

First Semester Report for the HBS Association and Foundation of Germany

My first semester at Harvard Business School (HBS) has ended; four months have gone by unbelievably fast. I remember one of the phrases that I heard at the beginning of the semester in August, describing the HBS experience: “it is like a good champagne that you want to enjoy every sip, but it comes from a firehose”. I thought it was an exaggerated expression, but my calendar at HBS became full very quickly and I desperately learned to prioritize. Curricular activities, social events, recruitment organizations, campus life, and other diverse projects help you grow and build an exclusive network.

To begin with, the curricular activities at HBS are intensive. Before starting the business school, I had heard from my friends who had their MBA degrees from other universities that the courses were not so hard that an average preparation for exams would be enough to succeed. This is not valid for HBS. The case method, the famous teaching model at HBS, measured class participation, and case-based exams require a significant preparation each day. The classes that take place 4-6 hours in weekdays have the potential to become literally an unforgettable experience in your life. There is nothing more remarkable and inspiring, in terms of learning, than the real stories told by your classmates, professors, or CEOs / leaders of the most (or sometimes the least) successful organizations that come in unexpectedly in the middle of the class. My favorite one was a “Leadership and Organizational Behavior” class, in which we read and discussed about 10th and 20th anniversary letters of HBS alumni, telling about their lives vs. expectations after the business school.

It is commonly said that an MBA is good for networking. This is true, and social events play a great role in this aspect. They include mostly balls, parties, and global treks, all of which are organized by students. Although attending such events is optional, the big majority of students is very active. There are 810 students at HBS in your year class, in addition to the 90 that you know very well from your own section. I cannot remember any other period of my life when I have met so many successful individuals in such a short time. There is clearly a trade-off between class preparation and social events that is up to your choice. I am also aware that it is not easy to build and keep deep relationships with every individual I have met. But my hope remains to build a few friendships that would last lifelong.

During my first semester, I also tried to attend some recruiting events. Many (big and small) companies come to HBS to introduce their industries and organizations. These have been a great opportunity for me to learn about other jobs. Some companies interested me so much that I decided to attend their dinners, introduce myself, and get to know them better. The summer internship is a big decision, as many companies offer full-time positions to their successful interns. It also provides you with a great 3-month experience in a new area. And for students with the ambition to join a certain company, these recruiting

events are highly important. I, personally, used them to build a more precise picture in my mind about my goals after graduation.

HBS has a beautiful campus with many extra-curricular possibilities straight out of your house door. Student clubs exist in almost every domain from social to business, including food, sports, coding, entrepreneurship, religion, and national clubs. I wanted to keep the number of clubs that I am enrolled in low: Tech Club, Transportation, Infrastructure and Logistics Club, and German Speaking Society. There have been various events, during which I had the chance, for example, to join an amazing backstage visit of Boston Logan International Airport, to contribute to the organization of one of the largest student conferences at HBS, and to meet with other students from Europe.

I also used my time at HBS to start individual projects. My goal in applying to HBS was to start a company. The school provides many resources for entrepreneurs. One of them is the so-called Winter Bootcamp, which is a 10-day workshop to test a business idea happening during the winter break. In order to attend this program, I founded a team of three and developed a business idea. The program starts soon and what I expect is to learn how to test a business idea, talk to venture capitalists, and design products. The application process is not completed yet and I plan to give more on the outcomes of this program in my next report.

As I wrote at the beginning of this report, the HBS champagne does come from a firehose! Based on my first semester experience, my best advice for the prospective HBS students is to try to find out what they want to achieve and where they want to be after graduation prior to joining HBS, so that they can focus on specific resources during their HBS time. This means, however, not turning their backs on other opportunities that they might be discovering, upon arriving at HBS.

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Boston, December 2017