

Mandela Washington Fellowship: University of Nevada, Reno

The 2015 Mandela Washington Young African Leaders Initiative fellows meet with Entrepreneurs Assembly in the Travis Linn Reading Room of the Reynolds School of Journalism.

"Breaking barriers."

"Making time, saving time. Making money, saving money."

"Creating a customer value proposition."

Business buzz words flew through the air in the Travis Linn Reading Room at the University's Reynolds School of Journalism and Center for Advanced Media Tuesday, June 23, during a two-hour workshop in which local entrepreneurs and business leaders from [Entrepreneurs Assembly](#), a local business incubator, met with 25 of Africa's emerging business and entrepreneurial leaders. The workshop was one of many events planned for the [Mandela Washington Fellowship](#), a six-week academic and leadership institute in business and entrepreneurship.

The University, in partnership with the [Northern Nevada International Center](#), welcomed the fellows Monday, June 22, as part of President Obama's [Young African Leaders Initiative](#), with the goal of empowering young African leaders through academic coursework, leadership training, mentoring, networking, professional opportunities and support for activities in their communities.

This cohort of Washington Mandela fellows representing 17 of Africa's 49 countries is part of a larger group of 500 fellows selected from a pool of 50,000 applicants being hosted across the United States this summer. Following their engagements with their respective universities, the fellows will join the other cohorts in Washington, D.C., for a Presidential Summit with President Obama.

The University is among 20 American universities, including Dartmouth College, University of Notre Dame, University of California, Berkeley and Northwestern University, to develop programs in conjunction with the Department of State's Bureau of Educational Affairs and its partner organization, [the International Research & Exchanges Board](#), in one of three tracks: Business and Entrepreneurship, Civic Leadership or Public Management.

"The energy and excitement surrounding business innovations and entrepreneurship in Reno and the surrounding areas continues to grow," Dave Croasdell, associate professor and chair of the information systems department in the [College of Business](#) at the University, said. "This program offers an incredible opportunity for the University of Nevada and community constituencies to form friendships with a wide array of young African business leaders from across the African continent."

University students and recently graduated students will act as peer collaborators to help the fellows experience American culture outside of the formal curriculum. University faculty and staff, along with local community business leaders will deliver sessions designed to help the fellows gain broad experience with the entrepreneurial ecosystem and culture of innovation in the area.

"The program will provide many opportunities to network with some very interesting individuals looking to make connections here in the U.S.," Croasdell said. "Time spent with the fellows will be both fun and enlightening, and the relationships that are fostered will carry forward throughout the year and into next year when we hope to host additional fellows."

The University's business and entrepreneurship program is designed to help fellows start business ventures in Africa,



and it exposes participants to leadership training in business strategies, operations and supply chain management, business ethics, microfinance, marketing and branding, innovation and technology, emerging markets and risk analysis. Fellows will meet with local entrepreneurs and mentors and attend leadership and innovation workshops. "Hosting the Mandela Washington Fellows is a great honor for the University of Nevada," Carina Black, executive director of the NNIC, said. "These individuals represent the incredible transformation that is currently happening on the continent of Africa, and it's great to experience our community being part of that transformation."

The program also provides insight into American culture through visits to local business and educational centers as well as tours of outlying facilities, including the Starbucks roasting and Bentley Biodiesel processing plants in Minden, the Sacramento legislature with the Berkeley fellows, the Barrick and Newmont mining operations outside of Winnemucca, and Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village. They will engage in community service opportunities with the Food Bank of Northern Nevada and local cultural activities, including attending the Reno Rodeo.

Back in the Travis Linn Reading Room, fellows had the opportunity to share their business plans and get coaching from EA mentors.

Teddy Manston Flomo, chief executive officer and founder of Students Transport Solutions and Car Rental Services in Liberia, is working to decentralize his community with a project aimed at linking the community with major marketplaces within Liberia. His takeaway from the EA session was to maintain focus and not get distracted from his goal.

"Every business has a mission," Flomo said. "Your mission, your goal is what sustains you. If you allow yourself to be distracted, you will never achieve your goal."

Matt Westfield, founder and director of Entrepreneurs Assembly, said he started EA at a time when Reno's economy was in a downward spiral. Today, EA has helped over 300 unrelated start-up companies gain traction in the marketplace through monthly meetings.

Westfield said over 20% of the Reno EA meeting attendees are University students who are starting, or have started, their own businesses.

"We are forming relationships, making friendships, and creating focus and vision," he said. "It's gratifying to see what works locally also works internationally."

The fellows will also participate in [Meet Africa! Entrepreneurs and Change Makers](#), an [Artown](#) event, at the Honor Court on the University campus from noon to 3 p.m., Wednesday, July 23.

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