Young South African leaders, part of defiance initiative, study at Wagner College in New York City

From flare to forever: 2013

STIHL AG (FRA), USA — For the first 5 weeks, South Africa’s Lalakha Rebub and Kenny Calu have been among 30 young African leaders from 12 sub-Saharan countries studying community and nonprofit organizations at Wagner College in Staten Island, N.Y. The Wagner College program is part of U.S. President Barack Obama’s Young African Leaders Initiative, which placed 500 men and women in programs at 24 colleges and universities across several countries.

Lalakha Rebub, a radio engineering technician and social entrepreneur, is founder and executive director of the local foundation of his home, Limpopo Province, which seeks to improve the performance of rural schools and their pupils’ ability to attract and engage in quality education.

Kenny Calu, a Queens-based journalist for the South African Broadcasting Corporation, is the daughter of Barbara Bheki, an organiser that serves people-born children and their incarcerated mothers in South Africa, which, according to the United Nations, are among the most disadvantaged groups in the world.

Both students are training young leaders in the U.S. Department for State’s leadership curriculum because of its grounding in Founding Father Edward Filardo, who first shaped programs, classes and students with 23 different community agencies, schools and churches in a nearby Staten Island community.

Wagner College President Richard Guarasci has outlined the basic strategy in an interview of “engaging the Founding Father of this school to engage with the community in a constructive, collaborative way: ‘We believe that this fellowship has to do with power, or at least its effects to do with the ability to bring together diverse groups of people in a common purpose and a shared interest of a better future.’”

I have had a great experience at Wagner,” said Nellyn Melo, who advocates for the rights of women and children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. “For me, Wagner is both a learning experience as well as an exposure to the way that people live in the United States,” said Marisol Mariscal, chief social projects officer for Vogue of India. The students from 12 countries are developing their own projects to address the need for educational and economic improvements and the differences in the student’s experience has been positive. “I feel that the program really forced me to improve my work and become a better person and a better student,” she said.

Among the many participants, community partners, the Wagner fellows’ experiences have taken the form of the military, and a popular music Torrent to learn about American culture and development and philanthropic work now learning about how to engage in a variety of tech-based community endeavors, and for the Youth for the Disabled, a Staten Island enterprise that has been an example of the former Wagner School at community college.

This dialogue was exemplified at the Wagner fellows’ field experiences studying the history of the Antebellum Slave Trade; and the most recent deal of the city’s most significant agreements in the field of human rights.

The events and discussions since have been both planned and thought out, and I feel that I have gained an exposure to the way that students in the United States, said U.S. ambassador, chief social projects officer for Vogue of India. The students from 12 countries are developing their own projects to address the need for educational and economic improvements and the differences in the student’s experience has been positive. “I feel that the program really forced me to improve my work and become a better person and a better student,” she said.

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