Entrepreneurial thinking is the foundation upon which Ashesi’s work educating ethical and innovative leaders is built. Integrated throughout all four years of learning, Ashesi’s approach to entrepreneurship cultivates critical thinking and the courage needed to operate with an ethical mindset. From their earliest days on campus, students are immersed in activities that provide hands-on learning and reward risk taking - both critical components for future success as entrepreneurs. By the time they graduate, Ashesi alums are primed with both the professional skill and ingenuity required to tackle pervasive problems - whether they join the work force or launch their own businesses.

With a goal that at least 20% of graduates launch a venture within ten years of graduation, the Ashesi Entrepreneurship Center houses all entrepreneurship curriculum and programs at Ashesi and is dedicated to strengthening student, faculty and alumni ventures. The Center also provides seed grants for businesses at the Ashesi Venture Incubator and Ashesi Start-up Launchpad. Programs and initiatives managed by the Center include:

**The First Year Experience (FYE)**
To ensure continuity of academic work in the face of evolving scenarios facing high school students and their entry to Ashesi during the pandemic, the FYE program was developed to equip incoming first year students with critical skills for success at Ashesi. The FYE’s modules enable students to develop problem-solving skills, critically analyze real-world problems, and develop big ideas and possible solutions relative to their communities.

**Foundations of Design and Entrepreneurship (FDE)**
In this mandatory course taken by freshmen and sophomores, students gain hands-on experience in business development by launching business ventures. The purpose of FDE is to introduce the students to the principles of design thinking. Course learnings are rolled into Ashesi’s second year leadership course, providing a foundation for students’ entrepreneurial studies moving forward.

**Ashesi D:Lab**
This is an initiative and hub that provides students with training and practice in design thinking for creative problem solving. With support from MIT and USAID, the D:Lab cultivates lean research skills and ensures students can step beyond their existing boundaries to propose, test and refine solutions for the world around them.

**Community Entrepreneurship**
Offered in the fall and spring semesters, this program is an experiential learning opportunity for students who are interested in creating social ventures that lead to the generation of economically viable solutions for local communities. Participating students can pursue independent entrepreneurial projects in exchange for academic credit.

**Entrepreneurship Capstone**
One of the graduation options for a senior project, the entrepreneurship capstone challenges students to consider how to start a scalable business. Scalable businesses are those that can be expected to develop into complex enterprises.
The ASL is a student-led accelerator that provides hand-on support, guidance, and coaching to student incubator businesses. Engaging support from faculty and local and international business leaders, the ASL helps scale and improve students’ promising ideas by providing them with the resources and funding that they will require in their early stages, in order to grow into fully-fledged companies.

Ventures accepted into the incubator can be at any level of maturity, from simple ideas to existing businesses. “The nurturing process for the entrepreneurial mindset needs to go beyond the boundaries of even the most experiential classroom to a real startup situation where there are real rewards and consequences to everyday decisions,” said Dr. Gordon Adomdza, faculty advisor for the accelerator.

“I believe that identifying entrepreneurial types and nurturing their dreams to change lives and make a lasting impact in Africa is at the heart of what the ASL does. With our passionate and hardworking management team and advisory board, I know we will continue to make strides towards creating a robust entrepreneurial ecosystem here at Ashesi.”

EDEM YEGBE ’20, CEO OF THE ASHESI START-UP LAUNCHPAD (ASL)

Ashesi Venture Incubator (AVI)

The AVI is a one-year alumni venture incubation experience under the Entrepreneurship Center. Fellows build their business through the incubator’s provision of coaching from local and global business leaders, business development sessions, and support services. Led by Entrepreneurship faculty Jewel Thompson, the Ashesi Venture Incubator primarily targets graduating Ashesi students and recent alumni, who are selected through a competitive application process.

To participate, the businesses must also be in the position to deliver some level of social impact, be it through their supply chain processes, sourcing, or inclusive employment practices. Over the course of three years the AVI has supported 26 businesses, 12 in the first year and 14 in the second year. This year, the AVI welcomed 18 fellows.
Design Thinking: an Integral Component of the Ashesi Education

Ashesi students are entrepreneurs who can see through challenges and build solutions. They are ethical and responsible and learn to see the short- and long-term effects of their decisions on society and the environment. They are also leaders who can communicate their ideas and work with teams to solve problems. Design thinking fosters these very qualities through its human-centered approach to problem solving. Across all our majors, there is an emphasis on teaching design thinking. “At Ashesi, we explore design thinking as a better approach to creating lasting, usable solutions,” says Gordon Adomdza, Lead of the Ashesi D:Lab. “We want to see Ashesi becoming a thought leader on design thinking in Ghana and Africa.”

Through a variety of courses and programs, design thinking becomes more than a skill held by Ashesi students; it becomes a mindset for creative problem solving.

In Global Competitions and Awards, Ashesi Students and Alumni Shine

UNICEF Innovation Fund
In 2018, The Fund granted $100,000 to NubianVR, a startup founded by Jonathan Dotse ’13 and Kabiru Seidu ’14. With UNICEF’s support, NubianVR will develop virtual reality education content for Ghanaian schools.

Forbes Africa 30 Under 30
Kofi Genfi ’16 made the 2018 Forbes Africa 30 Under 30 list for his work in developing artificial intelligence and mobile money payments through his startup, Cyst.

L’Oreal Brandstorm International Competition
After winning the 2018 L’Oreal Brandstorm national and regional competitions for their futuristic hair braiding device, a trio of Ashesi Juniors excelled in the global finals held in Paris, France. “We represented ourselves, Ashesi and Africa to the root in confidence and style,” said Obaayaa Gyapong ’20.

World Bank Development Report 2019 Competition
Justice Essuman ’19’s competition-winning paper details how startups can help curb youth unemployment. Justice’s paper was one of three winning submissions out of 600 entries in the competition to propose real-life examples of how actors can take advantage of opportunities created by technology and the future of work.

2020 Falling Walls Lab Competition
Khadijahtu Mohammed ’20 won first place at the 2020 Falling Walls Lab competition in Ghana. Her winning project, “Incucrib”, is a prototype baby incubator and crib which she developed for her senior-year project at Ashesi. The incucrib combines mothercare support, malaria prevention, and environmental conditions monitoring in a low-cost device.

WeGrow Hackathon
In 2021, Daniel Amoshie ’23 won the WeGrow Hackathon, a cocoa tech competition, with his cost-effective cocoa pod breaking machine design. After winning the competition, Daniel and his team will receive support from an energy business incubator focused on agricultural innovations.
Alumni Ventures Advance Africa

Whether Ashesi graduates join existing organizations or start their own, they act as job creators who carry forward entrepreneurial thinking in everything that they do. **Ashesi maintains a goal for 20-25% of alumni to start their own business within ten years of graduating.** Graduates’ enterprises span Africa, offer new technologies, and support inclusive development.

### Lighting Africa up, one community at a time
**Samuelle Asante ’21**

Over 652 million people live without electricity and energy in Sub-Saharan Africa. Samuelle founded Kaniya to help solve this problem. Kaniya’s first product is an organic photovoltaic solar (OPV)-cell powered study lamp and portable charger. With this product, an eco-friendly backpack is lined with OPV cells. During the day, children in the community take the backpack to school while the cells absorb solar energy and transfer the energy for storage in an in-built battery. At night, a lamp is connected to the battery and provides an entire room with light.

### Creating African fashion the environmentally-friendly way
**Dzifa Anagblah ’19**

Dzifa is the CEO of Safi Label, a 100% made-in-Africa fashion brand that produces responsibly crafted apparel, accessories and home goods. Safi Label is all about melding a love of African culture and style with a commitment to thoughtful production and consumption. Safi Label sources all their materials from the continent and works with artisans in low-income communities. Socio-economic and environmental impact is the brand’s key business framework. “We are trying our best to ensure that what we produce today will not affect generations tomorrow,” says Dzifa.

### Empowering young girls with entrepreneurial skills
**Teni Aganai ’18**

Growing up, Teni worked as a head porter in the local vegetable market to support herself through her high school education. Understanding firsthand the perils that came with being a kayayei, she founded the Loozeele Initiative, an organization that empowers young kayayei girls from the Northern part of Ghana through training with entrepreneurship skills to enable them to create a source of income for themselves and their families as they work towards their education and career goals. The girls are trained in the crafts of basketry, shea butter production, smock weaving and baking.

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JOIN US

Help us unlock innovation by supporting Ashesi’s Entrepreneurship Center. Philanthropic funds provide support for student and faculty research in the sector, room to experiment with business and growth models and runway to expand when ventures show promise. To learn more about Ashesi’s Entrepreneurship Ecosystem and how you can partner with us, contact us at 206.545.6988 or foundation@ashesi.org.