Christina: All right. Well, thank you for joining us today. I'd like to welcome everybody to the University of Maryland's Walter H. Smith School of Business online MBA student panel discussion webinar. I'm Christina Walsh and I'll be your host today. I'd like to thank you for joining us and taking time out of your busy schedule.

Before we begin, I'd like to review what you can expect during the presentation. To cut down on background noise, we placed all attendees in listen only mode. You can hear us but we cannot hear you. If you have questions during the presentation, please feel free to type them in the Q&A box in the lower right hand corner of your screen and hit send. Feel free to enter these questions as you think of them. We'll answer as many as time allows, following the panel discussion. Also, we are recording today's session. A link will be made available online or by contacting your enrollment adviser.

During today's session, we will be joined by three current student of our program, of the online MBA program, to review and discuss the following, the Smith online experience, networking opportunities, the Smith faculty, the time commitment you can expect, the coursework, and your investment. We will conclude with a Q&A session, and I review all the contact information as well, if you have any additional questions.

All right. Now I'd like to turn things over to Deana Myers, who will lead the panel discussion and introduce our panelists.

Deana: Hello everybody.

Christina: Well hello everyone.

Deana: I got this, thank you. I'm glad that you all were here to join us. My name is Deana Myers. I am the lead adviser here for enrollment at University of Maryland online MBA program. I'm very excited to start talking to you a little bit more about the program. I am actually a student in the online program myself. You will meet some of my classmates tonight. I would really welcome you guys to participate in the Q&A session. As soon as you have any questions, as Christina said, please do type them in the box. Not the chat, but the Q&A, so that we can answer them as we get to the question and answer portion of today's session here.

I would like to take a second to introduce you to the panels. The panel consists of three students who have started the online MBA program. The first being Charles Loweson. Charles Loweson is an online MBA student who joined us in the spring semester. He as a background, a bachelor of science in criminal justice in psychology from Southwestern College in Kansas. He is active duty military. He has been with the United States Air force for the past nine
years. He is currently a, I believe it's called, a survival and escape specialist at Barksdale Air force Base in Louisiana. He is a current student in the online MBA program.

Our next student panelist is Ashley [Rophy 00:03:31], I'm sorry, Ashley Ross. She's an online MBA student that started with us in the winter term this year. This will be third semester in the program. She has a background with a bachelor of science in mechanical engineering and technology from Michigan Tech. She has been employed by CSX Railroad for the past five years. She is currently a manager of operations support at CSX Railroad in New York.

Our third panelist is James [Cannon 00:04:06]. James is a online student who's joined us in the spring term. He has a background, a bachelor of science in sociology and biology from Brigham Young University. He has served as a CFO for the LA based accounting and business and management firm, and is a portfolio manager and income analyst at One Capital Management. He is currently the COO of [Farmore 00:04:31] and Washington in Washington DC. All right.

As we move through the panel, I am going to start having some questions for our students, so, welcome to their initial responses and I really do encourage you, like I said, if you have any questions that come up, please do type them in the Q&A section. We're going to transition to our program discussion. Okay. We're going to start, James, are you on the phone here?

James: Yes I am.

Deana: Okay, very good. I'm going to start with you here. We have a few questions, but first of all, what was your opinion of learning online, prior to applying to the Smith online MBA program? How has your opinion changed since you started the program?

James: To be honest, prior to the program I was a little unsure of how it would be. I had taken an occasional class in my undergrad online. It was more so just to kind of squeeze something into the schedule that I couldn't get into the time segment that I wanted to. It always seemed really driven by yourself, a self study type of class. Where, starting in this program, being a little bit hesitant at first, just wondering what it was going to be like. I was amazed for the better. It's really been a very very interactive course. You've learned a lot from interacting with other individuals and interacting with the professors. It really has shown ... To me, it actually has driven more of a classroom environment and comraderie than it would if I was actually in a class with 100 students.

Deana: Okay, thank you. I would like to open this up to Charles and Ashley. Would either one of you like to add on to this? Charles?
Charles: Sure, I did both my undergraduate degrees completely online. I was not a stranger at all to online learning. There's a big difference between how we did my undergraduate online learning and how the University of Maryland does it. I would say honestly it's easier to learn in the format Maryland using, and my undergraduate was mainly just read the textbook, answer some questions, and you really didn't learn anything from the instructors, it was all kind of like James said, self-study almost. The collaborative learning sections, your weekly class sessions are really nice because you learn from great faculty, but you also get to learn from each other. It's, at least in my cohort, it's definitely a very large scale of experiences and knowledge levels. It works out really well.

Deana: Okay, great. Ashley, I'll turn the next question over to you. What features and functionality do you find most helpful and engaging with the online program?

Ashley: I really like the lab sessions. They help, like they said, interacting with the professors, you actually get to see your classmates, which you get to meet them all in an orientation ahead of time, and some of the professors, but you get to see people. There's chat windows that you can talk with people in and ask questions amongst yourself. Then we also use the Google apps to do a lot of our teamwork. You can use Googledocs to share projects, and you can also have online meetings. I think between Adobe Connect and the Googledocs has been probably the best pieces of technology that we've used so far.

Deana: Okay, fantastic. All right. We'll go to the next slide here. Ashley, do you mind if I call on you again since you're open mic? Have you ever ... Have you been able to engage with your peer and your classmates since during the program?

Ashley: Yes. You do it on a weekly basis. Pretty much every class will have at least one team project. We just had our managerial accounting class where you would think accounting is kind of a self study where you're going to be working by yourselves, but our homework assignments that we have every week were actually done in a group and you had to submit them together. Then you have other classes, such as our marketing class, that we had to analyze an entire company. You put a really big presentation together and there was a video and there was a paper and everything. You interact with your classmates a lot. Also, during the live session, you see everybody. Your groups are never the same, which is kind of nice, you get to work with everybody in different portions during the program.

Deana: Okay, thank you so much. Charles or James, do you have anything to add to that?

Charles: I think that about sums it up.
Deana: Okay, great. All right. Let's move to the next questions here. James, why don't we start with you. What has your experience been so with the faculty at Smith?

James: I have been blown away by the interaction that you receive with faculty. To be looking at them through a webcam, you might think that it creates distance, but it's been great. They really desire for you to do the best and you're able to interact with them on almost as if you're sitting across the table with them. Every time you have class and also after class, or if you ever have office hours, you can do the same thing. There's been an overwhelming feeling of support and really just ... They really care about what we're learning and how we're learning, not how much information they're shoving down our throats. It's making sure that we actually understand everything that we're being taught. The faculty has been absolutely amazing. Could not compliment them anymore.

Deana: Okay, great. Ashley, Charles, did you have anything to add to that?

Ashley: Yeah, I do. I have a job where I am on call 24/7. Things happen where I have to go back into work all of a sudden, there's an emergency that happens, all of the professors have been extremely good about helping me out in the few instances that I have had to go into work and maybe I couldn't turn in an assignment on time or maybe I couldn't be in the class, they've all been really fantastic to work with you and be flexible when you actually need the time.

Deana: That's fantastic. What stands out most about the faculty here than, maybe, your previous experiences? Do you want to elaborate Ashley?

Ashley: The faculty, like I said, they all understand that, I'd say probably 90% of my cohorts work full-time, if not more than that. They're just very understanding. They're looking at it differently than what I had in an undergrad experience. Usually when you're an undergrad, especially when you leave just from high school and get in there, you don't have as many responsibilities as you do as an adult. All the professors, they're working full-time, so they're just very very understanding. I can't stress that enough. They're very willing to work with you and they make time that will fit into your schedule.

Deana: Okay, fantastic. All right. Well, let's move on to time commitment. Charles, I understand that you have a very demanding schedule. Why don't we talk about that with you. How many hours a week are you dedicating to your studies? What method do you use to figure out how to manage your time with regards to this?

Charles: The first session, I think honestly, spent less time on my studies than I will in the future ones. Our 10 week course was leadership and human capital. The military just forces down our throat leadership principals, and they're honestly the same
ones we use in business. That was kind of nice for me because I already knew some of the information.

I would guess my average is going to be around 15 to 20 hours per week, probably. As far as time management, I think the biggest thing is scheduling your schoolwork into your schedule, not just nonchalantly saying, "Well, I'll get this done Thursday this week. I'll get this done Tuesday this week." If you can find that period of time and actually block it off in your schedule and say, "No kidding every week this is going to be my routine. I'm going to do school work this time a night during these days." It really helps out. That way you're anticipating it rather than just trying to make it fit everywhere else.

The professors are great working with you. At the same time, you got to work with them too and put the work into the program.

Deana: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Being in the military, I understand that you have some prior obligations sometimes. How is it working with the faculty when you had to take leave for military?

Charles: Their very accommodating. During this session, I actually spent almost 10 days away from the internet and phones completely. Basically, 10 days away from class completely. They were really good with working with me. I worked ahead and I still had to make up work on the back end. They're very accommodating and helping me make sure that I was able to get through the work, maintain my grades, and keep progressing, even though I did have that significant chunk of time away from the classroom.

Deana: Fantastic. James, being a COO must take up a lot of your time. How did you manage your time to make sure that you were able to accomplish what you needed to accomplish in class?

James: To be honest, it was a little trial and error at first. I knew that it was going to be time consuming and I knew that I was definitely going to have to set aside time. I also have two small children so getting into that and really trying to figure out what was going to work best took a little bit of time.

It definitely came down to the point where once you get a schedule going, you're able to manage. I'd say, along with Chuck, it's probably about 15 to 20 hours a week and you really have to, for me, I have to set aside those times. I have to leave my phone. I take my computer with me, but you really have to dedicate the time, otherwise it seems like it'd be very easy to fall behind. Luckily you're classmates are very close with you. That's the amazing thing that we have is we're all able to stay in touch with each other, text each other, we're all on a
group text, or phone. It's very demanding, but you really have to just dedicate those hours and set them aside to get it done.

Deana: Okay. Thank you so much. Let's move on to the student learning experience. Ashley, I'm going to call on you first here. Can you speak a little bit on your experience while attending the opening residency here?

Ashley: It was fantastic. It was a lot of work, but it was great. We started off with a meet and greet the first night, where I got to meet a lot of my future classmates. Then we had about three days of different presentations and stuff from other professors from group projects and just kind of general getting to know each other and getting to know the professors. It was long hours, because it does count as credits towards your degree, but it was absolutely fantastic. They had the hotel set up for us, food, they had transportation, you really got a very good base built with your classmates and as well with the professors.

Deana: Okay, great. James, did you want to jump in on that?

James: I wouldn't have much more to add. That was spot on right there.

Deana: Okay, great.

Deana: All right.

Charles: I have something.

Deana: Okay.

Charles: To me the residency is extremely important because when I look back at my undergrad and doing online work, we really didn't interact with our classmates at all. I think a big reason for that was because you didn't know any of them. You had some little paragraph at the beginning of each course where you describe who you were and you said hi to people, but putting faces to names and getting that teamwork built in the opening residency really opens up the communication channels. Like James was talking about, we text each other all the time. If somebody's not in class, five minutes early, we text them to see if they're on the way, maybe they missed a train, something like that. The opening residency, getting to meet with everybody, work with everybody, and collaborate, definitely sets the tone for the rest of your time.

Deana: Do you feel like you're building a good network here, Charles?

Charles: Certainly, definitely.
Deana: Okay.

Charles: Not to [crosstalk 00:18:37] ...

Deana: Can you ...

Charles: ... but with the faculty as well.

Deana: Fantastic. Can you actually take on the next question here. Can you elaborate with your experiences with the individual and the group assignments? I know you've done online learning before, so, why don't you tell us a little bit about your experience so far with Maryland.

Charles: Sure. The individual assignments are just like anything you’d expect from coursework in a graduate program, so it's no surprise there. You have different types of papers, problems and anything like that you have to work with. The group projects are definitely nicer in this setting, once again, because you've already met these people. When you're working with them, you're more likely to be confident in contacting them whereas in my past experiences, people hardly talked about group projects when we did them in my undergrad. Once again, we didn't know each other at all. There's no time to feel each other out. The residency really, I think, helped us out.

Then like Ashley was talking about with Google Hangouts and using a medium like that, it makes it really easy to collaborate on assignments, come together, review things together, parcel out the different parts of the projects and work from there.

Deana: Okay, great. All right, let's move on to investment. Who better to answer this question than our own personal investment banker. James, do you want to take this one? What are the main motivators and career objectives for enrolling in this program for you?

James: I'm going to have to charge you for this response. Just thinking about an MBA in general and the education that you receive, wanting to further your career, all of those things play into it. Then when you actually get into this program, and you realize how tough it is, it really is a tough program, you start to realize that you're really getting the best bang for your buck. It's not just a degree at the end. It really is knowledge and it's something that you can adapt to every part of your life, business, personally, whatever it might be.

I think, as far as a return on investment. It's only been 10 weeks for us, and I think Chuck would probably second this as we've had our conversations together, is you really just can't beat the environment and the educations you're
receiving. Price tag, you can't put on it. But you can definitely see it. If I could film a commercial at the end of it, it would end, "Online MBAs form the University of Maryland is priceless."

Deana: I like that. We may take you up on that there James. Ashley or Charles, do you have anything to add to that? I guess you just summed it up there, James.

James: Sure.

Charles: I agree. I agree with James, definitely. I think the biggest take away, at least so far for me, and we kind of touched on this earlier, is the experience of the instructors, the professors. You've been in classes before where the teacher is teaching from a textbook and they're teaching well, the theory according to so and so is this. The professors in this program are going to teach you the theory, but at the same time they're going to say, "Well, this one time when I was working in this job, this is what worked best." They're speaking from past experience, not from boring theory that you read in a book. They're going to tell you what's actually worked for them in actual businesses that vary across the spectrum. I think that's really invaluable as well.

Deana: Okay, great. Ashley, have you been able to apply any of the concepts that you've learned here in the program, to your current business as you've been going through the program?

Ashley: Yeah I have. I'm kind of over a lot of administrative stuff. With the railroad, we're mainly a logistical company. We don't produce anything. My first semester I had supply chain management. A big piece that we looked at was the actual supply chain and how each portion plays a part. Ours plays a big part because we deliver everything. Understanding how that can affect the end product even more so was good.

Leadership, I am in a leadership type position. Even though I know some of the concepts that we talked about and I've had some experience, I did learn some things in that class. We've actually taken not only the book that we had to read for orientation, but the one that we had to read for the class called Five Assumption of Team. We were applying concepts from that book at the shop that I work at.

Then, managerial accounting helped me because I've just recently had a couple extra job duties add to my plate. One of them is managing our budget at the shop. There's a lot of things that I just had no clue about. It really kind of opened up my eyes. I know that financial accounting, when we take that class, that will help me out as well.
Deana: Okay, fantastic. All right. I'm going to hand this back over, then, to Christina. We'll start our QA session, unless anybody has anything else to add about the program that we may have not covered in the panel section. All right. I ...

Ashley: I think, oh, Deana, I was going to say one thing on this.

Deana: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Ashley: You've all three of us talk about our cohorts and stuff. James and Chris are in the same cohort. Deana and I are actually in the same cohort. That doesn't mean that the cohort that you start with is going to always be the same. You're going to meet people from other cohorts. They have the orientation. If you are in the Baltimore area, you're always invited to them. Anybody that decides to enroll, you may meet some of the people from other cohorts. Then actually, this coming semester, I switched the days of class that I had, so I'm actually going to be in classes with James and Chris for the first time. Our cohorts are starting to mesh and intermingle. Your networking is going to expand, probably, much further than you ever thought it would.

Deana: [Crosstalk 00:25:25].

James: If I could ... this is James, just to say, one of my fears was not ... It was a fear of not being able to network as much because you're not with as big of a class size and you don't have in person interaction with people. I think, even though it's a smaller group, the networking that we've been able to do one with another is, I think, far, far beyond what we would have received going through a night program where there's a few hundred students sitting in a classroom, or even if it was just 40 or 50. We all know a lot about each other. We know exactly what we do. I assist with some finances at a hospital, and we have an individual in our cohort that works at a hospital on the HR side. She is actually ... we've been in touch about those things. We reach out to each other when we're thinking about what we're doing in our lives that relate to another person's career and to their expertise. It actually is very very valuable from a networking standpoint, if I could just add that.

Christina: Perfect, thank you all. All right. I will open up to the questions. We have received a good amount of questions so far. If you have any additional questions, please feel free to continue posting them in the Q&A box in the lower right hand corner of the screen. The first question is to all of the panelist. Why did you chose Maryland's online MBA program over other competitive programs?

Ashley: I could take first.

Christina: Great.
Ashley: I chose Maryland's ... I looked at a lot of programs. I chose it because of the online aspect. I also took some online classes in my undergrad, and I didn't like the ones where you never saw anybody, you never interacted, you never saw the professor actually teach. Through Michigan Tech, they record the lectures that they give in class so you do see some of the everyday questions and problems that you're struggling with, maybe another person in the actual class struggled with. Maryland had the interactive portion, and I thought that would be really useful.

Also, my company had got a business leadership program with the University of Maryland, so I knew it was a good school right from the get go. A fortune 500 company is not going to invest in putting their people through courses if it's not a very prestigious school.

Christina: Great. James, did you want to tell us why you chose the online MBA at Maryland?

James: Yeah, of course. I was in the midst, I had moved back to Washington DC right as I was planning on looking at MBA programs. Moving from Los Angeles to here, I was looking at the programs and what they offered here, and really what I could get most out of them. Reading a lot about the University of Maryland's program, Deana was actually one of the first people that contacted me, and did a heck of a job convincing me that this was one of the top programs around. Which it is. It was amazing to be able to have something that creates so much flexibility, you're getting a top notch education, and you realize that when you go to your initial residency weekend. You realize how much of a, really, a valuable program this is. It really stands out. For me, with other MBA programs around, what you receive, ranking wise, it's a great ranking, and also time frame. You're going to get through this program in two years as opposed to spending three years plus in a part-time program.

A lot of factors came into play, but number one, everything seemed right. If anybody else questions that, I'd advise them to see Deana or call her.

Christina: Perfect, thank you. Charles, would you want to add anything?

Charles: They really covered all my same reasons. I looked at a lot of different programs as well. Deana was the first person I talked to as well. She's just the best sales woman ever, but she had me convinced as well. She was really just telling me what I'd already learned through my own research. Definitely happy to have chosen the school that I did.
Christina: Perfect, thank you. This is a program related question. Deana, what are the admissions requirements for the online MBA program, and has the deadline passed for the fall term?

Deana: Well first of all, the fall term is open for applications until August 1st. If you are looking to apply for our fall term, please do reach out to the admissions office. We walk you through every step of the way. We try to make this on-boarding to an online program very easy so that as you’re going through the process it’s not a complicated process. We would really like to help you through and make sure that the timeline that you’ve selected is the right one for you. I would encourage you to reach out to your admissions adviser. If you do not know who that is, call the general line here, the number will come up in just in a minute.

Our general admissions requirements are a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution with about a 2.8 GPA or higher. We look for multiple years of experience, two plus, is a good rule of thumb there. Though, most of our students do have 10 plus years of experience. We look for GERIA, GMAT scores. Two letters of recommendations, two page goals essay. That's about it, really.

If you have any questions about any of the requirements, I encourage you to contact us here via phone or by email. We're always happy to answer questions about that.

Christina: Great, thanks Deana. All right. The next question is about the live sessions. Are they scheduled outside of normal business hours? Main reason, they're looking for an online program they can work a normal class schedule into a work schedule.

Deana: I guess I'll take that one too. Generally speaking, classes are scheduled at night. You're looking at around 7:30 or 8:00 at night. As our program grows, though, we are looking to offer more class times instead of less.

Christina: Perfect. This person, this next question is related to the course work and exams. How are exams or quizzes conducted in the online course or are there? Can you talk about that component?

James: This is James, I'll start with that one.

Christina: Good, thank you.

James: We, both ways. We've had quizzes where you actually sit on your webcam and the professor watches you take the exam. It's almost like a proctored exam via internet. Then we've also had quizzes that you do on your own. Some are timed,
some are untimed. It's very similar to a classroom setting. Also, if you're in your undergrad and you have a take home quiz or something similar to that.

Christina: Great, thank you. Next question, did you, to the panelist, did you block off large periods of time during the weekends for course work? How did you manage your time? I know we talked a little bit about this, but if you can expand a little bit regarding the weekends.

Charles: This is Charles. I definitely did a lot of my course work on the weekends. Those were my large blocks tied to homework. I knew it'd be, here and there, probably four to five hours. Some days, it was homework all day on the weekend if I wasn't able to do it during the week. That was just how it fit into my schedule though. Everybody's schedule is going to be different. It's finding that point in time where you do have that time to set aside for work.

Christina: Great, thank you.

James: [Crosstalk 00:34:26].

Christina: Go ahead.

James: I was going to say, I don't really remember what a weekend is. You do have to ... yeah, sometimes you give up your entire weekend. If you need to reserve your weekend, then you have to give up a large portion of your evenings throughout the week. For those of us who work long hours, I'm in the office usually around 7 or 7:30 and I don't come home until 7 at night. Then you have to sit down and do homework or study for another three or four hours every single night if you can't do it that weekend. It definitely takes a commitment to do that. If you can block off a weekend, then Saturday and a Sunday afternoon or a Sunday morning can definitely be effective.

Christina: Wonderful. Thank you for going through that a little bit in more detail. This next question, who's the best professor that you've had so far? Who would like to take it first?

Charles: Again, this is Charles again, I can say who my favorite was, I liked them all, personally. I've liked every professor we've gotten to interact with. My favorite would have to be professor Schlake, Oliver Schlake. He's a very high energy guy. I don't think it's possible to fall asleep in one of his classes. He would keep you entertained. He will keep you attention the entire time. Honestly, you don't not want to not pay attention to him because everything he says, well at least to me anyway, makes sense to me and it's stuff that I want to commit to memory. He's definitely my favorite.
Christina: Anyone else want to [crosstalk 00:36:09]

Ashley: I have to agree. I've ... oops, sorry.

Christina: [Crosstalk 00:36:11].

Ashley: I have to agree. Oliver did our orientation and it was amazing. I learned a lot from him. All the professors, like I said, have been fantastic. It's an hour and a half each week with them and they will keep you engaged, you will be jam packed with stuff to talk about. Having gone through two semesters as well, I can't say that there's very many classes where I would sit and watch on the clock and just going, "Okay, 30 more minutes. Okay, 28 more minutes." Usually it was, I looked down at the clock and it's, "Oh my gosh, it's already 8:00." And then I look again and it's like, "Oh, class is done." All the professors are great, and like we mentioned before, most of them have real world experience. They've been out in the industries and stuff. They have practical knowledge for you. It's really interesting.

Deana: I would also actually like to comment on that too, Christina.

Christina: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Deana: I have a lot of favorite professors. Yeah. Oliver Schlake, he's a really dynamic professor. I almost prefer the professors who make numbers related courses. For me, those are the hardest. I'm not a numbers person. I took the GERIE just because I couldn't crack it on the math for the GMAT. I could fake my way through it a little bit on the GERIE, but with economics and accounting, I didn't really like the classes. I thought that the classes were a little harder than I thought going in.

The professors were the difference. I loved the professors with econ and accounting, Bennet Zulner and Eugene Cantor. They are phenomenal. They make a not fun subject worth studying and worth understanding. Not only that, but both of them took quantities of time, I would say about five or six hours, out of their schedule to meet with me specifically because I had questions and I had concerns that I needed to go over. They were willing to set aside an hour or so for me, almost every week, to talk over my specific concerns and really let me understand the topics very well. I think that those kinds of professors definitely need to have a little bit of an accolade too.

Christina: Perfect. Here's a question, can you confirm which course professor Oliver teaches?
Deana: He will teach the action learning project for the online MBA program. Which is very fortunate for you guy because it is the one 4 credit class in the curriculum.

Christina: Great, thank you. Deana, this next question is a program related question. Can you go through a little bit of the program structure? We've had a number of questions about how many classes do you take at one time and how long are the classes, etcetera.

Deana: We usually have a slide, and I'm sad that we didn't put it in here with the course block.

Deana: It is, right, for next time, we will include it. How the classes actually work, is it's four semesters a year. That's how we get done so fast. Instead of going full time and having six classes at a time, we take two classes at a time, four times a year. You just cut out the summer and winter breaks. We all love our summer and winter breaks, but it's just a lot easier to work right through them. We do that. You have 10 week sessions, which you'll take two classes at a time. One of those classes will be a 10 week class that runs the whole way through the program. Then you have two 5 week classes that will run one right after the other. When you're done with that 10 week block, you're done with three classes and you'll have a two to three week break before classes start up again.

It's 21 months to complete the program. I don't really know what the other question were, I'm so sorry.

Christina: That's okay. There was also a request for additional clarification on the residency. What exactly it is and ... go into a little bit more detail on that.

Deana: The residency there at the very beginning and end of your program. They're a Thursday, Friday, Saturday component. They're 2 two credit classes that bookshelf your program. The first part, the opening residency, will be more ... It serves as kind of a template for prerequisites. Instead of us combing through your undergraduate and finding, "Oh, did you have an accounting class or a finance class." We just assume that everybody is starting off at square one and we go from there. You'll have an introduction to finance, accounting, economics, strategy, action learning project. You'll figure out all these things in the environment where the professors are there to help if you have any questions. They can really offer that extra help in the classroom.

You'll also be there with your cohort, which are the people that you start and end the program with. You'll get a lot of networking with, not only the people that you'll be in classes with, but also the professors and the staff on campus. It builds a really good opportunity for networking. The only other time you actually
have to come to campus is your closing residency, which is a Thursday, Friday, Saturday, at the very end of your program. That's a business project that you'll be doing.

With that in mind, you'll be here two credit classes. They're the only two times you have to come on campus. Of course, we always like to see our online students on campus for any events that we are invited to. You'll see a graduate newsletter every month that will alert you to events on campus. You can, of course, schedule any events that you'd like to come to.

Christina: Perfect, thank you Deana, for walking us through all of that. That's a mouthful. The next question is related to student demographics. What's the average age of the students that we've seen in the cohorts so far, and the amount of work experience the students have?

Deana: That, I guess, is a me question. I'm so sorry. I feel like I'm dominating this right now.

Christina: Yeah.

Deana: Generally speaking, our student demographics, they're in their 30s, would be our average age. Of course, we do have students in the older and the younger end of that. Generally, you see 30s to 40s. We're looking, generally speaking, at about 10 years of work experience. Of course, we have students on either side of that spectrum. It's a really, very well mixed group of students.

Christina: Great. Okay. We have a lot of questions that we received. A really great questions, so thank you all for your participation. This next question, can you please talk about the flexibility of the course load. What's the average time to complete the pro ... You said that already. Do you have the option to take additional classes to finish sooner or less than the course load? Lesson the course load. Did that make sense? Do I have the option to take more classes and finish sooner, or lessen my course load and take longer? Flexibility of the program.

Deana: I think you guys can answer that as much as I can.

Christina: Right.

Ashley: Really, you're going to be taking ... The amount that you're taking is what you're going to take. Right now, with the beginning of the year classes, everybody's taking the same classes in the same semester. Those are the only ones that are offered. Now when the second year starts, I'm not sure how all that will play out.
I do know that it was something that I asked. What happens if something comes up in life and I have to take a semester off or something. I was kind of discouraged to do that because then you won't be with your same cohort. It is an option that may make the degree quite a bit longer because if it's a core class in your first year, you may have to wait for that to come around again. You're pretty much, you're going to be on the set schedule. You're not going to take more, you're not going to take less. Everybody's in the same amount of workload.

Christina: Great, thank you Ashley. This next question is or Charles. This person is a retired air force veteran. He would be applying to the program using the GI bill. He's curious about the financial portion and how it worked for the air force members.

Charles: I'm using my GI bill as well. The school has been really helpful in giving me the paperwork I needed and certifying everything. The VA has not yet even paid for my first session yet. The unfortunate part is, I don't know how much they're going to pay yet. As far as finance goes, there's another military member in my cohort. He's in the navy. He seems to think that the GI bill is going to cover quite a bit of the cost, because Maryland is a state school. He might be right. Unfortunately, I don't have a better answer. I'm just kind of waiting to see how much the VA pays for my classes. I have the FASFA filled out. I have student aid available, but I don't want to tell the school I want to take student aid unless I need a certain amount. Honestly, I don't have a great answer for you on that one, unfortunately.

Christina: No problem. I have heard that that process can take a long time. Thank you. I do know that the university is working to add a team member to assist in that process with the VA. They're working on adding that person right at this moment. Hopefully the process will be ...

Deana: They actually just added him. Hopefully we'll be able to get that process a lot faster.

Christina: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Exactly.

Charles: The school hasn’t been slow, just so you know. The school is very proactive in getting it done. It’s the VA that’s slow. Just ... Everything you've heard about VA healthcare, they're not good at anything else. Sorry if there's people who work for the VA. It's a slow process, whether they're undermanned or not. The school is great in processing all my paperwork and helping me get everything filled out. We got it all submitted and it took almost a month before the VA even replied. The school's been great. Just to add that in there.
Christina: Good, thank you Charles. Let's see here. This next question is for James. We have a question for the manager of operations. Like you, I'm in operations management where my schedule is not my own. Can you share your personal experience navigating the online experience and any secrets to success in succeeding when classes are at night?

James: Yeah. I would definitely say open communication with professors and classmates is a key that happen times ... actually Chuck and myself, I think we're the only two that have actually missed classes, so we're probably the best to answer this. Whether it being called away on travel or having to stay at work, being able to email professors, having classes that are recorded, you get a link where you can watch it. There's a lot of flexibility with professors. They work with you because they understand what you're doing, but you have to have that communication upfront with them to let them know.

Then also, just yourself. For me it took a lot of discipline. It's very easy for me to get distracted with something that I want to do and start thinking about 1000 things that I need to get done, but if you can find a way to discipline yourself and make sure that you focus on what you need to, then it's very manageable. It's hard, but it's definitely very manageable.

Christina: Great, thank you. Just a few more questions here, in the interest of time. Is video conferencing the only way to do a class or are there other means of being in class if video is not available on the computer you're using? Deana do you want to take this one?

Deana: [Crosstalk 00:49:34].

Christina: Yeah. Go ahead, whoever wants to take it.

Ashley: I was going to say, you can dial into class, but you really do need to have some sort of a webcam. Most of the professors, when you're going to answer questions or anything, you'll physically raise your hand and they can see you in the screen. If it's like one week that you don't have access to the video camera, it'll be okay, but you're not going to make it through the whole semester without having a webcam.

Deana: Yeah. I would also say that yes, we have had student in the car or in a cab. You can access the online classroom from your phone or your tablets, but it's really not full functionality. You should be in front of your laptop. If you're in the middle of your commute and you just have your earpiece, you can dial in until you get home, basically. There is a lot that they do have with the online classroom, a lot of functionalities that are really cool, like breakout sessions.
where you can talk to the rest of your smaller broken out team or the power point slides and what not. There's a lot that you'd be missing out on if you didn't have access to the internet and a laptop.

Christina: Great, thanks. Next question. Are online students invited to walk at graduation?

Deana: Yes. Absolutely. We're trying to put the closing residency on top of graduation as close as possible so that everybody who's out of town can be here to graduate with the rest of their class. We want everybody to walk. I think that's a really great option. Your diploma says the exact same thing as everybody else who graduates from the Smith school with an MBA. It's the same program. It's just that you're doing this with a little bit more flexibility. Yes. Come to graduation. I really encourage it. Come to our CEO at Smith or career center. Come on campus as much as you possibly can. We love to see online students come to our campus events and you're very welcome to come to anything that you feel would benefit you.

Christina: Perfect, thank you. Can you ... We've had a couple questions about choosing your specialization and about elective in the program. Can Deana or anybody else, can you speak about that a little bit?

Deana: Well, I guess I can speak to what a specialization is, but then I'd like you guys to take it up on what specialization you chose and why. Yes, specializations are offered in finance, accounting, information systems and business analytics, which sounds like two but it's one, and then also marketing. There are three classes at your foundation two, which is your second round of classes. Basically your second year here on campus. There's three classes. General track would be just choosing which ever classes please you at that time. Or, you can specialize and take the series of three finance or three marketing classes. You'd just get either a finance or marketing specialization respectively.

James: Yeah, this is James.

Deana: [Crosstalk 00:53:08]. Go ahead James.

James: I took a ... the ... Excuse me, better get these words out of my mouth here. I took the finance track, partly because I'm in the finance world and I anticipate staying in the finance world. I know that there are other in our cohort that have chosen different tracks and some that have chosen the same. We, next year is when we actually start to break out and take those classes that are specific to our preference.

Christina: Great. Ashley or Charles, did you want to add anything?
Ashley: Yep, I'm taking the general track. It's aligned with my career goals and I want to work within different departments in my company. I don't necessarily have a passion for finance or accounting. I kind of want to learn about everything. My mentor through work mentioned the general track and that's going to give you a very well rounded perspective in general, unless you know specifically you want to be in marketing. That's your happy little bubble and you don't want to leave that and that's fantastic, but for me, having the option to have a general track was great.

Charles: For me it was the same decision. I'm general track. I'm not in a business industry yet and I like the latitude that the general track affords. I like the idea of marketing, but like Ashley said, I don't want to get branded as, "This guy does marketing." I'd like to be able to jump around to whatever I feel like going.

Christina: Okay, great. Thank you all. Well, it looks like we're narrowing in our time here. I'm going to turn it over to Deana. We do have some additional questions, but we can have her reach out to you directly and to each of you directly to answer any of them that we weren't able to cover today.

Deana: Okay. Thank you so much. Yeah. I really appreciate everybody who's taken the time out of their busy schedule to come and listen to us. We're students in the program. We would love to see most of you join us in the program. On the screen here you will find our contact information for the enrollment office. The admissions office is open from almost like 8am in the morning to 8pm at night. Please feel free to give us a call.

Here at Smith, we like to reach out to our students who are even in the application stage, and not only help them through the admissions process, I myself know how terrifying it is sometimes to apply to a top 25 MBA program. We're here to help you with this process and we're here to make this process a smooth one. We provide you with advisers from the time that you start applying to the program to the very end of your program and beyond. Please feel free to reach out to us.

I'd actually like to extend a person invitation to everyone of you that hasn't spoken to an admissions adviser yet, to please give us a call. Like I said, we are always available for questions, not matter how little or big that they are. We will be able to speak about everything from where you're at professionally and specializations to the timing of your MBA program and seeing which session would be the best for you to apply for, and putting together a reasonable timeline for your specific case and what you want to do.
I would like to say, also, thank you to our panelist to take the time out of their busy schedules here to share their experience so far in the program. Also, thank you guys all for coming in and viewing the webinar here. We're glad we could see you join us. I hope that this was very informative and helpful for you. Thank you again for attending. We look forward to seeing you in the admissions office very shortly. Have a great evening everybody.

Christina: Thank you all.

Charles: Thank you.