Welcome to the Stanford Africa MBA Fellowship webinar. This transcript has been edited to share highlights of the online event with you. My name is Sabah Khan, and I’m on the MBA admissions staff here at Stanford GSB. We’ll focus on questions you submitted to us in advance.

I am joined by two current student panelists on the webinar, and they are both MBAs in the class of 2015: Sam Kamara and Anita Niangoran. Sam is Ugandan and most recently worked in commodities trading in Johannesburg, South Africa. Anita is pursuing a dual degree with the Harvard Kennedy School and is an economist from Cote D’Ivoire. She most recently worked at the International Monetary Fund.

We’ve received questions from several of you asking about preparation for the GMAT or GRE exam, one of which is required to apply for the MBA Program. Anita and Sam, do you have any advice or suggestions for how you prepared for these tests?

I took one exam earlier on just to get a feel of where my strengths and weaknesses were. I took some time understanding what the performance of the exam was like because it was unlike something I’d ever seen before. Every exam I took before that was paper-based, where the GMAT is a computer adaptive test, meaning that as you go along, the test is getting harder, depending on questions you get.

I spoke to people who have taken the GMAT before. I would recommend taking a GMAT prep course; it worked pretty well for me, a few of my friends took Kaplan and it worked really well for them as well. And if you feel that -- a lot of my friends told me that for instance they had a weakness in the math section for instance and if math is not a really strong area for you, you can always take online courses. There are different options, you can take an online course offered by these type of providers which I know are quite costly. Or you could also look for tutors, there are a lot of tutors around and different universities in Africa because at the end of the day you can access that report, you can learn the math concepts from the tutors -- a few of my friends did do that. And I mean their math scores in the GMAT improved considerably.
So the main thing would be try and understand what the format of the exam is like and then get the right material, work hard at it and continue to practice. Take as many practice exams as you can; you want to get your score as high as possible before you get into the exam because you can't expect to get -- for miracles to happen in the exam, right? Like what you do before the exam is what will happen in the exam. So if you have a minimum score of whatever that's mostly likely what you'll get in the exam. So really think hard about what you read for the exam and only try and write the exam once you feel comfortable.

Anita:

This is a question that I can really relate to as a person who didn't study in the Anglo-Saxon system or someone whose native language is not English. So there is kind of a mental barrier when you start preparing. So my advice would be for us to not think about these kind of limitations that you think that you could have in the beginning, just go for it: try a couple of mock tests in the beginning to see where are your weaknesses, as Sam mentioned. Once you have defined these areas you can try to organize yourselves into a study plan. Try to allow sufficient time for the test date, maybe eight weeks where you can really intensively work on these questions. And the key is practice, practice, practice. The more you practice the more you are comfortable with and you can go faster during the test, so practice and organization I would say are the main things to put there.

Sabah:

Thank you both so much for your insights. I think you hit on some really key points that in my experience have worked really well for our applicants – that the GMAT is a test that you can prepare for. And so the more that you prepare the better you will do. And so even if you feel that you're stuck at a certain level I think if you keep taking the test you can improve.

We also had a question submitted asking whether you've taken advantage of any Africa-focused learning opportunities at the GSB, for example either faculty research or coursework through the Africa Business Club, speakers on campus or anything else that you care to share about Africa-related resources as well at Stanford Business School.

Anita:

We have been able to benefit from all these opportunities, speakers – I remember the minister of technology of Nigeria came earlier this quarter and it was a great -- so a great meeting, we had a lot of people from the entrepreneurship sector in Nigeria, technology sector, diplomacy sector in Nigeria and it was a great conversation about how to develop the continent. We have really executive
people from Africa coming on campus and with whom we are able to interact directly.

We have also the Africa Business Club and we are trying to prepare for the Africa Business Club conference that is happening in March, and this is really an opportunity for us first-year students who try to contact leaders on the continent and really, as I said, interact and learn from them.

I think our first case in one of our first classes was also a case about Africa; I think I will let Sam talk a little bit more about it.

Sam:

Sure. The case Anita is referring to is a case in Kenya, Equity Bank. This quarter we had a strategic leadership course and we were studying the strategy of different companies throughout the world. The first case that came up was Equity Bank which really made me happy because I'm African and a lot of my classmates ask me about Equity Bank as I went through. It was really interesting seeing the thought process behind how the whole organization was formed, the challenges that were faced, and seeing the company grow from startup phase to where it is right now.

Besides that our classmates, a lot of them have worked in Africa before and you'd be surprised, you'd be having a lunch with someone tell you they spent the last three or four months in Rwanda or Tanzania and they will teach you about Africa as well. So that's how amazing this place is -- you can learn so much from so many different places so when thinking about Africa I don't want you to think Africa is only African Africans at Stanford at the GSB. So many different people who are interested in Africa who worked in Africa and are more interested in working in Africa both during summer internship and post school.

Stanford also has an initiative called SEED and that was launched in Ghana about a year ago where they're looking to help promote entrepreneurs throughout West Africa and currently they're looking to start up another building in East Africa. So the initiatives happening right now at the GSB in Africa are an indication of how serious the school is about Africa and promoting African leaders.

Sabah:

Thanks, Sam. I think it's great to hear you mention that there's a strong emphasis here on peer to peer learning and so a huge part of this fellowship is really bringing the perspective you have from the region that you've been working in to our campus but that also means you're learning about all the other experiences your classmates have had and so it is really a region that's of great
interest to our community at large. Almost 10 percent of our MBA 2 class worked in Africa last summer and that's a consistent trend, it was about 10 percent the summer before as well and so you do see a huge amount of investment of time and energy to really gain experience on the ground there.

You also mentioned SEED. SEED is the Stanford Institute for Innovation and Developing Economies. And it was established in 2011 through an extraordinary grant from an alum who endowed the institute. And like Sam said, the first hub for SEED was built in Ghana and it launched over the past summer. It's right now focused on partnering our alumni with entrepreneurs in that region.

So there are cohorts of business leaders from West Africa who are working closely with our alumni to scale their businesses. That's really the inaugural program for the institute. However it's still in a pretty startup phase so we're looking forward to offering more programs that our current students can get involved with as SEED continues to develop.

Anita, we also had a few questions about how to pursue a joint or dual degree. What are the requirements and how did the application process change? What was your thought process around applying for both degrees?

_Anita:_

You apply to the GSB as a regular applicant and you apply to the other school as a regular applicant. And then once you are admitted in both schools then you are a dual degree.

I guess for me this whole process -- as I said, I worked in government before but as I interacted in that environment I realized how much private sector tools are important. I think that most of the growth in Africa will be led by the private sector in the next few years or so. I found that it would be interesting for me to have both sides and to be able to kind of move across sectors. I thought I could bring more to Africa by being a leader that can work in both sides.

So once you are admitted I found it great that at the GSB -- we have a person in the administration who is really dedicated to help us work out our dual degree and because we have to move back and forth. So for example I spent my first year in Boston last year at the Kennedy School. I do my second year here and then next year I'll spend one semester at the Kennedy School and one semester at the business school here.
So we have a person who is here to advise us on the classes we take and to put us in touch with other people so that we can manage the moving and organizing process.

Sabah: Thanks, Anita. For those of you who have raised your hand I have taken note of that. Just leave your hand raised and we will get to your questions shortly.

Anita: I just wanted to add that I have been talking about the Kennedy School because it is the one that I am doing but there are joint degrees in Stanford, so you can do a joint degree with the education program here. I think that you can get both degrees by staying in Stanford two years. Or you can do a joint degree with the law school. So there are many opportunities available.

Sabah: Great. If you take a look at your screen under the admissions application material section there's a whole section on joint and dual degrees. If you wish to pursue one of those you can learn more by specifically clicking on any one of these degree programs. Actually at Stanford one in six of our students is pursuing a joint or dual degree, and 97 percent of our students will take at least one class outside of the business school. So I think it's a huge advantage to be at Stanford Business School because you're also able to take courses at any of the other graduate schools that are here, and so that really forces you to think about things differently, confront assumptions you might have, be more innovative when you try to think about new solutions to problems that are increasingly interdisciplinary and complex.

We also had a couple of questions asking about global experience requirements. At Stanford one of the requirements to graduate from the MBA program is to spend time in a country you've never lived or worked in before and there are a number of different ways you can fulfill that requirement. One of the most popular ways is through a global study trip. These are 10 to 14 days where you spend time on the ground in a country meeting with all of the primary players of that marketplace. One of your study trips is covered under the financial aid offered for the tuition and associated fees.

Would you guys like to talk a little bit about what global experience requirement you plan on pursuing and a little more about that?

Anita: I'm planning on doing the global study trip - I'm actually leaving this afternoon. I'm lucky to go to Australia for about 10 days, as you mentioned. So we have a lot of exciting meetings planned; I
think we will meet the minister of communication there who plays a big role in shaping the constitution. We're going to meet the representative of the indigenous population there. So it will be really an exciting opportunity to discover a new country, a new culture and a new way to do business in a place where I've never been or I've never thought that I would be going I think that early.

Sam:

I'm also doing a global study trip. I'm leaving tomorrow for Brazil and the trip will be quite exciting. I'm going to spend a few days in Sao Paolo and then Rio and we're going to meet so many different leaders throughout Brazil, through education, resources both public and private. It's quite exciting because we're going to get a chance to meet the former president of Brazil, which is really impressive. Those of you who are interested in soccer football we're going to meet Renaldo, the Brazilian star. There's so many amazing people you meet on these trips and when choosing a trip there's so many different trips to choose from. I wanted a trip from one of the BRIC countries and so I really tried to emphasize that and over a year you can actually do what you want to do. So you can't really choose where you want to go and I'm really excited to go to Brazil.

I'm also thinking about going to do a GMIX as well next year after my summer internship and I'm looking to do that in China so I'm trying to continue with my BRICs journey being as I'm from South Africa.

Sabah:

Can you describe what a GMIX is, what it stands for?

Sam:

Yes, so a GMIX [Global Management Internship Experience] it basically allows you to work in a country -- it's longer than a study trip. A study trip is about a week long whereas a GMIX you get a chance to work for a company in a country you've never lived or worked in before. Instead of being introduced to different leaders in different areas of the country you get more on the ground experience focused on a specific sector you're interested in. I'm interested in doing something a bit different for my GMIX looking at e-commerce and I'm looking to do that in China so I'm talking to a few people, trying to find a company over there where I can actually learn these skills I want to develop.

Sabah:

Thank you. That sounds exciting. I'm jealous. We have a couple questions - they both relate to career opportunities. Have either of you started using the Career Management Center to explore what your next steps might be? Have you thought about internship programs or even full-time opportunities yet? And how does the career management process help students if there's anything
particular that pertains your background coming from Africa as it relates to career management if you could shed some light on that.

Anita:

I found the Career Management Center at the GSB amazing in the way it's organized. We started with the career vision workshop. I mean it was great to just take some time, step back and think deeply about what you want to do because sometimes we have so many ideas that they are not in -- I don't know, in the past that was clear to you so it was great to just have some time and people who are students that they are taking the time to think about that clearly, about the next step that you're going to take. We have so many other opportunities; we can sign up for meetings to go over our resumes and cover letters, we have advisors available almost every day at every time we can sign up.

We also have mock interviews and they're able to put us in touch with people from the industry that we are interested in. So the Career Management Center covers everything from shaping what you want to do next to how you get there.

Sam:

I think Anita covered it quite well. Personally I signed up for a small group, CLV session which is a career life vision session, about six of us and we meet three times a quarter and discuss our thought process, what we want to do with our careers and why we want to do that and also hold ourselves accountable as to how we're going to get there and what actions are we taking. I signed up for a few one-on-one sessions, self-reflection sessions, the resume help sessions, mock interviews. The GSB is an amazing place where you have so many different things you can do and the Career Management Center helps you focus on what you want to do and give you tangible solutions how to get there. They're not going to just tell you about something; they're going to show you how to get there. It's a strong support base to have here.

That's another thing I love about the GSB and I think the CMC website allows you to see what jobs are available and you can create filters for jobs you are interested in. Say for instance you're interested in hedge funds or private equity. You can sign up on the website to go to that, your personalized section on the website such that every time a hedge fund job pops up you'll get an email and you know what's happening and that's super helpful if you're looking for a specific job.

Anita:

I think one of the amazing things also is that -- I mean the GSB family support in that whatever you want to do you will always be able to find somebody in that area and the CMC people are always able to put you in touch with these people, so the resources are
really there, whatever your background is or whatever you want to do in the future.

Sabah: I think that addresses a lot of the questions because we really don't see our Career Management Center as a placement center; it's not a place that you just go to apply for jobs; it's really a much broader kind of resource that helps you identify all the way from what your vision is to how to actually execute it and give you dedicated advice and resources for the full duration of the two years that you're a student to actually achieve what that vision is. So it's really tailored to you specifically and your background. We're not an MBA factory; we're not trying to turn out 400 of the world's best consultants or financial analysts. It's really about the vision you have personally for making an impact in your life or in your country or however you see that being defined and then we really work with you to help realize that vision and that's what the Career Management is for. So it's much more than just maintaining relationships with our alumni to give you an internship opportunity but even at a deeper level than that.

I'm going to unmute some of you.

Participant: Good evening, I'm calling from Egypt, my name is Noha Mustafa. I have two questions. One of them is about the program after I complete it. I know one of the circumstances is that I have to return to Africa, whichever country it is. Does the program help direct me to which country I have to go to and which opportunity or direction? I mean if I choose to go back to Egypt but I don't have a specific job to join in Egypt does the program provide me with the direction and direct me to where and what field I'm going to work in Africa?

Sabah: As I mentioned before, our Career Management Center is available to help you identify professional opportunities that relate to your interest. As such our definition of how to contribute back to Africa's development is not something for us to define. We really rely on our applicants to define that and tailor that to yourself. We don't have a requirement if you go on to the Stanford Africa Fellowship website I'm on now and take a look at the application requirements there is a frequently asked question down here that asks what we mean by contributing to Africa. There's no particular industry, country, sector you need to commit to going to after you graduate so our Career Management Center is available to all of our students as well as alumni; you have lifelong access to the Career Management Center so you would be able to work with them, define a position or opportunity in the region anywhere in a field that relates to making a difference in that area.
Sabah: We have another question from Abel Belinas.

Participant: My name is Abel Belinas. Nobody gets it right the first time so no worries. Currently I live in Washington, D.C., but I was born and raised in Ethiopia. Based on my experience one question I really want to ask is are there any of the classes or any programs that's going to help you have some kind of experience dealing with African governments or public policy? I'd actually like to know about resources for me dealing with the government when it comes to my Ethiopia. So are there any classes or any kind of programs that can show you or help you deal with the government back in Africa?

Anita: The first one I can think of is not necessarily government in Africa but we have a global strategy class when we try to think about how to do business internationally and we take these kind of questions into account about how to adapt according to the government you're going to meet or the culture you're going to face when you try to extend your business internationally. This is a good way to think about these questions.

Sam: I think Anita has covered our exposure to that so far. The good thing about the GSB is that those courses are available. Our first quarter is more structured, meaning we don't take any lectures, but after this quarter we are allowed to take more lectures at other schools within the GSB. There are so many other schools in Stanford where we can go and take those specific courses if you're interested in that.

Sabah: The other thing: the global management course actually I think also has a section that's taught by Condoleezza Rice, former Secretary of State so we do have access to pretty senior level government decision makers. Last year on our study trek to Kenya and Rwanda our students met with the sitting president of Rwanda, President Paul Kagame.

So I think the approach to learning is there's not always necessarily specific coursework. Anita, do you feel like the dual degree gives you more options to think about the government public sector side? That might be another option for you.

Anita: Definitely. I mean because here we are more business oriented so we try to look at government as an external factor that can influence the business. But in a public policy school you learn more about how to deal with public policy and what it means. If
it's very important to you I would advise to look at the dual degree probably.

There is a public policy school here as well and as Sam said you might take some electives there. So there are many options you have.

Participant: Thanks for that. I appreciate it.

Sabah: Thanks Abel. Asensei we're going to unmute you. Can you hear us?

Participant: How are you.

Sabah: I hope I'm not mispronouncing your name.

Participant: No, you actually got it quite well. I have two questions. The first question is – I don't know if I misheard you but did you say that you can still be eligible for the program, for the scholarship if you apply in round three? Because I see online it says you must have applied by round one or two, and I know I'm only scheduled to write my GMAT in February. So could I still possibly be eligible for the scholarship or not?

And then my second question is to Sam because I'm also from South Africa and I wanted to know how much work experience did you have before you decided to do an MBA and I want to within the South African context what's a good timeline for work experience before you get into an MBA.

Sabah: Sam, go ahead.

Sam: Coming from South Africa there's so many different people who have done MBAs internationally. I don't know what your background is but most consultants spend about three years before they go to the MBA and then find people in finance or less traditional backgrounds usually spend a bit longer, maybe four or five years. I spent five years working before I went to do my -- before I came to Stanford to do my MBA.

Sabah: And on your first question, if you take a look at the application requirements for the fellowship we do recommend applying in round one. That's really because for our international admits it is a lengthy process to make sure all of your logistics are in order for housing, for visa, etc. Let's say all of the eight fellowships for example have been taken by then round three tends to be the most
competitive round. So we do encourage people on the margin to apply earlier.

That said, if we do have additional fellowships available in the third round and you are eligible you may be offered the fellowship but it's possible that all of the fellowships could be distributed in the first two rounds.

**Participant:** All righty, thanks so much.

**Sabah:** You're very welcome. Thanks for calling.

I am just looking for Diana; I am about to put you on the line. Diana can you go ahead and ask your question?

**Participant:** Hello everyone, my name is Diana. I'm an LLM student at the University of Cape Town. I have four years of experience; I'm Ugandan but I'm studying here in South Africa. I wanted to ask you about the GMAT because I don't have so much experience with math for the last ten years or so -- that was the last time I did math was ten years back -- and I'm just wondering how much weight you give to the GMAT and what the range of the scores you want. I tried to take a test without preparation. I scored a 400 and it was really, really bad and it put me down so much. So I'm just wondering for people like lawyers do they have any chance of getting in. Thank you.

**Sabah:** That's a good question, Diana. We look at your application really holistically so there's no one part that can make or break it. As I said earlier we do not have a minimum score requirement. That said, our program is really academically rigorous. The quantitative challenges that you'll encounter in your coursework, especially in the winter quarter, really the GMAT is intended to provide a barometer of how likely you are to succeed in that coursework. So we really do want to admit people to our program who have demonstrated a high likelihood of success in our program.

So as Sam and Anita both pointed out earlier in terms of preparing for the exam we really encourage you to prepare rigorously, be really dedicated to it, take additional time, study in advance and just practice makes perfect. So we do take into consideration your training and background, so obviously someone like Sam who's worked in finance, worked in commodities trading is going to have a different level of quantitative experience than somebody who has worked in some legal profession or in marketing or in education for example. And so that's something we do take into account.
But like I said, the better you do on the exam the better it is for you; our application process is quite competitive and the reason that we do take the GMAT into consideration is because we want to make sure that you are fully prepared to succeed in our quantitative curriculum.

We're coming up on 45 minutes right now but it looks like Sam has something to add to this question.

**Sam:**

Diana, I feel I should contribute to this seeing as I went to the University of Cape Town as well and my parents are Ugandan. I know the University of Cape Town offers a GMAT course where you can -- I think the five-day course, if I remember correctly -- I would recommend you start there; it will give you a foundation as to where to go. Then from there you can continue to work on your weak spots.

I wouldn't let the test-taking get you down initially. Part of this process is to try and test your own rigor and push yourself harder. Like both Sabah and Anita have mentioned this test can be learned and you can do well in it if you work really hard on it.

**Sabah:**

Thank you. We are coming up on time; we do have a few more people on the line with questions. I can go ahead and take those questions if our panelists are here for a few more minutes; you can feel free to chime in but also I want to respect your time. So if you need to get going I totally understand. I know you have a flight to catch, Anita. Don it's not too late to ask a question. Go ahead.

**Participant:**

Hi, how are you doing? This is Don, I'm in South Africa but I'm Zambian; I'm working in labor. My challenge with the program or maybe it's a question more than a challenge because I was wanting to see how it would work. I'm working and with a family. What I wanted to find out is two quick questions: this program, if you go to Stanford and you go to this scholarship how accommodating is it that somebody can come with their family, that's one. Number two, my wife is a corporate professional. When I come and I get my student visa can she actually work in the States because I'm considering actually moving with my family from South Africa.

**Sabah:**

On your first question about having a family when you move to the GSB we actually do take into account the number of dependents that are in your family when we create a financial aid package. So this fellowship covers your full tuition and associated fees. But let's say when you fill out your application for financial aid it turns out that your level of need is even higher than full tuition. We may provide additional assistance either through fellowship or through
loans to cover the cost of your family's needs obviously in terms of housing, schooling, etc.

In terms of your spouse's ability to work that really depends on what type of visa you come here on. On a student visa your spouse is not given eligibility to work. However, there are times where you may be able to come to the U.S. on a different visa but that is not something Stanford would be able to support your application for. So it's not likely that if you came on a student visa that your spouse would be supported to work.

**Participant:** I think, as Sabah said, if you come on an F visa your spouse is not eligible to work, but if you come on a J visa she can work. You might want to check it but I think the J visa you can have it when you have most of your tuition paid by the institution that brings you in. But this is something that you might want to check for.

**Sabah:** Unfortunately I don't know those details but when you're admitted to our program you work with our Bechtel International Center which is a dedicated resource for all graduate students throughout Stanford University to provide all the details about what visa you are most likely to receive or what makes the most sense for your circumstances. I will say that the student visa is by far the most common visa for our community but there may be ways to be eligible for a different kind of visa.

**Sam:** If I can add to that, you say your situation is unique. It actually isn't. I have a few friends of mine who just left Stanford and who came here and their significant others worked while they were studying so it is possible. But like Sabah and Anita mentioned, the details. We don't really have them with us but like Stanford does provide all of that to you once you get admitted.

**Sabah:** I think one of the cases you might be thinking about was an African student who was here. His spouse was working. However, she was working on a visa that was sponsored by her employer. So that wasn't -- she wasn't eligible to work on a visa as the spouse of a student; she had a separate work visa and that was sponsored by her employer. So all of these details are really case by case dependent and that was something that we work with you on one on one after you're admitted to the program.

Just because we're short on time I'm going to move on to the next question from Cass. Cass you're now on the line.

**Participant:** Hi. My question was you said obviously the total of the eight fellowships are available at all their different application stages, so
do those typically go to whoever is the highest scoring African applicant who qualifies on the financial need basis?

Sabah: Not necessarily. We're really looking at all three criteria pretty equally. So one is your level of financial need, one is your demonstrated commitment to Africa. That's a big piece of this is how I think we do get a lot of applicants who are African by nationality that have predominantly worked in fields that don't necessarily relate to Africa's development. That would be less compelling for us than somebody who's really dedicated their professional and academic experiences to making a difference on the continent.

Then within that yes, we do consider your overall admission criteria, so your leadership potential, your intellectual vitality are things that we're considering in who gets the fellowship. At this point I will be frank and say that our applicant pool from that region is a pool that we hope will continue to grow. But we're not at a point yet where the level of competition for these fellowships exceeds the number of fellowships that we have. So we are optimistic that this fellowship is really intended to create that problem; it would be a great problem to have if we had way more African admits than fellows but that's not something that we have - - the demand isn't there yet.

Sabah: We do have a few more questions but in the interest of time I'm going to start to wrap things up.
I also just want to thank you both, Anita and Sam, for taking the time. I know you have a lot going on; you're about to jet set for your global study trip but I think your insights were really valuable and so I really, really appreciate you taking the time to get back to future applicants and potentially your classmates next year.

If you have further questions, again, I just want to remind everybody to please go ahead and contact us and in the meantime I want to thank you all so much for attending and for learning more about Stanford and our interest in developing Africa's human and economic development. So thank you and have a great day.