Intro: Welcome to Simon Bizcast a podcast with prospective business school students navigating the admissions process, exploring Student Life and more. Join us at the University of Rochester Simon Business School for advice and take on all things B-school.

Matt: Hello, everyone. Thank you for joining us for this episode of The Simon Bizcast podcast. This episode revolves around the MBA student experience here at Simon Business School. My name is Matt McCormick. I'm Associate Director of Admissions here at Simon and I'm joined by two current MBA students who are in their second year of the MBA program are as our guests today. So, I wanted to turn it over to them to just kind of introduce themselves and give us a little bit of insight into their background and where they are in their student experience. So, Missy, I'll go ahead and hand it over to you first.

Missy: Absolutely. Well, first off, thanks for having me. Happy to be here. As mentioned before, I'm Missy Keesler. Second year in the full time MBA program right now, focusing on consulting. Prior to Simon I was a physical therapist, so very nontraditional, doing a good transition here. In the past summer I interned with a consulting company called Cognizant and I will be returning there full time.

Matt: Excellent. Thank you. And Ashfaq. Would you like to introduce yourself too?

Ashfaq: Thank you so much, Matt, for having us here. Well, I'm Ashfaq and I'm a second year MBA here at Simon Business School. I come from Bangladesh. And before my MBA, I used to work in CPG, mostly in brand management, commercial strategy, business development. I worked for around eight years. And here I am at the MBA party. Last summer, I worked in Eli Lilly and Company in their pricing strategy team. And I'll be returning to Lily next summer in their market access team. So it's great to be here!

Matt: Awesome. Well, thank you so much to both of you for joining us for today. We're really excited to dive into this conversation and learn more about your experiences here. I wanted to take a step back and kind of think about, you know, where this journey started for you. I know that you're both coming from very different backgrounds. But I believe both of you are coming from outside the Rochester area and making that transition to studying here. So, I was curious to learn, and Ashfaq, I may go to you first on this one. Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like and how you came across Simon business school for the first time and you know, at the point where you were offered admission and chose to enroll and study here? What was that transition like coming to Rochester and what's been any places of note here in Rochester that you found so far?

Ashfaq: So it's been an amazing journey so far. I've been wondering about coming for MBA for quite some time during my career, and finally found the courage to start applying and then applied to Simon and in spring of 2022. And my getting the acceptance and also getting the US visa were of particular challenge considering I'm coming from Bangladesh. So, everything happened in quite a rush. But I had a lot of conviction about my decision about Simon. Since I've worked mostly in marketing, I wanted to add that additional layer of, you know, analytics, and also the whole numbers orientation to myself, and Simon has his very specific way of pedagogy in terms of the curriculum and also in terms of the quants. So, I was really looking forward to that. And I also of course, the decision was made easily because my wife also received the acceptance at Simon. So, we came in with a lot of conviction at Simon and also we were really looking forward to the diversity that we have enjoyed so much. And of course, it was a big shift to Rochester and I've never come to US before, I've never seen snow before. So all if
it happened everything together all at once by coming to Rochester, and I'm just super surprised at how fast human body can adapt. So very thankful for that! But it has been a very pleasant experience thus far. There has been a lot of support around, and we've been really learn how to love and enjoy Rochester and it's been an amazing place so far.

**Matt:** That's great and amazing thing to to have your wife here in the program right here with you. That's an incredible dimension to add to your to your trip here and resettling in Rochester. So no, thank you for sharing. And Miss, we are curious to learn about your journey as well.

**Missy:** Yeah, absolutely. So, a little more of a nontraditional path where I was a physical therapist. I was starting to think about where the next five years was going to take me and I wasn't happy with staying in the physical therapy world, at least from what I was seeing. And so, I've been having conversations with my partner and, and family members and friends who had gone through MBA. And my fiancé is actually Simon alumni. And so towards the end of the application cycle, he kind of gave me one last push of let's just apply, see where you're at. So I did apply on May 1, had a great interview with Matt, and managed to get in very successfully, very happy about that decision. And then within those next six weeks, just started that transition of making sure all my ducks were in a row ready to go to business school. And I will say it was the right decision at the right time. For me, part of the reason that I was drawn a little more to Simon and other schools was, as Ashfaq said, the analytics. I knew that I had the ability to talk to people. I knew that I'm very driven when it comes to academics, but I didn't have a ton of experience when it comes to data analytics, particularly as a physical therapist. Not a ton of us code all the time. And so, Simon is able to give me that foundation to truly give me a good pivot and take my current career forward in whatever direction I'd like to. Great support from admissions in making that transition because it was a very quick on. The team did a really nice job of just making sure that I was set up for success. Coming to Rochester is great. I'm originally from upstate New York, but prior to this, I was living in Washington, DC. So, it was nice to come back to an area where I do have some family, and then my fiancé's family is here. And then just being able to explore the area with a different perspective. I think it's nice, because I've done maple syrup in here, we've got to know all the local areas, take my dog for a walk. It has a really nice sense of community. And then of course, always go Bills!

**Matt:** Definitely Bills country out here for sure. [laughs] Excellent. So, you know, the timing of this podcast, we're rolling up on the end of the spring a semester here very quickly with finals only about a week or two from now. But I wanted to go back to you know, the current coursework and things that you're both involved in. And it's interesting point you brought up Missy about, you know, the kind of analytics aspect to the program and how this has been evolving in our curriculum over the years. And, and I want to throw this question actually over to Ashfaq first to ask about, you know, what has been, with some of these, you know, a lot of development in the curriculum, but what has been your most impactful course, that you've had up to this point, or has had a lasting impression on you?

**Ashfaq:** I believe, one of the courses that impacted me the most, and my trajectory so far has been business modeling by Professor Ravi Mantena. And that is because it showed me a way of how we should organize our numbers and our cases in a mathematical model to reach effective and efficient decisions. So that one thing I enjoyed a lot. And not only that, my whole internship project was literally an optimization model. It might sound [like] gibberish for a lot of people, but it used to sound [like] gibberish to me as well. But right now, I've just become so well versed with it, that I'm really enjoying it. And even Professor Mantena even helped me along the
way during my internship as well. So that was much appreciated. I even took the advanced business modeling course, last fall as well. That was amazing. And apart from that, there were some other courses that we took, for example, game theory, is something that I really enjoyed. Then I am enjoying right now, this one course called advanced marketing strategy. It's the whole course is literally a simulation where I am, let's say the CEO of a firm and competing with other firms in the class. And these simulation-based learnings, we've had these in operations we've had this in, even in managerial communications. So these simulations were are also super fun. So yeah, a mix of both simulation-based learning, quantitative learning, and modeling. These are some stuff that I've really enjoyed.

Matt: That's really interesting point to bring up, you know, that kind of how you a lot of the classroom experience involves taking real life scenarios and applying this knowledge to a real life context. That's really interesting. And Missy, what would you say has been your, most impactful course that you've had up to this point?

Missy: Well, I will have to admit Ashfaq just mentioned two of my favorites already. A business modeling with Ravi. Ravi's the man, if you have not heard it yet, and you will hear it many times. It definitely changes, I agree, it changes how you think and you approach different aspects of data analytics, but also problem solving in general. Game Theory, that was the other one that was going to mention. I had Jeanine Miklos-Thal—fantastic. You go to class every night you play a game and then you start to analyze behind the game. And I will say that was another that was a class that just changed my perspective. You start to see real world events and you start to think about how, what game is being played and what the outcome might be happening. But this semester, I'd say my current favorite one is New Venture Development with Dennis Kessler. It's an entrepreneurship class where he brings in a speaker that user alumni are currently in the community with either a startup experience, or a startup success, startup failure, or just has had a really an interesting journey after Simon with it having an entrepreneurship mind set. And it's also great because he has real world business as a lot of our professors do. And so he often will put up a picture and make a little statement of this is the current problem going on in my business. What would you guys do? And it's just brainstorming as a class to hear different perspectives and different approaches going forward.

Matt: Very nice. Yeah, I was going to say another element to this too, you know, as we've talked about this, learning through experiential learning, and also real life contexts, it extends outside the classroom too. And I know that there's a lot of extracurricular activities like student clubs and organizations that range anywhere from professional clubs to social clubs, to sports to a number of other things, too. And I wanted to transition next to ask a little bit about some things that you've gotten involved in outside the classroom, you know, including clubs or even other things like case competitions, or events or any things like that. I know our students are very involved in many different things and have lots of balance. And I was curious, going to Missy the first, what are some things that you've been involved in outside the classroom that had been really great experiences for you?

Missy: Oh, yeah, lots of opportunities at Simon to be involved in and it really helps to meet people get to know people and also just experienced life while you're trying to figure out academics at the same time. I am VP of Marketing and Alumni Relations for our Simon consulting club. Last year, part of that was also being a first year rep. That's been really nice, where we have weekly meetings, and learning and teaching how to go through the consulting, networking, interviewing, recruiting process, and hosting case competitions and various events
that help network with our alumni that are in the consulting industry. I am also a Benet career peer, which means that I am a resource for our first years and MS students in their career searches for internships and full times that that role is really nice, because I get to know a lot of the first years and MS students that I may not have an opportunity to meet. We go through resumes through cover letters, different interview experiences, then I have completed a case competition, where we got second place at UNC US healthcare case competition last year. That was a really nice experience, because that was probably the first one at Simon where, I realized I can do this. I'm just being able to take some of the coursework that we had already learned and put it into an actual consulting perspective. Let's see. I'm also an event ambassador for admissions. Where we get to meet incoming potential students interact with them show some of what Simon's about also show the Rochester area and what life as a student here would be like. I think there's more things that I'm involved in, I'm just forgetting at this time.

Matt: There's definitely quite a lot going on even outside the classroom too. Thank you, Missy. Really appreciate that. It's amazing to see, and especially when you're talking about the Benet career peers, this sort of pay it forward culture that we have here at Simon. It's really quite special too and it speaks to that. And Ashfaq. What about you? What types of things have been really great to be involved in? And what types of extracurricular activities have you been really engaged in?

Ashfaq: Well, definitely, I've been very fortunate that Simon offers so many opportunities, not only platforms for learning, but also for just pure fun. Speaking of learning. Currently, I'm learning the most as the President of the Graduate Business Council of Simon, which is basically the student government. I lead a team of eight VPs. And we are essentially, the custodians and the representatives of the students. We are elected government. And we act as a bridge between the students and administration. We listen to the students and we hold true to the values that Simon have. We engage and we create events that engage the student community at Simon. And there are also a lot of programs that we have started this year to support the career aspirations of the students as well. So, this is a great platform for me to practice leadership with influence, and it's been a great journey so far. And apart from that, last year, I was part of Simon Vision consulting as well, where I was a project manager doing pro bono consulting for a local food bank and Rochester called Foodlink. And considering I am an international student, it gave me an opportunity to learn about issues within the socioeconomic situation here at Rochester, where Foodlink deals with solving the problems of food deserts. So got a chance to work on that. Led a team of five consultants there. So that was very enlightening, excellent experience. I also learning a lot about allyship by being part of Simon women in business, which is an EDI club here at Simon. And then just from pure fun, there are a lot of platforms for that as well. I'm a member of Simon Gaming club, we recently went laser tagging, that was amazing! And then I'm also a member of Simon Outdoor Adventure Club. We recently went for snowtubing, with Simon outdoors adventures, so that was amazing! So yeah, all of these activities are amazing, both for learning and also for enjoyment. I'm also an admissions committee ambassador, whereas both the admissions team for MS admissions and learning a lot there as well. So, it's been a great, great experience thus far.

Matt: That's great. And I have to say, we greatly appreciate the work that both of you do for our office. Absolutely. And, it's interesting Ashfaq, that point you brought up about, you know, being involved in a project, that revolves around the local community and the challenge of food deserts here and socioeconomic challenges here in Rochester. And, you know, a lot of times we
get international students coming in trying to find ways to leave a lasting impact in the local community while they're here, too. So that's a really incredible thing that you had a chance to be involved in it's great to hear that. And I wanted to kind of tie this together with the fact that I think both of you, both of you are clearly involved in a lot of things. And it's really great that you know, the breadth of experiences that you've been able to have here. And I think one question we get a lot of times is that, you know, I think you would both agree that the life of an MBA student is a busy one. And we get questions from students about how do I manage my time? What have you found to be a good strategy for balancing all of these different things to get involved in while still, you know, practicing selfcare and looking after yourself as well? Missy, I'll go to you first on this one.

Missy: Great question. I think that is something that is particularly questioned a lot coming into our first year where you're balancing, recruiting, learning and remembering how to be a full-time student again, and selfcare. As always, for me, I do a lot of blocking of my time. Fortunately, having been a physical therapist, I'm used to doing schedules, appointments, all that and I still kind of treat my life very similar. I am an exercise nut. So, I always make sure that I get my selfcare done in the morning. I tend to do about a 6am workout or so before class. Go to class, see my classmates. Go through all the different activities that may happen at the noon hour, which is quite a few whether it's for recruiting clubs, or meeting with professors. And then afterwards was usually when I would start to sit down and do some of my work. I think the other thing that I remembered to do is having family in the area and Ashfaq having his wife here may also be able to talk to this, you have to remember to balance family time too. But make sure you let them know what you have on your list to do. And so, by just being very clear, in all the things we had to do first year, my family was a great support for me. As far as time management goes, second year is definitely a different game than first year. I now remember how to be a student. A lot of our classes are different times in the day. And so I get to do a lot of my schoolwork in the morning. Fortunately, I did not have to re-recruit this year. And so that was a huge workload off my plate from doing it. But we do have more roles, as you heard previously. And so, what I previously used to spend in recruiting, I'm now spending probably more in the club area. But that's all just remembering that things I enjoy. It makes me happy. And so, by remembering that it's not burden, it's a fun thing to do. But time management is a big part of Simon but it's very doable and everyone is in it together. Thank you, Missy and Ashfaq, how about in your case? What have you found to be good time management strategies for your for your schedule?

Ashfaq: Well, I will just echo what Missy has mentioned, a lot of it is about proactively managing your calendar. I think this is also a great practice for the life that you want to lead after MBA as well. Being able to organize your time blocking time off, and then also setting priorities. Specifically, Simon, there are so many activities happening, you have to know what you genuinely want, and prioritize those accordingly. And, for me, for example, I prioritize a few things here and there. I love unwinding. I, of course, I have big support with my wife here, in Rochester doing the MBA with me going through the same journey. So, we tend to share our experiences a lot and share the burden as well that comes along with it. And of course, one thing that I like, though, is the schedule that we have for classes, we don't have Friday classes. So essentially, you if you plan your time well, I try to make maximum utilization of my time in Friday, Saturday and Sunday to unwind. So from Friday afternoon onwards, I tried to keep my challenger free. That gives me all the three days. It gives me a lot of time and energy to recover.
And apart from that, I mean, I go to the gym near grad housing. One thing that also helps me on a regular basis is I Since I'm a Muslim, I go for my Friday prayers, which happened at Interfaith Chapel. I really appreciate the support that the university provides in this regard. And that helps me stay on track. And by practicing religion, it kind of gives me a strength that comes from spirituality. Also, one thing that I tell everyone, and something I actively practice is I plan vacations. I know that whatever vacation we get here during the journey, be it the fall break, be it the spring break, be it the summers, I know that this is the most pure form vacation one might ever get with no strings attached. So, I love planning vacations, and that helps me kind of unwind as well. And overall, it's a lot about knowing what you really want to do and what you want to enjoy and blocking off time for that and choosing the activities that you think are you know, that you will enjoy or learn from.

Matt: That's great. Yeah, it definitely takes a lot of careful thought and consideration. And, like you said, managing what's important to you what your priorities are, but also looking after your personal spiritual and family Well Being as well. That's, that's great, thank you. I wanted to move next to a couple more things outside the classroom experience. And that is some of the main resources that we have on campus. So the nice thing about the Simon community is that you have the Greater University of Rochester, but for the most part, many things are all kind of contained under one roof, a lot of you know points of contact and other places you might need to use or resources you might need to use as a student are all in a place that's kind of in the same place where you're taking courses. And a lot of our incoming students have these resources, like our Office of Student Engagement and our Bennett Career Management Center to lean on as a support system as they go through this journey. And I was curious to learn what types of interactions you've had with these offices and what has what have you found to be most useful for you. So Ashfaq? I'll start with you.

Ashfaq: Yeah, absolutely. The two offices that you mentioned, the Office of Student Engagement and the Benet Career Management Center, and I'll also include the Office of Equity and Inclusion, or we we work closely with all these three offices, especially with the OSE, the Office of Student Engagement, we really work closely since I'm the president of GBC. OSE actively supports us in everything that we do. And they are the ones who actually enable us, support us, help us during emergencies, and facilitate so much for us. So, we really appreciate the support we get from the OSE. And as for the CMC, they're not only does CMC have Benet career peers as Missy mentioned, but also has advisors who support us for the different tracks, for example, consulting, product management and marketing and then also for finance as well. So that is a great support that goes along the way. A lot of international students actually don't know a lot about the landscape for employment opportunities or how industries are set up or how career progressions work here in the US. And the Benet CMC actually does a lot a lot in order to share those learnings and share that knowledge from the get go from day one of the MBA journey. So, we really value that support as well. So definitely these two three teams have been super helpful. But also one thing that I want to mention is that the community in general, in Simon is very supportive. When I was in first year, I got a lot of support from my peers in the second year, whether they were better career peers or not. I still received a lot of support and guidance. So we also tried to pay it forward by helping the next class as well. So, there's just a great atmosphere around in terms of a supportive culture in Simon.

Matt: That's great. Yeah. And I'm glad you brought in the office of diversity, equity and inclusion, they're phenomenal resource here at Simon too. Thank you, Ashfaq. And Missy I wanted to turn
it over to you to find out, you know, what have you found to be most helpful in the support offices here on campus?

**Missy:** There are so many great resources here. And as Ashfaq was going through different places, I started to think about also, within OSE, we have experiential learning. And so that is a team that I've worked with very closely. One of the experiences I forgot to mention previously is I got to go on the South Africa immersion. And so, part of that is taking a class, we focused on small businesses within South Africa. And then we went to South Africa for about 10 days in which I got to travel with 15 other peers, and both Wayne and Diana from experiential learning. And that was a once in a lifetime experience. And then also with consulting club, I had the opportunity for helping and assisting and organizing a case competition, in which I worked very closely with Chrissy Harrison. And, and I would say all three of those people have really changed my experience at Simon. Beyond that, OSE is most the most approachable office I've ever been to. If you have any problems, you can walk in at any time, and someone will be able to talk to you. Whether it's about academics, personal life, classmates, anything that may happen, they may not have the resource there in the media, but they know how to be able to access that. You know, we have seen a lot, whether it's University Counseling Center coming in for various events, or just seeing the different mindfulness events. Even right now we've got the week of wellness that's been going on, where we are just focused on wellness events. Then transitioning from OSE to the Career Center. Career Center is also a home for me, because I am a Benet career peer, and it is somewhere that I am very happy to spend my time and I feel very comfortable. The resources there are unlike any others. As Ashfaq mentioned, we have a community. We have a strong alumni community that we can lean on, we have second year's first year that my students that we can lean each on each other, as we're all going through our own recruiting process. And even though we all feel like we are going through an independent experience, they have seen it all. So, if you have a question, they can answer it. If you need a resource similar to OSE, they have it. It is similar, very much the same as OSE. You can walk in there with any question and they can help you with it. So, I would say that the resources that Simon provides us are unlike any other.

**Matt:** That's wonderful. Yeah. And I would also sing the same praises about OSE. As far as our relationship and the Admissions office, we overlap with them quite a lot as students are beginning to do onboarding and making their way to campus. And we have a fantastic relationship between our offices. That's really great. Thank you for sharing that. Well, it's round everything out. I really appreciate both of you sharing your experiences at Simon and you know what you found to be the most transformative for you. And I wanted to just finish out by asking you do you have any pieces of advice, any quick pieces of advice that knowing what you know, now that you wish you could go back to your previous selves or anything that you'd want to share with the next incoming generation of Simon MBA students? So Missy, I'll start with you.

**Missy:** Ah, data is not scary. I think a lot of times when I talk to potential incoming students, one of our first questions is, I'm not a math related, I'm not math focused: Can I do it? And yes, you can. And you don't need to shy away from those courses that may be perceived as hard. They are there are resources that Simon that will help you get through but also our professors are genuinely great, very approachable. You have any questions, any problems, you send them an email and they'll respond very quickly. They open up office hours for when you need it. We have tutoring. We have TAs. Analytics is not scary. It's very doable and it will change how you see things.
Matt: Excellent. Ashfaq?

Ashfaq: What Missy mentioned plus. There will be a lot of opportunities to enjoy life at Simon but I would also encourage every prospective student to enjoy the campus life overall. At University of Rochester there's just so much to do. Go to Goergen Athletic [center] take a swim. Go to Eastman School of Music, attend a concert. There are so many different resources available at U of R that you can benefit a lot from. And there's there will be a handful of things to do at Simon. But do not get bogged down by all of it. Prioritize and make the maximum use of your time in doing things that you will enjoy, and you want to learn.

Matt: Excellent. Well thank you again. Special thanks to both Missy and Ashfaq for taking the time to share their experiences with us. We really appreciate all of your insights and hope that everybody listening feels the same. And I really wanted to thank everybody for taking the time to listen to this episode of the podcast revolving around the MBA student experience here at Simon Business school. We look forward to seeing you in future episodes where we will cover a variety of different topics and look forward to having you be involved in the Simon community in the future. So thank you again and we will see you next time. Take care everybody.

Outro: Thanks for listening to the Simon Bizcast! Make sure you subscribe so you never miss an episode. Ready to begin your business school journey? Visit Simon.rochester.edu to get started.