given the competing demands of academic rigor, social life and family life? We have a new father here, and we have a mother as well. So I will sit this one out.

Valerie Rivera: I have 11-year old twin boys right now. I might have the oldest kids here at the GSB. So some of the things that made me very ordinary when I was in the military, like getting married young and having kids young and being a parent, are absolutely fascinating to others here.

So they just think I'm Super Woman, when I'm just paddling along trying to do my thing. And I'm also living off-campus. So that has been quite the juggling act. But it is doable and I still feel like I'm getting that GSB experience. And Jacob's got the whole other side of things.

Jacob Sheehan: Yeah. So I have a three-month old, Samuel. And so for the first three quarters of my experience here, we didn't have to really manage it that much now. Being married and living off campus, like Valerie said, very close biking distance. But it's something you have to negotiate in terms of how much of your day do you want to spend at the GSB, and then also how much do you want to integrate your spouse or your partner in GSB life.

And I think because I was just getting settled, I didn't integrate my wife as early as possible into the GSB community, but then over
time it happened and we realized we had this really great set of friends here and we're going to be very sad to leave afterwards. So I think that answer's going to be different for everyone and you just need to set up the appropriate boundaries that allow both sides of your life to be really thriving.

-Reed Wildman:

Wow. Well, we're almost out of time today. Before we go, Valerie and Jake, any final words of advice for people thinking about applying for a Stanford MBA, especially if they served in the military?

-Valerie Rivera:

I'd say don't sell yourself short. Give it a shot. You never know what can happen.

-Jacob Sheehan:

Yeah. I think that there is value in experimentation and reflection, like I mentioned earlier. And so taking a couple years of your life to do the best in you instead of essentially rushing right back into the workforce is helpful because you identify what you're really good at. And in a constrained world, it's much better to do what you're really good at instead of just trying to overcompensate for something that you're average at.

-Reed Wildman:

Yeah, if I've got 40 years left to work, I really like the idea of taking in a couple years to think about and test out all the different ways I could go and then move forward from there. I would also say, the transition is work. It's a lot of work.

I think when I got out of the military, I kind of got out knowing what I was running from, but not necessarily what I was going to. And I had to really develop and spend some time thinking about that. So I think when you're in the lows of, 'this is taking a lot of my time, how can it possibly so hard to think about these things, and this process is incredibly complex,' I would say that resoundingly it's been worth it to get through that. And to keep pushing and to continue exploring and that there's just a lot of effort that goes into it, but there's a lot of upside on the backend of that. So keep pushing.

Great. Well, thank you both for joining us. And for everyone in the audience for participating. You can learn more about the MBA program on the GSB website. And the application for the class starting in the fall of 2017 will be available in June. So you've got a little bit of time. If you have questions about the MBA program, you can continue to submit them in the chat box. Staff from the MBA admissions office will answer them for the next 15 minutes. Thanks again, and have a great day.