

AUS | الجامعة الأميركية في الشارقة
American University of Sharjah

Empowering Student Engagement through a Library Employment Program

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Student Engagement

Definition of Student Engagement:

“Student engagement represents two critical features of collegiate quality. The first is the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities. The second is how the institution deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities” (National Survey of Student Engagement [NSSE], n.d., as cited in Tomlinson, 2022)

Why student engagement matters?

According to Mebert (2020) “Student engagement is a key factor in achieving learning outcomes, and students who are more engaged are more likely to be academically successful and satisfied with their college experience”



Objectives of the Study

- Evaluate the current AUS Library student employment program.
- Identify strengths and areas for improvement.
- Formulate effective strategies to boost student engagement through this program.

Methodology

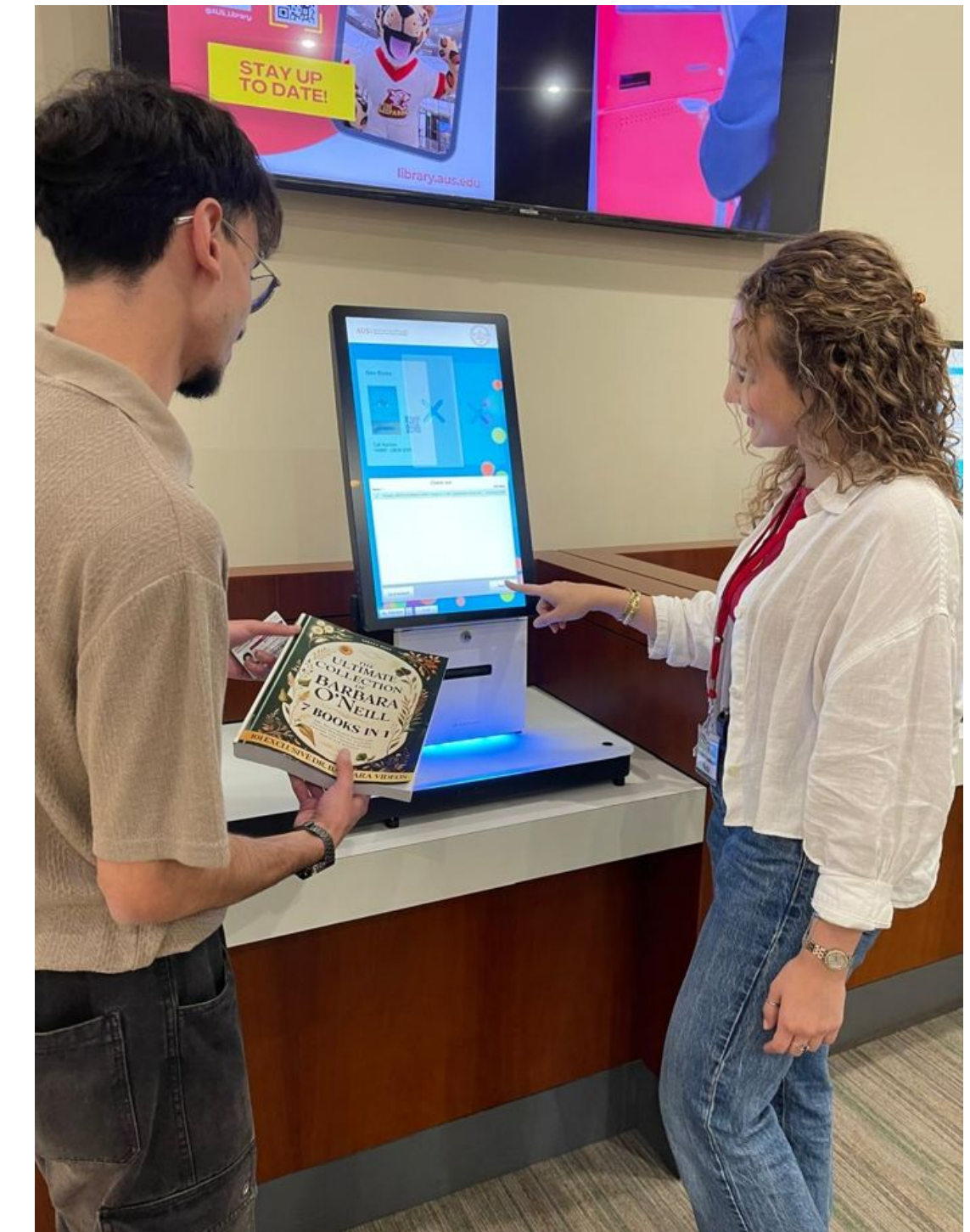
➤ Surveys:

Participants: 23 Student assistants, library staff working directly with student employees.

Format: Quantitative and qualitative

➤ Focus Group discussions:

Two sessions attended by 10 library staff to discuss student assistants' feedback collected through surveys.



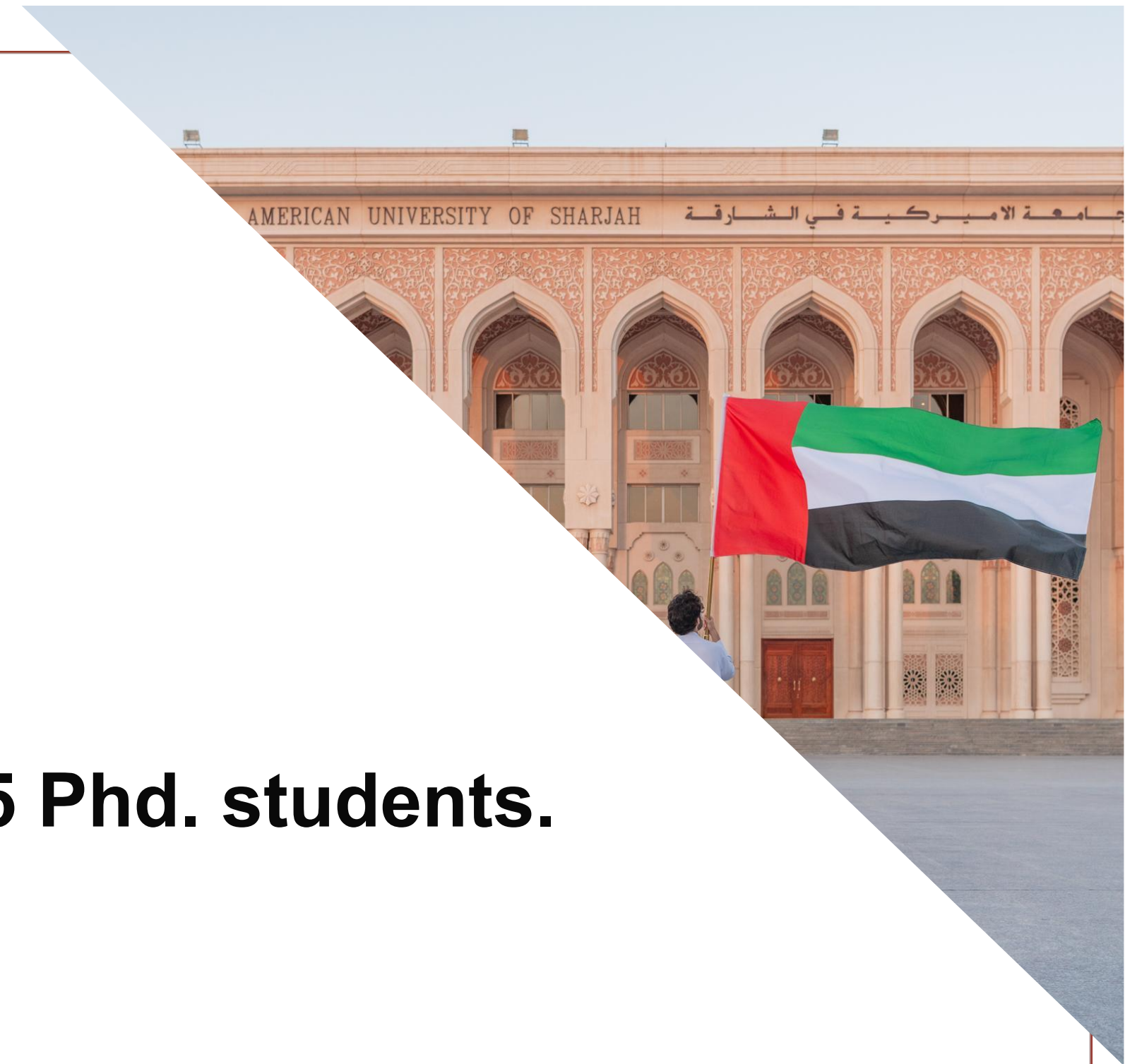
About

American University of Sharjah (AUS):

- American University of Sharjah was founded in 1997.
- 5600+ undergraduate students, 480 Master's students and 135 Phd. students.

Current AUS Library:

- Opened in 2006, the library building is located in the center of the campus, with a total of 8,750 square meters of usable space, on three floors.
- 10 librarians, 13 full time staff, four part-time staff and **23 student assistants.**



AUS Library Student Employment Program

Open to currently registered undergraduate students who have already completed at least one semester at AUS with cumulative GPA not less than 2.2; and available to work 8 to 15 hours/week (including weekends).

Tasks performed by student assistants (SAs):

Library Service Desk Duties.

Shelving and Shelf Maintenance.

Technical/Technology Services Support.

Basic Reference and Research Assistance.

Administrative and Marketing Tasks.



Key Findings : Benefits of the program

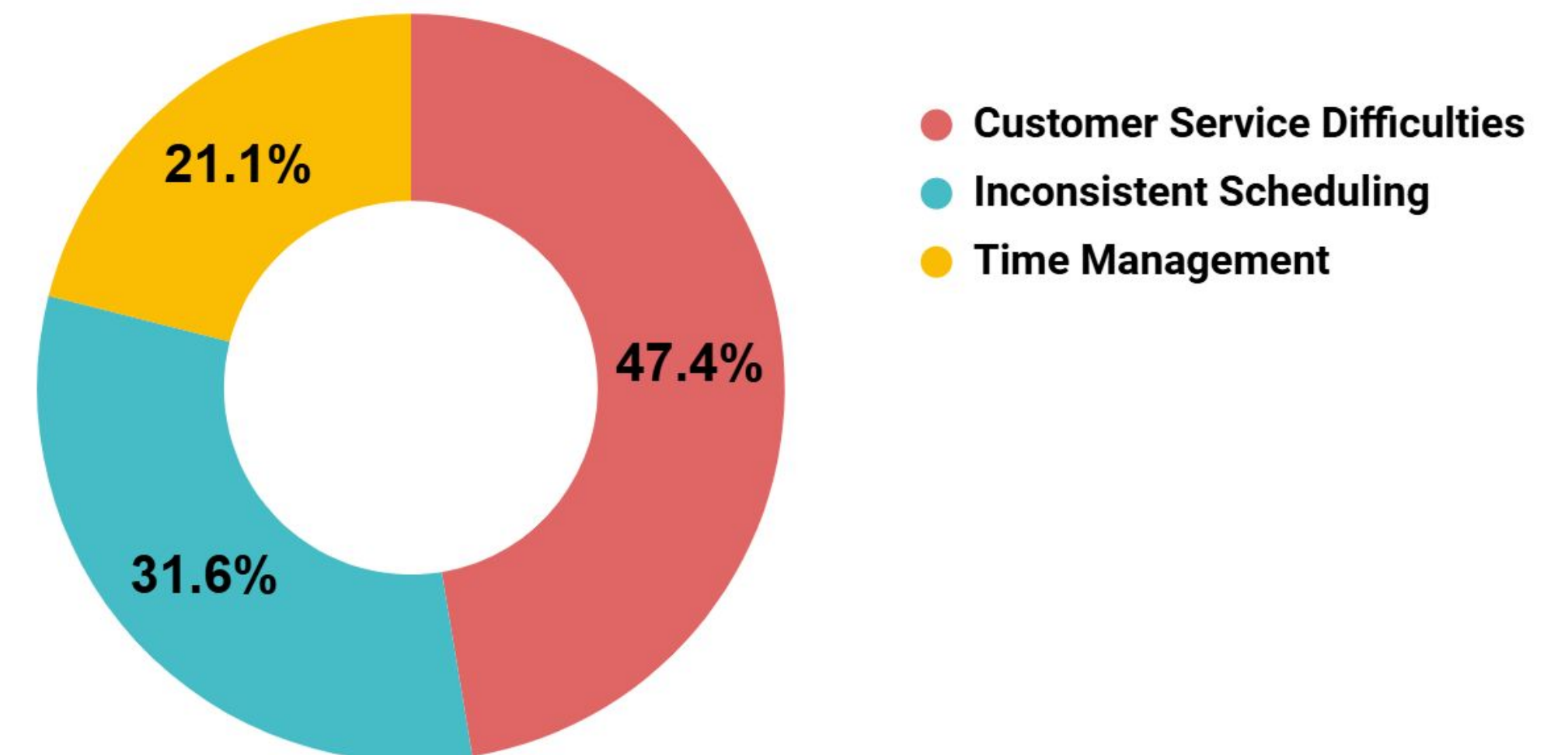
Benefits for Student Assistants	Value for the library
Professional Development: customer service, time-management, interpersonal relations, and problem-solving skills.	Operational Support: student assistants help maintain daily library functions.
Confidence Building: Student assistants have demonstrated increased self-confidence as a result of their interactions with diverse patron groups, including faculty members.	Fresh perspectives and innovation: student assistants can provide feedback on library services and bring creative ideas.
Career Preparation: student assistants have acquired practical insights into the job market and began building a foundation for future career success.	Technology assistance and peer-to peer support: most of student assistants are tech-savvy and fellow students feel more comfortable asking them for help.



Findings: Main Challenges

1. **Customer Service challenge: dealing with difficult patrons.**
2. **Inconsistent Scheduling (conflict with class changes or extracurricular activities).**
3. **Time Management and Balancing Responsibilities (changing academic workload).**

The main challenges faced by student assistants working in the AUS Library



Professional Development Opportunities

Opportunities offered to student assistants in AUS Library:

1. Presenting a library workshop (e.g. library technology).
2. Representing the library at some events (e.g. AUS Open Day)
3. Logistics assistance in a library conference hosted at AUS.
4. Creating videos promoting the library services.
5. Presenting at the new student assistants' orientation session.



Professional Development Opportunities (Cont.)

Suggested Opportunities to Explore:

- 1. Implement a “Peer Training Program”: senior student assistants training newly hired SAs.**
- 2. Involve senior student assistants in the hiring process (interviews of new SAs).**
- 3. Support librarian-led workshops.**
- 4. Delegate leadership of library activities: student assistants to coordinate library activities (e.g. educational games) under staff supervision.**
- 5. Encourage student assistants to attend library-related conferences held at AUS and participate in networking with professionals and peers.**
- 6. Facilitate peer feedback collection: assign student assistants the role of gathering feedback from their peers on library services and initiatives.**



AUS Library Employment Program Improvement

Improvements suggested in the surveys and the focus group discussions:

- 1. Implementing a formal recognition program that acknowledges student assistants' contributions: "Student Assistant of the Semester".**
- 2. Offer customized workshops for student assistants focused on public speaking/ presentation skills, and emotional intelligence competencies.**
- 3. Flexible scheduling especially during examination period.**
- 4. Preparing student assistants to assume leadership roles through mentorship and career development opportunities.**

Library Employment Program & Academic Success

- **Library employment enhances students' information literacy.**
- **Students develop key academic and professional competencies.**
- **Balancing work and study foster strong organizational skills.**
- **On-campus employment provides time efficiency by eliminating the need for off-campus commuting.**
- **Employment reinforces the importance of academic commitment.**



Recommended Strategies

Recommended strategies for boosting student engagement through a library employment program:

- **Providing student assistants with structured trainings and skill development opportunities in a collaborative work environment.**
- **Increase flexibility in schedules to accommodate students' academic commitment.**
- **Creating mentorship and networking opportunities.**
- **Encouraging student assistants' inputs and feedback.**
- **Recognizing and rewarding outstanding contributions.**
- **Leveraging technology and social media.**

Key Takeaways

- ✓ **Student assistants are essential contributors to the successful operation of academic libraries.**
- ✓ **Creating a supportive work environment through clear communication, professional development opportunities, schedule flexibility, and employee recognition, enhances student engagement and productivity.**
- ✓ **Ongoing assessment and continuous improvement of student employment programs help strengthen students' sense of belonging within the library and the wider campus community.**
- ✓ **Empowering students through library employment experiences can have a significant impact on academic achievement and supports increased student retention rates.**

References

1. Mebert, L., Barnes, R., Dalley, J., Gawarecki, L., Ghazi-Nezami, F., Shafer, G., ... Yezbick, E. (2020). Fostering student engagement through a real-world, collaborative project across disciplines and institutions. *Higher Education Pedagogies*, 5(1), 30–51. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23752696.2020.1750306>
2. Tomlinson, C., & Arnold-Garza, S. (2022). Library Employment Practices That Support Student Engagement. *portal: Libraries and the Academy* 22(3), 571-594. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/pla.2022.0027>

Thank you for your attention

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