



Developing Africa's Next Generation of Leaders

A few months into his first quarter at Stanford, Fred Swaniker, MBA '04, was one of seven students sitting at breakfast with Carlos Ghosn, the CEO of Nissan and Renault. "I realized that if an ordinary person could lead such a successful global organization, so could I."

Meeting top executives regularly in courses and extracurricular events at the School helped demystify the process of leadership for Swaniker, a native of Ghana who has lived all over Africa, worked for McKinsey in South Africa, and served as headmaster at his family-founded primary school in Botswana. "It gave me the gall to think big," he says. "I don't think I'd be taking on such a bold initiative now--creating a new boarding school to develop Africa's future leaders--if I hadn't been exposed to such role models at Stanford."



Stanford also put him in contact with colleagues who immediately became excited about his idea of preparing talented 15-18 year-old Africans for a lifetime of leadership on the continent. One was Chris Bradford, a joint MBA/MA (education) '05 student, and former brand manager at P&G, who had taught economics and physical science to African boarding school students in the U.K. During a study tour to South Africa, Bradford saw first-hand the limited opportunities available to most African youth. "When Fred shared the skeleton of his plan for African Leadership Academy (ALA) with me while working on his project for the GSB course Evaluating Entrepreneurial Opportunities, I was hooked."

The two also struck up a friendship with Bradford's classmate Chinezi Chijioke, MBA/MA (education) '05. Chijioke had taught high school mathematics in the United States and co-founded a nonprofit organization aimed at serving youth and developing young leaders in his native Nigeria. He was similarly impressed with Swaniker's vision. The threesome developed a one-month summer program for youth in Cape Town to serve as a small-scale trial for ALA. Classmate Ronalee Bayani, MBA '04, the former head of a summer program to prepare minority high school students for the University of California, eventually joined them.



The "Summer Academy" launched in summer 2005, featuring a robust African studies curriculum, 12 teachers from around the world, and 70 students from 13 countries. "The impact of the program was tremendous," said Bradford. "Our students gained confidence and recognized their power to positively affect the world, and they became passionate about their community and continent."

Swaniker and Bradford are now soliciting designs for a new \$5 million campus outside Johannesburg for their school and recruiting staff and students, with an eye toward opening ALA in 2008. The Academy will be the first institution in the world dedicated to providing an integrated curriculum in leadership, entrepreneurship, and African studies for promising young students. "We intend to nurture more Africans to lead in the spirit of Nelson Mandela, who has so skillfully transformed South Africa into a multi-racial democracy," Swaniker says.

"The use of case studies and experiential learning at Stanford, the truly international student body, the material taught on interpersonal skills, and the constant flow of inspirational guest speakers all strongly influenced the way we've designed the Academy," he reports. "If you want a model for how to integrate entrepreneurship and leadership into an academic program, look at the Stanford MBA Program. We, too, will be using case studies and guest speakers, we'll be international in nature, and all students will be required to take a modified version of Interpersonal Dynamics."

Bradford credits Stanford with giving him the flexibility to "take ownership" of his education and tailor it to his own goals. "My courses in entrepreneurship at GSB, combined with those at the School of Education, were hugely influential in my embarking on this path," he says. "I was encouraged to do the joint degree my way, taking the classes most relevant to my career ambitions. I also spent a quarter defining the African Leadership Academy business plan with Fred, which positioned me to take on a leadership role as COO," he says.

For Chijioke, who continues to consult to ALA while serving as an associate at McKinsey, Stanford helped round out his business skills while also demonstrating how he could combine his own unique talents in a business context. "As a former teacher with little business exposure, everything from depreciation to overage costs was new to me," he says. "Developing competence in new areas opened up new opportunities. At the same time, working on team projects such as the Summer Academy helped me understand the contributions I could make by drawing on my own background as a teacher. Stanford provided a great environment for me to explore all of this."

"I'd read about how collaborative Stanford was in the brochures, but I didn't quite believe it until I experienced it," says Swaniker. "People really look out for you here and help you to become the best you can be. That empowers you to have a positive impact on the world."

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