

a Global College

*In the global marketplace
for top students, the College
Class of 2014 shows Rochester
making an impression in Africa.*

By Karen McCally '02 (PhD)
Photographs by Adam Fenster

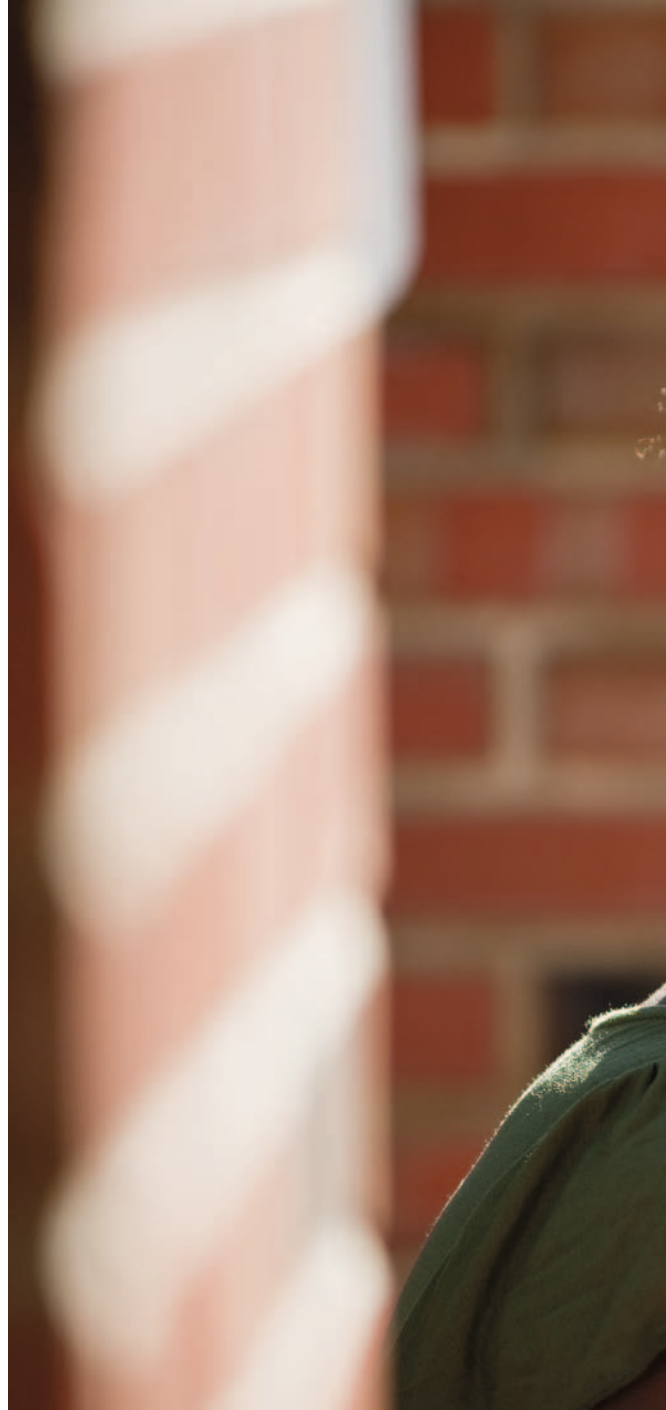
IN THE CONTEST FOR ADMISSION TO TOP AMERICAN COLLEGES, Rochester's undergraduate dean of admissions, Jonathan Burdick, is not shy in indicating the scope of the competition.

"We're in a global enterprise and we're providing services for a global audience," he says.

The College has long attracted students applying directly from other countries. According to assistant provost for institutional research Vini Falciano, most have come from China, India, Korea, Taiwan, and Canada. In addition, the University's graduate programs, in all divisions, have long drawn students from around the globe in even larger numbers. International students, for example, make up more than half the student body at the Simon School, more than half of all graduate students in the Hajim School, and about one third of graduate students at the Eastman School and the School of Medicine and Dentistry.

This past year, however, marked a turning point for undergraduate admissions to Arts, Sciences, and Engineering. There are 11 students in the Class of 2014 who call Africa home. And while the number is not large compared to many much larger American universities, what's significant, says Burdick, is the trend it may set.

"I think we're at the front of something that can only get bigger," he says. In much of Africa, expectations are rising, as is a middle class. But infrastructure lags behind. "You've got students there who will be looking for a great foundation to do all the things they want to do in their countries." *(Continued on page 22)*



Lendsey Achudi

Maseno, Kenya

As a child in a remote corner of western Kenya, Lendsey Achudi had a difficult start in school.

"The first few years, I went to a public primary school, and the conditions were heartbreaking. We had these mud walls. And then the roof was made of rusted iron sheets so when it rained, it let water in. And then you have one teacher and there are sometimes 80 of you in class," she says, sitting at a café table at the River Campus Starbucks.

Achudi credits her mother with setting her on the path that would eventually lead her to Rochester.

"My mom saw if I continued in that school, I wouldn't do well. And I think my mom knew I had this potential



that not many other children had. I was able to learn English faster than anybody. English was my third language. I speak Teso, and Swahili, and now I speak French fluently. And a little bit of Spanish,” she says, smiling broadly.

Her mother arranged for her to enroll in a new private school, where Achudi excelled, acing the first round of national exams that determine the educational fate of young Kenyans.

That led her to a public boarding school where, she says, “I participated very actively,” taking on leadership positions in the French club, the math club, and other groups.

In her first semester at Rochester, where she plans to study international relations, she’s shown similar leadership. When she learned many students have little knowledge of Africa and harbor misperceptions about the continent, she drafted an article for the *Campus Times* to provide classmates a more complex picture of the continent’s mix of challenges and assets and to suggest that Africa plays a greater

role in Americans’ everyday lives than many suppose. “The coffee you spend your Declining on at Starbucks is probably from Africa,” she wrote, alluding to the ATM-like system that students use to purchase meals and other items on campus.

Assistant director of admissions Phil Bradley, noting Achudi’s strong leadership skills, appointed her one of two all-class representatives from among the 85 Renaissance and Global Scholars.

While many young Kenyans are drawn to the modern city of Nairobi, Achudi says her passion lies in improving the region of Kenya in which her pastoral tribe, the Tesos, reside as a largely neglected minority. “We haven’t really had a leader because we have just one member in parliament.”

Achudi has high ambitions, and wherever she goes will likely be determined in part by an inclination that she sums up succinctly: “I like challenging environments. I don’t like being the leader among the fools.”

Daniel Bonga

Freetown, Sierra Leone

When Daniel Bonga left his home in Freetown, Sierra Leone, to attend the African Leadership Academy, it was the first time he had been out of his home country.

It was an eye-opening experience to meet students from all over the continent, but also a peaceful refuge for the young Sierra Leonean who grew up amidst a decade-long civil war that began when he was less than a year old.

“My childhood was not good as compared to a normal childhood,” explains Bonga of his middle class upbringing in Sierra Leone’s capital city. “My father’s business had flourished, but then when the war broke out, they burned everything that he had,” says Bonga of the wholesale and retail clothing store his father operated in Freetown. “He had to start again from scratch. But he didn’t give up. He started out selling socks.”

In 1999, Bonga’s father had only just re-established himself when civil war came again. “Everything was burned again. And he still didn’t give up, but started again. And now he’s doing very well.”

“I’m grateful that everyone I knew is still alive,” says Bonga. “And at least after the war I was able to go to a very good public school in Sierra Leone.”

That school was the first step on a path that led him to the African Leadership Academy and then to Rochester.

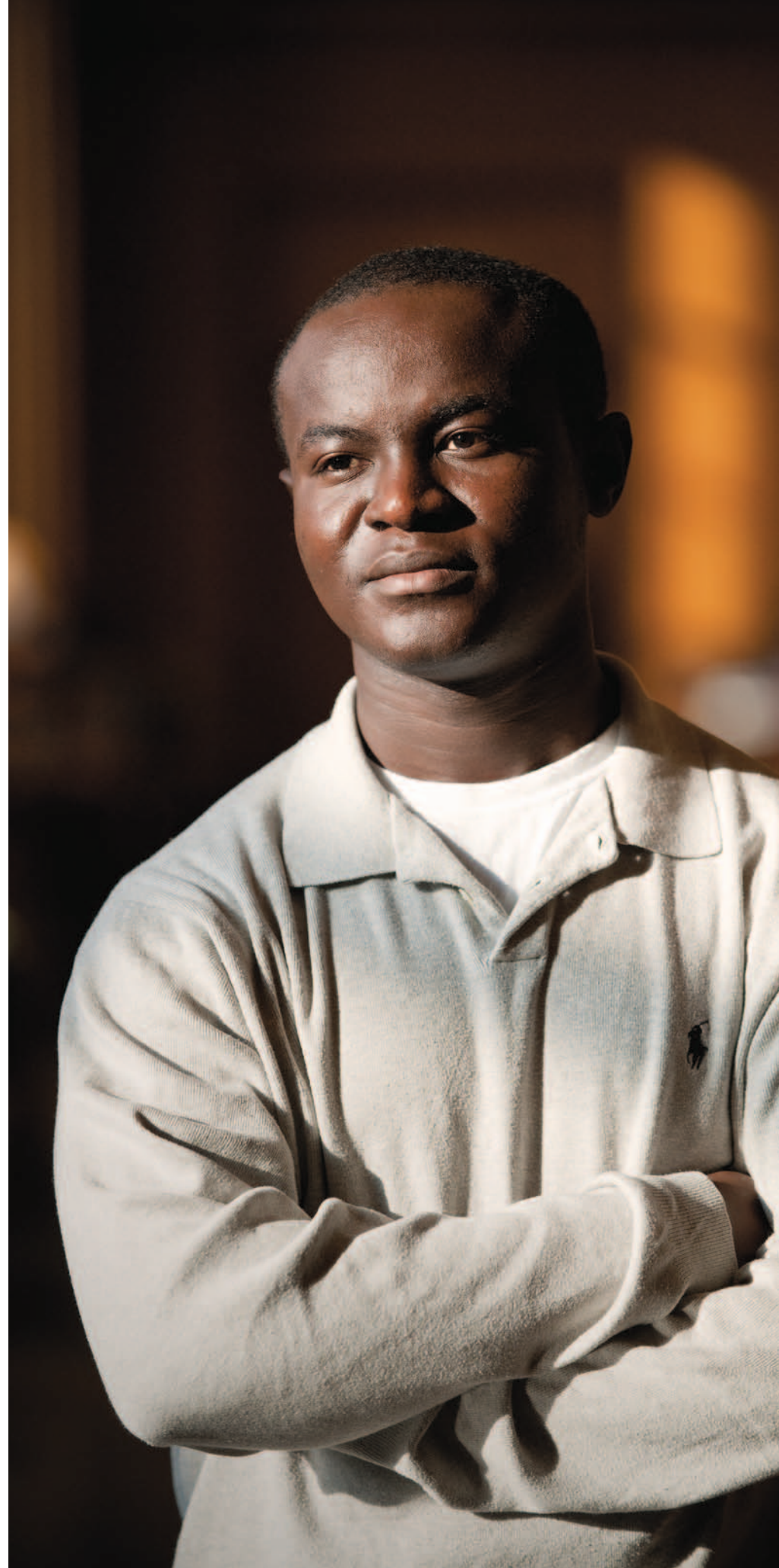
Bonga is fairly certain of the road he wants to travel now that he is at Rochester. He intends to study electrical and computer engineering and return to Sierra Leone to help rebuild infrastructure decimated during the war.

“Right now, Sierra Leone lacks investors. And one reason might be the political instability. But another might be that we don’t have much of an electrical supply for industries,” he says.

Indeed, electricity has been a huge issue in Sierra Leone, where even in the capital city, most businesses must rely on private generators.

Bonga says he’s enjoying his introductory engineering course and is looking forward to delving more deeply into the electrical and computer engineering program that was a major factor in his decision to come to Rochester.

“The professors are quite open,” he says, “always ready to talk to you and answer your questions.”





Bridget Chabunya

Lilongwe, Malawi

It takes a discerning ear to identify what any North American student might consider an “accent” as Bridget Chabunya talks about her time at the African Leadership Academy, her first semester at Rochester, and her desire to return to her native Malawi to help improve the country’s health system.

“People are surprised when they find out I’m not American,” she says.

Or Canadian.

Chabunya spent 10 years growing up in Ottawa, Canada, where her father was stationed at the Malawi embassy. Then, the family returned home to Lilongwe, the capital city of Malawi, in 2005.

“I had bits of my home country with me growing up in Canada. My parents had a big influence introducing me to the culture,” says Chabunya. “Unfortunately, I lost the language, though I can still understand it,” she adds, referring to her native language of Chichewa.

Back in Malawi, Chabunya was nominated by her school’s principal to apply to the African Leadership Academy, and then was admitted. To accept the offer would mean spending a year longer in secondary school than she had planned.

She decided to go. “I’m really glad I did,” she says. “If it wasn’t for them, I wouldn’t be here.”

At the academy, she presented a yearlong research project she conducted on pharmacogenomics, or the study of the interaction between certain genetic markers and pharmaceuticals. Noting the continent’s struggles with HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, Chabunya explained the potential of pharmacogenomics “to create drugs designed specifically for African needs.”

In her culminating project, a demonstration of social entrepreneurship required of all students at the school, she and her classmates started an afterschool program in a South African township with a high poverty level. “We called it KWIT—Kids With Insane Talent,” she says.

“I was, I guess you would say, the president of the organization,” says Chabunya. “And I picked the successor. So I still talk with him and ask him how it’s going,” adding that applications to KWIT have risen this year.

During her first semester, Chabunya chose courses that offered her a solid beginning for study of biological sciences or public health, and she took advantage of the freedom that draws many students to Rochester: biology, chemistry, American Sign Language, and a dance class.

It was her initial visit, however, that clinched her decision. “I met a group of amazing people from the Pan-African Students Association,” she says, referring to the student organization whose members hosted Chabunya and her academy classmates in the spring of 2010. “They just made me feel welcome. Their experience here helped me to realize that I would love it here.”

(Continued from page 18) Furthermore, on most of the African continent, secondary education is conducted in English. “In terms of English language acquisition and skills beyond, I think Africa is likely to prove over the long term a really important place for universities like ours,” Burdick says.

“We had only had a handful of students from Africa in all schools and levels of the University just a few years ago,” says Falciano. In 2005, there were eight. In the 2010–11 academic year, there are 25.

One reason Rochester has been able to compete more effectively for top international students is the expansion of the Renaissance Scholars program. Says Phil Bradley, an assistant director of admissions who helps select and advise the scholars, Renaissance scholarships had originally been offered to “the best of the freshman class.” In 2003, funding was increased and the effort was renamed the Renaissance and Global Scholars program to reflect a mission that had evolved to attract not only top talent, but top talent from an ethnically, regionally, and internationally diverse pool.

“You want students who are very academically sound,” says Bradley, “but it’s also about the ‘X factor.’ What other really strong piece of the puzzle do they bring?”

THIS ACADEMIC YEAR, THERE ARE 85 RENAISSANCE AND Global Scholars, 27 of them freshmen. They come from Hong Kong, Malaysia, Nepal, Ukraine, India, and multiple other countries, as well as from Africa.

“Having a much different experience, they enhance the institution,” says Bradley. “In the classes that they’re in, in the clubs and organizations that they’re a part of, they’re going to bring a much different perspective, so that they not only have a great experience, but the students that they meet and the classes that they’re part of are enhanced because of their presence.”


Among the African freshmen, almost half come from the first graduating class of a single school, the African Leadership Academy, a private secondary school outside Johannesburg, South Africa.

But, says Bradley, “The beauty of the African Leadership Academy is that they bring students from all over Africa.”

Fred Swaniker, an American-educated Ghanaian social entrepreneur, founded the academy in 2008 for students across the African continent showing exceptional leadership, entrepreneurial, and academic potential, as well as a passion to use their skills to improve political and social conditions in Africa. In numerical terms, the academy is about as difficult—or more difficult—to get into as any top American university. Only 7 percent of a select group of applicants was ultimately admitted to its entering class.

Burdick made contact with leaders at the academy last winter, and ultimately Rochester made offers to seven out of 13 applicants. Six accepted, which makes Rochester home to more academy graduates than any other single university.

The students credit Rochester’s strong programs, particularly in science and engineering, but also the personal attention they received in their first introduction to the University.

“There are times when you speak to someone at the other end of a telephone, and you get the feeling that the admissions officer is doing business as usual,” says Brian Kalugira ’14, of Tanzania, who plans to major in chemical engineering. “And there are people who make you feel like, ‘I’m doing this because I want you here, and I want you to have this opportunity.’ That’s what Dean Burdick made us feel. And to me that was really important.” 



Oswald Codjoe

Accra, Ghana

Each year, there are a few brave freshmen who, in a new town, at a new school, and with new friendships only weeks old, plunge into campaigns for student government. This year, one of those students was Oswald Codjoe, who arrived not just in a new city, but on a new continent, and became one of eight freshmen elected to the Class of 2014 Council out of a field of 20 candidates.

“I hope to bring students together to learn from their diversity and grow as a strong community so that, together, we shall live out the school’s creed: *Meliora*—‘Ever Better,’” he wrote in his campaign message.

Codjoe knows a few things about diversity, not to mention *Meliora*. Before moving to Johannesburg, South Africa, to become part of the first entering class at the



African Leadership Academy, he'd met few people who weren't from his native Ghana, and virtually no one outside West Africa.

And at the academy, he lived out its mission to help improve the lives of fellow Africans in sustainable ways. At a nearby school for disadvantaged children, Codjoe and several of his classmates helped ensure a steadier food supply for the kids. "We decided to grow a vegetable garden so we could increase production of the vegetables they ate, so that they could feed themselves," Codjoe says.

He's mapped out an academic plan at Rochester that includes a potential double major in economics and political science, a hefty dose of French, and a study abroad program. So far he says he's challenged, but also well prepared.

"I passed the Cambridge A Level exam in economics," says Codjoe, referring to the international college preparatory curriculum on which instruction at the African Leadership Academy is based. "But every time I enter class," he says of Rochester's introductory economics course, Principles of Economics, "I learn something new, or I get an

in-depth understanding of what I already knew. And that's what makes me excited to go to class every time."

The youngest of four children, Codjoe grew up in the capital city of Accra. His siblings and mother still reside there, while his father, a police officer in the Ghana Police Service who has served on United Nations peacekeeping missions in Namibia and East Timor, is now on his third mission in Sudan.

His brothers, both computer technicians, and his sister, enrolled in a secretarial school, "are excited, but also not so excited," about his being so far from home. "When we're back home, we sing in a quartet in church every Sunday. And when I'm not around, they can't sing."

Codjoe says he's not sure what his future will hold, "but every once in a while I get this feeling I'll enter politics."

"Among African countries, Ghana is doing well in terms of governance and democracy. But like any other country, there's still more to be done." Developing the skills of Ghanaian youth, Codjoe says, "is one area where a lot needs to be done."



Sarah Ndegwa

Nairobi, Kenya

What immediately surprised Sarah Ndegwa in her first days at Rochester was something many American students at private universities take for granted.

“I didn’t know you can just choose to study what you want,” says Ndegwa, a native of Kenya, a nation with a higher education system developed under British colonial rule. Under that system, university students declare a course of study on day one, and it is one that they’ve qualified for, based on entrance exams.

“I chose neuroscience because I knew I was good at neuroscience,” says Ndegwa of what she once indicated was her intended major. With all the possibilities she now knows she has, Ndegwa says, “I now call myself undecided.” But her ultimate goals have not changed. “I’m really interested in public health. That one I’m sure of.”

Her fall semester schedule included the introductory biology, chemistry, and calculus courses typical for premed students, plus a psychology course. She has one word to describe her classes so far: “Intense.”

“Having come from my country and being one of the best, I come here and think, ‘Oh my God, I have to be the best.’ It’s so much. It’s very challenging. But it’s worth it.”

Ndegwa grew up in the Rift Valley province of Kenya, a member of the majority tribe, the Kikuyu. She was raised by her mother, who

holds a degree in hospitality and management that served her well in a nation in which tourism is a major industry. In December 2007, what Ndegwa describes as a peaceful childhood and adolescence was suddenly disrupted, after a surprise victory by the incumbent Kikuyu presidential candidate generated charges of fraud, which in turn sparked violent protests along tribal lines. Ndegwa’s extended family no longer believed Sarah and her mother were safe. “They said to my mom, ‘You have to go. Leave everything behind.’”

Ndegwa graduated from high school in Nairobi where, by happenstance, she learned about the Zawadi Africa education fund, which assists talented African girls without financial means with college application advice and scholarship aid. In a small study room at Zawadi’s Nairobi headquarters, she coached herself in preparation for the SATs. Rochester, which is one of about 40 American colleges and universities that partner with Zawadi, was among five schools to which counselors at the foundation suggested Ndegwa apply.

Although she’s no longer sure she’ll major in neuroscience, she says she knows she’ll stick with the sciences, and perhaps pursue a master’s in public health before going on to medical school.

“I’m really interested in working for international organizations to improve the health systems in Africa,” she says. “When I came here I was really impressed with how you just pay for your insurance, and then you get your card, and you go to your hospital. In my country? Very different. You wouldn’t get treated if you didn’t have money.”