Management Education as a Crucible for Ethical Social Change

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Purpose, Significance and Impact

This chapter is an exploration of an aspirational ethics program for undergraduate students that carries an optimistic set of goals for their potential to act as **agents of social change**. Ashesi University College is a private not-for-profit, 501(c)3 organization, undergraduate-only university college in Berekuso, Ghana. Founded in 2002, its mission is to train a new generation of ethical, entrepreneurial business leaders in Africa and to nurture excellence in scholarship, leadership and citizenship. Students graduate with degrees in Business Administration, Management Information Systems, Engineering and Computer Science, all based on a liberal arts model. When compared with institutions around the world that offer business and management degrees, there are *three* main defining aspects that make Ashesi distinct and reflect its commitment to ethical standards. The first is the commitment to gender and economic class diversity: 47% of students are female; 55% of students receive some level of scholarship funding (http://www.ashesi.edu.gh/), and 25% receive a full scholarship.

This level of commitment to a diverse student body is quite unusual in institutions of higher learning generally, and in African nations and Ghana specifically (Atuahene and Owusu-Ansah 2013). It is even more unusual in institutions that focus on subjects associated with traditionally male-dominated fields such as business, computer science, and engineering. For instance in the United States, women earn fewer than 20% of undergraduate engineering degrees (Yoder 2016), and in the

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UK under 15% of those earning an engineering degree and only 5.5% of engineering professionals are female (http://www.wes.org.uk/statistics). The first impact therefore is access to an engineering degree for females in Africa.

The second distinguishing characteristic of Ashesi is the high employment rate of graduates, the impact therefore being successful attainment of employment: According to records kept by the College, 96% of its students are employed 3 months post-graduation, and 90% of students remain in Africa, either in Ghana or their home country. In Ghana, like much of Africa, pervasive unemployment of college graduates is a major national concern and obstacle for economic growth (Kokutse 2011; Owusu 2014); the level of post-graduate employment for Ashesi students presents a dramatic exception. The third characteristic is the commitment to the Honor Code: Ashesi has an examination Honor Code and a Code of Ethics. Though honor codes governing behavior during examinations are commonplace at institutions of higher learning in the United States and Europe, they are virtually non-existent in African colleges and universities. In this way, Ashesi is not only exceptional, but unique among Ghanaian educational institutions of higher learning. The origin, implementation, and continued employment of the precepts in Ashesi's Honor Code are the focus of this chapter.

On a scale where "0" is the *most corrupt* and "100" the *least corrupt*, New Zealand ties with Denmark as having the least corruption in the world with the highest score of 91; Afghanistan has a low score of 12, and Ghana falls in the middle with a score of 46 (http://www.transparency.org/country). Among the goals for Ashesi graduates, administrators pointedly identify **social change through ethical leadership**, specifically the reduction of corruption in Ghana and on the African continent generally. Patrick Awuah, President of Ashesi, articulates this goal:

> I believe that when people think in an ethical way, they have empathy. They have a conscience, and they are better citizens and better leaders, which is what Ashesi is all about. I also hope that it will be become clear to other universities and their student bodies that people can be successful and ethical in our country and that Ashesi students will demonstrate this. They have a big responsibility to be ethical leaders... I hope that institutions that frown on cheating and unethical behavior will become the norm in Ghana.

Using a justice-based ethical system to prioritize diversity in gender and socioeconomic class and inviting students to experience and implement ethical behavior on personal and interpersonal levels, the intention is to create and educate honorable business leaders who then change the expectations for honesty and integrity in the larger culture. The plan is for Ashesi graduates to work in private sector initially (they are currently not embraced by the public sector). Overtime, as graduates become leaders in the private sector business community, the hope is that they will be in the position and have the inclination to join and influence the public sector, and therefore ultimately transform the current commonplace corruption in Ghana into a culture that reflects honesty and integrity. One Ashesi graduate explains:

Most Ashesi students would leave public institutions or we would get kicked out anyway. We are doing good work in private institutions...Eventually some [Ashesi graduates] will become wealthy enough to participate [in the public sector]. For that it is just time. You need someone who has enough clout who says I want to make the public systems work. Once you get more Ashesians in civil service, change will come. It will come with time. As a country do we have that time? I would say we have to wait because it has to happen sometime even if it happens in the next 50 years.

The aspiration is that ethically-trained business people in the private sector will raise the standards of the public sector, indeed of the culture generally; this is both idealistic and staggeringly ambitious. By using in-depth interviewing techniques to explore the lives of Ashesi graduates and hear whether and how these aspirations follow them into their workplace and personal interactions, this research builds on earlier interviews with students and faculty members (Godwyn 2015). Previously conducted interviews with Ashesi students and faculty members were overwhelmingly positive about the life and culture-changing possibilities of the educational interventions employed at the College. This continued research seeks to ascertain whether the ambitions behind the educational interventions are realized in postgraduate life as former students become workplace participants.

The significance and benefits of this research are twofold. First, it adds to the research literature that examines whether or not educational interventions carry over once undergraduate students begin their lives as young adults outside the educational organization. An increasing number of studies demonstrates that long-term success measured in post-graduate degree attainment and job placement (Treisman 1992), and salary, personal life satisfaction, and community involvement can be affected by educational interventions when the interventions are conducted within certain parameters (Langowitz et al. 2013; Godwyn 2009; Godwyn and Langowitz 2015). Here the question is whether ethics training received at the undergraduate level is manifest in workplace behavior, mindset, and identity after students graduate. The case of Ashesi is especially compelling as these interventions are unique among African institutions of higher learning. Ashesi intends the intervention to ignite a cultural shift in ethical behavior, and Ashesi students are potentially positioned to do so as they have an extraordinarily high rate of employment despite the current crisis of unemployment for many Ghanaian college graduates (Kokutse 2011; Owusu 2014).

The second area of significance to explore is whether those employed in the private sector can become ethical leaders in the public sector and influence and raise cultural standards of ethical behavior. As discussed in the literature review below, ethical leadership by corporate executives often engenders skepticism in developed nations such as the U.S. and Western European countries where corporate actors are largely viewed as instrumentalizing and vitiating ethical standards in the public sphere through outright fraud and deception or through manipulation of information in campaigns associated with greenwashing and corporate social responsibility. Philanthrocapitalism is also viewed with suspicion curtailing the avenues where positive impact investment can be made with credibility. However, in areas where governments are relatively unstable and public corruption is rampant, the private sector might well be a crucible for raising civil and ethical conduct in public life.

The focus in this research is to what degree the ethical standards of a private undergraduate college can be maintained in workplaces that are situated within a culture rife with corruption. Even further, can an ethical culture in education be extrapolated to achieve social and environmental goals alongside with financial performance? Can an ethical code learned and adopted in an undergraduate educational environment sustain and persist when students graduate and enter the world of business and commerce? Is it possible for these graduates to ameliorate entrenched corruption by enacting the ethical guidelines they have adopted?

Methods

We use qualitative methodology to explore the Honor Code from the perspectives of approximately 20 Ashesi graduates. We also interviewed some core faculty members and administrators who were able to give background regarding the origin, vision, and ambition behind the Honor Code. One author of this research (Buchele) was a member of the administrative team when the Honor Code was launched at Ashesi. Graduates were asked to describe the transition from using the Honor Code at Ashesi to their post-graduate life in the workplace. We solicited graduate interviewees on a volunteer basis through disseminating information about the study with the help of the Alumni Office. Administrators in the position to offer institutional history and knowledge helped make sure that the study was not skewed toward opinions held by a few, but that our sample would be widely representational. To this end, the list of the graduates who volunteered to be interviewed was vetted to ensure they were not merely individuals who came back to Ashesi to act as guest speakers on the benefits of the Honor Code.

The data collection methods are qualitative survey questions and in-depth interviews. Emergent themes are compared to extant literature and analysis is primarily qualitative interview data research using data analyzed by applying an iterative process to search for key words and themes (Charmaz 2001; Yin 1984; Emerson 1983). Interviews were conducted with 23 graduates remotely by written questionnaires, and by phone and Skype. Interviews began with open-ended questions (see Appendix A for the recruitment solicitation and examples of interview questions for graduates) tailored to elicit narratives: the interviewer listens and responds by asking for clarification of the respondent's descriptions of her/his experiences. In this way, the interactional and relational approach creates another opportunity for the respondent to develop interpretations and build on existing narratives. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed.

The research questions around which the interviews are conducted are: (1) How are ethical theories and practices are incorporated into student life? and (2) To what degree, if any, are graduates able to maintain these ethical standards in their workplace and personal lives once they leave Ashesi? We were granted approval to work with human subjects by the Institutional Review Boards of both Babson College and Ashesi University College.

Literature Review

The literature review below samples three main areas of scholarship relevant to this study: (1) The continued use and success of educational interventions on students after they graduate; (2) First-hand accounts of ethical standards in organizations; and (3) Private sector ethics as a guide for public sector policies.

The Use and Success of Educational Interventions

There is a deep and rich literature of studies identifying educational interventions and how these interventions affect students while they are attending school. Fewer studies follow students after graduation to examine what, if any, effect educational interventions continue to have. The group of studies we draw from here spans almost four decades of research, and each study finds that, when certain parameters of delivery are met, educational interventions with a wide range of goals such as increase in mathematical (Treisman 1992) and standardized test performance (Steele 1997), increase in successful entrepreneurial activity (Godwyn 2009), and increase leadership, income, and life satisfaction (Langowitz et al. 2013) can positively affect the performance and success of the targeted group of students within the institution. The two studies described in depth below also report that educational interventions can follow students into post-graduation life. The first study is authored by Uri Treisman (1992) on mathematical success of African American students in undergraduate calculus classes, and the second is a study by Langowitz et al. (2013) on women's leadership. Both describe increases in student performance that travel with them after graduation. Finally in this section, some of the key elements of educational interventions are also listed in order to explore their applicability to the Ashesi Honor Code.

African American Student Success in Undergraduate Calculus Courses

In the mid-1970s, as a graduate student in at University of California, Berkeley, Uri Treisman noticed a demographic peculiarity with regard to success in undergraduate calculus classes: Asian students had very high grades and African American and Hispanic students did very poorly. In fact, in a 10-year period, 60% of the African American students had received grades of D or F, and in no year did more than two Black or Hispanic students earn more than a B (Treisman 1992: 364). To compare the ethnic group with the poorest performance to the one with the best, Treisman randomly selected 20 African American students and 20 Chinese students to investigate the performance discrepancy. Treisman found that both were groups of

motivated students; each group of individuals spent about 8 hours a week on calculus work; each group had family support and had strong high school records in mathematics. The salient difference between the groups was the *way* they studied. Chinese students studied together, asked for help from their professors when needed, and created what Treisman referred to as, "something like a truly academic fraternity" (1992: 366). African American students, on the other hand, tended to study alone, avoid practice sessions with teaching assistants, and were hesitant to reach out to instructors when they had questions or problems. Treisman reasoned that African American students did not seek help because they feared confirming the stereotype that African Americans are intellectually inferior. Furthermore, that stereotype seemed substantiated by the pattern of poor grades earned by African Americans.

Treisman created an educational intervention wherein he replicated the study groups used by Chinese students and welcomed African American students to partake—not as students who needed remediation for mathematical or intellectual inferiority, but as particularly talented students. African American students were invited to join the groups based on their talent and interest in mathematics. The groups were therefore accreditation and honorific rather than remedial. With regard to the impact of this educational intervention, Treisman reports:

> The results of the program were quite dramatic. Black and Latino participants...*substantially outperformed not only their minority peers, but their White and Asian classmates as well.* Many of the students from these early workshops have gone on to become physicians, scientists, and engineers. One Black woman became a Rhodes Scholar, and many others have won distinguished graduate fellowships. (Treisman 1992: 369, emphasis added)

Treisman set up similar programs for the University of Texas at Austin and City University New York. As a result of these programs, the grade point average for minority students became higher than that of non-minority students and higher than the class average. At University of Texas, minorities earned a 3.53 compared to a 1.66 average GPA for non-minority students, and at CUNY, minorities earned a GPA of 3.2 compared to the 1.8 class average (Treisman 1992: 371–372).

Women's Career Outcomes: Salary and Life Satisfaction

In an attempt to address the continuing wage and status gap between women and men in late-stage business careers, Langowitz et al. explore whether undergraduate educational interventions might impact early-stage career outcomes with respect to gender. Similar to the fallacious stereotype of intellectual inferiority that surrounds African Americans, women are often erroneously typecast as inferior in the workplace, especially in business management and in leadership roles. Langowitz et al. write:

> Indeed, despite many years of research and changing social norms, studies find that the persistent stereotype "think manager—think male" remains entrenched (Schein 2007) and

behaviors continue to be interpreted differently in the workplace based upon gender and minority status (Westphal and Stern 2007; Langowitz et al. 2013: 115).

Similar to Treisman's study, Langowitz et al. examined the post-graduate effects of forming "anti-remedial" (Treisman 1992: 368) accreditation groups that provided ways that the targeted population could acquire expertise despite social expectations that work against them. In addition to the standard business curriculum, gender specific, accreditation experiences were included under the co-curricular honorific Women's Leadership Programming (WLP) for a group of female undergraduate business students. Sample activities included mentorship "by experienced women business professionals, talks by women leaders and entrepreneurs, volunteer service activities, and discussions; all of which provide an opportunity to consider issues around women's leadership and careers, as well as a strong social connection" (Langowitz et al. 2013: 118).

Post-graduate surveys with undergraduate women who experienced the Women's Leadership Program found that these women still earned less money than their male counterparts; however, they experienced significantly *less of a pay gap* when compared to their female peers who had not been similarly exposed to an accreditation group. The wage gap for those women in the WLP was $9633 less than male graduates versus $16,945 for all women versus men (Langowitz et al. 2013: 123). Additionally, after graduation the female students included in the accreditation group not only reported more life satisfaction than the female undergraduates not included in the WLP intervention—they experienced more life satisfaction than did their male counterparts (Langowitz et al. 2013: 126). Langowitz et al. write: "The good news is that we have evidence that educational interventions can have a countervailing impact. Both gender studies coursework and women's leadership support ameliorate the salary differential. In particular, we find that [Women's Leadership Programming] can significantly narrow the gender pay gap" (Langowitz et al. 2013: 129).

Some commonalities across studies of successful educational interventions, including those with effects that continue after graduation, are: (1) Creating learning communities that provide both academic and peer social support; (2) Constructing honorific and accreditation programs in which membership becomes a source of pride rather than remedial programs that assume inferiority at the task; and (3) Ascribing success to effort, desire, and practice rather than to natural inborn talent. To the degree that Ashesi's ethical standards continue to be implemented by graduates in their work and personal lives, we would expect that this educational intervention would have some elements in common with others in the literature.

First-Hand Accounts of Ethical Standards in Organizations

The central role of ethics at Ashesi and the goal of initiating ethical social change are quite an unusual combination in undergraduate institutions. Additionally, first-hand

accounts from students and graduates who have participated in honor systems is also scarce. The extant research literature using qualitative methods tends to explore workplace organizations rather than educational institutions. Studies of the ethical codes in schools most often use quantitative survey data rather than interview data. Additionally, in these studies, faculty members and administrators, rather than students, are most often surveyed see Davies et al. (2009) and Yar et al. (2009). The ethical codes studied tend to concentrate narrowly on academic honesty rather than, as at Ashesi, codes of conduct that also guide interpersonal behavior. Aspirational codes of conduct intended to create large scale social change exist in some religious universities, but there are no supporting evaluations of the long-term efficacy of these ethical programs in the available research.

As mentioned, studies using ethnographic research, (i.e., in-depth interviews and participant observation to reveal and develop narratives about the ethical codes, as we do here) tend to focus on employees in the workplace. For instance, Robert Jackall (2011) and Jana Craft (2013) focus on corporate executives; Craft specifically interviews those who are in prison for ethical and legal violations. Arlie Hochschild (1983) and Martin Tolich research service workers (1993), and Jennifer Pierce (1995) studies attorneys. Morris and Feldman and Tolich (1997) examine the emotion work necessary to negotiate workplace ethics when these ethics are at odds with personal and/or social and cultural ethical values and behavior. Though these studies are situated in the workplace, they provide a basis to explore how individuals narrate the negotiation and incorporation of ethical codes in their daily activity. We used this research to guide us in developing interview questions and analysing interview data.

Private Sector Ethics as a Guide for Public Sector Policies

It is not a new idea that private sector ethics, that is, ethics within privately funded entities such as companies, foundations, and universities, can influence wider cultural values and public policies. Though this is often interpreted as a deterioration or degradation of public sector definitions of civil order and integrity, there is also the notion that in situations where social values in the public sphere from organizations such as governments, unions, and religious groups reach a critical mass of corruption or impotence, the private sector can act to raise the level of ethical behavior in the larger culture.

Twentieth-century U.S. history for instance, reveals widespread corporate policies from the 1950s through the 1970s that sought to balance productivity and profit with respect for governmental regulations and workers' rights. Elisabeth S. Clemens argues that during this relatively short time, corporations, like governments, were judged in part by their degree of social responsibility (2009) indicating that social welfare and public opinion were powerful predictors of private sector success. This arrangement resulted in the "sharing of prosperity" (Marens 2009: 112).

However, as the U.S. economy began to stagnate in the 1980s, and governmental support for labor unions decreased, social good was increasingly entrusted to the decision-making executives in private corporations. In this context, Edward R. Freeman (1984) proposed stakeholder theory. In its ideal implementation, stakeholder theory instructs managers to consider every stakeholder's interest along with corporate goals, as opposed to merely making decisions that will maximize profit. In this way, the corporation, and the decision-making managers, became a substitute for the roles once played by union protections and government regulations; executives at private companies were therefore expected to act as ethical leaders and guide the social mores.

The private sector as social custodian is, however, generally met with skepticism and suspicion.

Most recently the phenomenon of philanthrocapitalism has been on the rise in the United States, and has received very mixed reviews. The American economist James Surowiecki admits that, "It's reasonable to lament the fact that a small number of billionaires have so much power over which problems get dealt with and which do not. But they have that power precisely because they are spending so much of their money to solve global problems. We, as a country, are not" (2015: 40). Surowiecki commends Bill Gates for investing in public health and education measures as a "vital" contribution from which we will all benefit. On the other hand, Matthew Reisz warns of the perils of philanthrocapitalism,

> The Gates Foundation now contributes about 10 per cent of the total budget of the World Health Organisation, leading to allegations that it has undue influence on the organisation's policies: a worry all the more serious given the contentious positions it has taken on, for example, the right balance between treatment and prevention in addressing HIV/Aids (2015).

Moreover, in some cases charitable contributions funnelled through private foundations serve as tax shelters and deny governments millions of dollars in revenue. Along with charitable contributions, foundation funds fuel for-profit companies such as media outlets that act as uncritical reporters of the foundation's unbridled generosity (Reisz 2015). Jane Mayer also reports that though billionaire philanthrocapitalists David and Charles Koch make huge donations to cultural organizations such as the Metropolitan Opera, the American Ballet, and the American Museum of Natural History, they are probably best known for funding right-wing political causes and giving large contributions to conservative political candidates, who "believe in drastically lower personal and corporate taxes, minimal social services for the needy, and much less oversight of industry—especially environmental regulation" (2010). Koch Industries has been named one of the top ten air polluters in the United States (Mayer 2010). The concern is that the mega rich, rather than representatives chose by the electorate, are determining public policy, and this can have devastating effects on the democratic process.

Philanthrocapitalism and Positive Impact Investing at Ashesi

Described by CNN as a "millionaire who left Microsoft to educate Africa's future leaders" (Duthiers and Ellis 2013), in some ways, President and Founder of Ashesi University College, Patrick Awuah, is a typical philanthrocapitalist. Unlike Bill Gates or Mark Zuckerberg, however, Awuah is not merely giving large sums of money to a cause, he is living it. Born in Accra, Awuah was educated in the United States and then returned to Ghana with a mission: to change the African continent by producing the next generation of leaders who exemplified the highest level of ethical conduct. Awuah saw education as the beginning of a movement that could resituate Africa on the world stage and inspire pride, hope, and honor in all those of African descent:

> In this country, only 5% of college-age kids go to college...And there's two problems with that number: one, is it's too small, but the second is that everyone who goes to college by definition is going to be running this country one day, the 5%—they're going to be running the courts; they're going to be designing roads and buildings and infrastructure; they're going to be running the hospitals, the schools, the businesses. So when I look at universities I see Africa fast-forward 30 years. When this 20-year-old is now in his or her 50s, that person is going to be a leader. And so I felt that engaging how that leadership, that future leadership core, is educated could be catalytic...The world needs to change in this way, and I strongly believe that people like me who have had the privilege of a great education need to be part of the solution; that I need to be really actively involved in helping to drive this change in Africa so that 30, 50 years from now, the world will be a different place for all people of African descent in the world. (Duthiers and Ellis 2013)

Though Awuah envisioned an ethical ecosystem that would inspire and educate the next generation of leaders, he admits the Honor Code was not his idea.

> I had the vision of having an ethical body and educating ethical people, yes. But the Honor System was not mine. It came about on campus from the executive team. We don't want the Ashesi Code of Conduct owned by me or the administration. We want the students to own it. We had a conversation about a student-run Honor System. Then the Dean of Students and the Student Government stepped in.
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> The logic was sustainability. If it is going to last, there has to be an institutional culture around it. Without culture, then all we are doing at best is ensuring students won't cheat if they think they will be caught. They are not holding themselves accountable. The goal was to have a culture of integrity embedded in Ashesi and really owned. It then became a core part of the institution that everyone holds dear.

An example of CSR, and Impact Investing, the MasterCard Foundation is the major donor of financial aid and supplies the vast majority of Ashesi scholarship funding. In 2015, they provided full scholarship, room, board, laptop, transportation to and from home and Ashesi, and summer programming to 60 students per year. This number is expected to increase next year. Several other private foundations including the Ashesi University Foundation, Old Mutual, and the African American Institute are also donors. The funding from private foundations allows Ashesi to fulfil its commitment to a diverse student body. Currently, there is no record that Ashesi students have become employed by MasterCard or other donors, but that might be changing. One administrator commented that she thought MasterCard would like to hire Ashesi graduates.

Disputing the notion that private executives could and should act as ethical leaders for the wider culture, Subhabrata Bobby Banerjee invokes Michel Foucault's concept of subjectification (Foucault 1979, 1980). In this context, subjectification theorizes that managers become subjects of the corporation and develop their sense of meaning and reality through their identification with the interests of the firm. Banerjee therefore argues that managers are not free to make socially responsible decisions as these are often in conflict with profit maximization (2008: 58). Muhammad Yunus agrees. Yunus states that because of the mandate to maximize shareholder interests, there is little dispute that social responsibility is a distant second to profit accumulation: "What about when the demands of the marketplace and the long-term interests of society conflict? What will companies do? Experience shows that profit always wins out. (Yunus 2007: 17).

The relevant question for this research is whether those Ashesi alumni in the private sector can maintain ethics that reflect and prioritize public welfare and deontological objectives, especially when social considerations and ethical principles conflict with private sector interests, including the short-term interests of individuals. As one graduate notes:

> Currently, people don't like to deal with Ashesians because we try to fight a corrupt system, and then you are stepping on people's toes. And you might be robbing them of their livelihood. They are not going to thank you for that even if it is in the best interest of the nation in the long run.

The Origin and Implementation of the Honor Code at Ashesi University College and Beyond

The Honor Code was voted into force by students at Ashesi in January of 2008. The purpose of the code was to create community with shared ethical principles and for students to adopt and enact those principles through self-monitoring: "The Honour System at Ashesi provides an avenue for students to practice doing the right thing even when no one is watching. In other words, they develop a habit of honourable behaviour that is internally driven" http://www.ashesi.edu.gh/images/about/the%20honour%20system%20at%20ashesi%20university%20college%20-%20white%20paper.pdf

Through the entire first year of study at Ashesi, students are introduced to the specifics of the Honor Code. In their second year, each class of students has the opportunity to vote on whether the class as a whole will adopt and live by the Honor Code. In this way the Honor Code is a living and emerging set of ideas and practices that are given life, or not, through the will and actions of students. Two-thirds of the class must vote to adopt the Honor Code, otherwise class exams will be proctored, as is traditional in Ghana, and ethical behavior will be externally enforced by school administration. Each class except one has so far embraced the Honor Code. Awuah explains that not everyone has the confidence the Honor Code is viable:

> [The class of] 2009—did not join the Honor Code. They were not convinced it would work. We need a 2/3 majority. That class didn't vote because they were not eager to join.

However, the decision not to join the Honor Code is not interpreted as permission to violate the code. The Honor System White Paper states:

> Not joining the honour system does not constitute a license to cheat; it only means that members of the class will be less trusted than others in this community. The university will continue to hold students individually responsible for complying with the university's code of ethics. http://www.ashesi.edu.gh/images/about/the%20honour%20system%20at%20ashesi%20university%20college%20-%20white%20paper.pdf

The first graduating class to fully experience the Honor Code was the class of 2012 (3 years prior to the gathering of the research for this article). The graduating classes of 2010 and 2011 did vote to accept the Honor Code, but later than the first semester of their sophomore years. The Honor Code is therefore relatively new to Ashesi and remains groundbreaking, and currently a unique, educational innovation in African institutions of higher learning. Graduates who experienced the Honor Code have recently entered the labor force.

The first part of the Honor Code is the Examination Code of Conduct that describes acceptable behavior during unproctored exams. The Ashesi Administration explains the purpose behind the code is to imbue the community with trust and to give students ethical autonomy and responsibility for their conduct: "The adoption of the Examination Honour Code marks a significant step in the history of Ashesi University. The code is intended to build a high-trust community, to put students in charge of their ethical posture and the reputation of their alma mater, and by so doing, to take a significant step in Ashesi's mission to educate a new generation of ethical leaders in Africa" http://www.ashesi.edu.gh/about/ashesi-at-a-glance/honour-code-16.html.

At the end of each exam, students sign a statement verifying they have received no unauthorized assistance and that they have not violated any of the conditions of the Examination Code of Conduct. Conditions include leaving books and other aids outside the classroom when taking a test and turning electronic devices off. Perhaps the most difficult condition is that students commit to reporting violations or obstructions of the Honor Code made by themselves and by other students. Over time, students have expanded the Examination Honor Code at Ashesi to include a general code of conduct covering behaviour such as honesty in interpersonal relations.

Ashesi Graduates' Comments on the Honor Code

The graduates interviewed here were uniformly enthusiastic about and committed to the Honor Code. In the 23 interviews conducted, the primary repeated themes were: (1) The Honor Code became a "lifestyle;" (2) Graduates think about the world differently than they did before attending Ashesi; and (3) It can be a struggle to

enact the Honor Code in their adult lives and to reconcile it with the behaviour of those around them. However, all of the graduates voiced an ongoing committed to maintaining the Honor Code in both their personal and work lives and were readily able to give examples of how they did this.

The Honor Code as a "Lifestyle"

Demonstrating the internalization of the Honor Code, many interviewees, termed it a "lifestyle." The Honor Code had become so inculcated and graduates identified with it to such a strong degree that after graduating from Ashesi, abiding by the Honor Code was no longer experienced as a choice, but a given. Representative comments are:

> So it's more of a lifestyle. It is good to do the right thing and not just cheat to get to where you want to get to. It does affect my day-to-day activities.

> My understanding of the Honour Code has grown since my days at Ashesi. It is not just about exams; it's a life decision. To live and act in a way that is honourable at all times. Why is it so necessary for us? Someone who cheats on an exam might be prone to doing the same at work: taking credit for work they didn't do, using information against people or slacking as a team member on a project and expecting others to cover for them. Now when I encounter people who say 'Ashesi students don't have invigilators, and I don't understand why,' I say to them, the Honour Code is not about examinations and has never been. It's a pillar we live by.

> Having experienced the impact of the Honour Code myself, I believe it is a wonderful mission and should be an action every institution should practice. The Honour Code goes beyond a student being ethical in taking examinations; it is a way of life. If schools, businesses, government can build and hold to ethics and integrity within their sectors, one can imagine the impact it will have on the Ghanaian economy as a whole.

Thinking about Ethics Differently

Many students reflected on their development of an ethical self through their experiences of the Honor Code at Ashesi. They described looking at the world differently and reevaluating their own options for behavior within various environments. These narrative accounts focus on becoming aware of a dimensionality of assessment and action they had not been conscious of prior to becoming part of the Ashesi community. Comments include:

> Ashesi gave me a direction and structure. I was never confronted with that situation. It made me more aware. . .Now I realize I am more reluctant to compromise my position, and I would only do it with great reluctance and try not to. In an exam situation I never did it. But now I am less able to ignore situations and make an effort not to compromise my integrity because now it is more important to me than it was before Ashesi.

> It's certainly a noble goal. It was introduced in my second year and I thought it was a cool thing to be able to write a paper without anyone looking over my shoulder as if I couldn't be trusted. Initially, I even thought we would be able to listen to music while writing papers!

The actual weight of what was required hit me when my friends cheated in the very first exam we had under the Honor Code. I reported it, and when they found out, I was ostracized for a time. Nevertheless, I continued to act honourably; not just in exam cases, but in all other aspects of my life. It was (and is) always a struggle, but one I feel is worth it.

Challenges of Implementing the Honor Code Post-graduation

While voicing a strong continuing commitment to the principles embodied in the Honor Code, one of the most prevalent themes among graduates was the difficulty of maintaining their ethical position in both in their work and personal lives.

It is more challenging outside school because you come across things when you don't know what is right. I used to work for [a company] where you can't get the business for the company unless you pay a kickback. This was a serious challenge. How is this possible? It goes against what I believe in and what I learned in school. But, I was able to get the contract without promising a kickback. It is challenging to decide what exactly to do.

It was hard because here I was, 'ready to conquer the world' with what I had learnt, but people on the outside felt differently about almost everything I did. I kept getting attacks from the people I worked with. Names like 'Holier than thou' became my second name. I was accused of trying to impress when I was merely doing what was expected of me. But gradually, some people begin to side with you and you stand out at the end of the day. That is what really matters.

Dealing with the systems and the people outside of Ashesi was not so easy in the beginning. After 4 years of being surrounded by people who were all aiming at excellence, stepping into a world of bureaucracy, where individuals were set in their ways was a shock. I believe Ashesi students should be primed for this and know that they will be stereotyped. More importantly an introduction to leading and managing change in their own small way can help to make a difference.

My feelings for the Honor Code have not changed. In fact, they have been reinforced. The world outside school is radically different and no amount of schooling can adequately prepare you for it. Practicing integrity in your work is frowned upon in almost all circumstances as individuals are always looking out for the quickest means to cheat the system and line their pockets. Even though there are laid down rules on how things are supposed to be done, hardly anybody does them because no one is ready to bear the responsibility.

In Ghana we are having power problems. Some guys want to do an illegal connection and [my parents] said, "Why don't we do it?" I don't feel comfortable doing this because it is using more electricity and that won't work in the long run. Initially my parents were doing it, and then my mother thought about it, and said, 'You are right.'

The Honor Code as an educational intervention is consistent with the successful interventions detailed in the literature review earlier in this paper (Treisman 1992; Steele 1997; Godwyn 2009; Langowitz et al. 2013). As mentioned, the common elements of successful educational interventions are:

1. Creating learning communities that provide both academic and peer social support: While students are on campus, Ashesi provides both academic and peer support for the Honor Code. Social support also continues after graduation.

According to Awuah, 90% of the students are connected to the college and one another through social media.

2. Constructing honorific and accreditation programs in which membership becomes a source of pride rather than remedial programs that assume inferiority at the task: The Honor Code represents a remedy to the corruption associated with Ghana and gives students and graduates of Ashesi the power to enact a corrective to the national stigma. Similar to other educational interventions detailed, the Honor Code serves to credit Ashesi students and alumni and give them a source of pride. One student writes:

> We who have the honour and privilege of working in an institution run by the Honour Code System are filled with a sense of hope, faith and gratitude because every day, practicing the Honour Code and living under it, Patrick Awuah, faculty and staff of Ashesi University College tells us the student body that they know and believe that we are capable of changing the status quo. They believe that we can be better than our fathers; we can be people who are trustworthy, people of integrity and honour. They in short tell us that we are better than our society thinks us to be.

3. Ascribing success to effort, desire, and practice rather than to natural inborn talent: Ethical conduct at Ashesi is represented as a set of behaviors that are learned and developed rather than as innate understandings or inborn character traits. This means that each student has the potential to become an ethical person and that mistakes do not indicate some underlying failure or inability, but rather a step in the process. One faculty member remarks:

> We are humans, and we are fallible. We all make mistakes. We all need second chances as well. Your mistakes shouldn't be that end point. So I want students to know they did wrong, but they are still welcome if they do right.

Debate: Is an Honor Code Possible in an Institution of Higher Learning in Ghana?

Despite interview narratives from Ashesi graduates that demonstrate a strong and consistent commitment to and identification with the Honor Code, the reception from the National Accreditation Board (NAB) in Ghana has been much less enthusiastic. In fact, within Ghana, the Honor Code at Ashesi has been so controversial that the NAB, composed of African academics, has threatened to withhold Ashesi's accreditation. At the heart of the controversy is the belief that Ghanaians might not be capable of consistent ethical behavior. A cynical view held by some members of the NAB is that rather than promoting ethical behavior, the Honor Code provides a shield for Ashesi students to cheat. This perspective is rooted in the traditional practice in Ghana of proctoring exams and the widespread cheating that one student says "starts in secondary school and just gets worse."

Education in Ghana: Cheating as the Norm

Many of the students and administrators at Ashesi reported that in the public domain in Ghana, among not only government employees such as police officers, passport office workers, health and building inspectors, but also teachers and school officials, there is rampant corruption and the expectation of dishonesty. Favoritism, nepotism, and bribes routinely play a central role in commercial exchange and interpersonal behavior. This dishonesty can be used to strengthen or undermine relationships.

Many Ghanaian students grow up in a boarding school culture. By most accounts from Ashesi students and administrators, boarding schools reflect and maintain the expectation of corruption that permeates the larger culture. Representative comments include:

> There is a rigidity around extended family loyalty. Ghana has a boarding school system and peers become almost like family. There is a strict hierarchy in this culture, maybe stronger than in other cultures and systems. As if you have two competing rules: I saw my friend and could report her, but she is my friend. Therefore, what she does is not wrong—it is the right thing to do. People become numb to justifications of corruption and bribery.

> Teachers at boarding schools will ask students to help their friends. So is "helping," cheating, portrayed as a bad thing? Not as much stigma as giving or taking a bribe. As a teacher you would get in more trouble if you colluded. They know it's wrong, but it also makes it easier if students "help" each other, so that is what they do.

> You have learned something wrong for 20 years. And the Honor Code means that you will unlearn it. It's an ongoing conversation. So the other day, I said to students. You know what, go back into your childhood and high school. At what point did you internalize unethical behavior? . . .Boarding schools are based on a military model and so there is system of favors reinforcing unethical behavior. Kind of like prisoners—do what you have to do to get by. The boarding school system is a great reinforcer for unethical behavior. Students say they all loved boarding school, but when you poke into their stories you realize that boarding school teaches them to be independent through bullying. Extrinsic ethics, not internally generated. The internal system of rewards is not getting built up. Students are not self-motivated or self-disciplined. So when they come here and learn they might have to snitch on someone. You don't do this in boarding school; you don't do this in prison.

> Here in Ghana and most places in Africa, we are not used to going against the status quo and changing things. So having exams without proctors was very alien. It is still thought of as a joke (Godwyn 2015: 63).

The debate between Ashesi University College and the NAB over whether then Honor Code is viable has been ongoing since 2010. In some ways, the debate reveals the struggle over the definition of Ghanaian identity and Ghanaian culture. This debate is described by some at Ashesi as the conflict within Ghana between those who want a progressive position on the international stage and those who are comfortable with a more parochial and insular colonial past. A staff member comments:

> This was a colonial university system intended to produce people for the civil service who would never get their hands dirty or do anything except carry out orders. Then we came along with a model that's for changing Ghana and being ethical. We are a threat. At some

point in the deliberations, I just said, 'The Board is stuck back in the time of the British Empire. I was born in Ghana!' (Godwyn 2015: 65).

The threat of loss of accreditation elicited a passionate defence of the Honor Code from the Ashesi community including conversations on campus attended by virtually the entire student body, administration and faculty members, and about 300 parents (Godwyn 2015: 64). An administrator recounts:

> Mostly parents were saying, 'Look, my kid was changed completely since they started using the honor code. You are doing something right.' A parent stood up and sang the national anthem of Ghana, with the words 'make us cherish fearless honesty.' There are a couple of lines too that talk about defending a just cause. This parent said, 'You should go and you should tell the board this is the only university that argues our national anthem. This is a fearless anthem. For young people to take this position is something the accreditation boards has no business trying to stop.' So at the end of this conversation, the head of student government said, 'We need a show of hands. A vote. How many feel we should disregard the directive from the national accreditation board? And remember, history favors those who fight hard for a good cause.' Every hand goes up. And there is a standing ovation. I am thinking to myself, there is no way a phenomenon like this should be allowed to fail. It is done. We will do this thing. (Godwyn 2015: 64–65).

The campus conversations in 2010 inspired letter writing campaigns and press coverage, including student interviews on television and radio.

At times, the debate has been filled with vitriol with some of the members of the NAB vigorously rejecting the claim that by denying Ashesi the right to have its Examination Honor Code, common to so many institutions of higher education in the U.S. and Europe, they are condemning Ghana and Ghanaians to second-class status. Clearly offended, one NAB member wrote that Ashesi should "never to assume that members and staff of the National Accreditation Board are not conversant with developments in tertiary education in the world around us." In an effort to engender support, Awuah wrote to administrators of Ashesi's mentor institution, the University of Cape Coast:

> As you know, the National Accreditation Board (NAB) has expressed reservations about Ashesi's Honour System—a reservation that is principally predicated on the belief that Ghanaian students cannot at this time be trusted to work without examination invigilators. The Ashesi Community is very passionate about this matter and is doing all it can to maintaining the Honour System. I myself have received copies of over 170 individual letters that students, faculty, and administrators of this institution have written to the NAB…Clearly this is an important matter for us here at Ashesi.

Perhaps the most representative student sentiment in a letter written to the NAB about Ashesi's Honor Code is captured in the quote below:

> It came as a great shock to me that the National Accreditation Board thought it wise to stop the running of the Honour Code System. I asked myself what the Honour Code meant to me and many positive things flooded my mind. The Honour Code signifies the dawn of a new era in Ghana, Africa and the world as a whole. It signifies the age of a new kind of leader, a new kind of employer, a new kind of entrepreneur, a new kind of mother; in essence a new crop of human beings released into Ghana and the world at large.
>
> So why I wonder, would the National Accreditation Board want to take away this hope that we have for Africa? This chance that Africa will be able to lose the title of being a

continent of corruption. If we Ghanaians do not have faith in our ability to be people of integrity, people who can be trusted, then what do we expect the outside world to think?

Discussion

There is undoubtedly enough unscrupulousness, insincerity, and profiteering to legitimately fuel doubts around whether private sector ethics in the forms of Corporate Social Responsibility programs, Impact Investing, Philanthrocapitalism, and in this case, university Honor Codes can effectively create sustainable and beneficial change for many in the public realm. However, these doubts should not blind us to the possibility that there are well-intentioned and well-functioning programs that do in fact create positive social and environmental change. By all first-hand accounts, the Honor Code at Ashesi University College is one such intervention that carries ethics from a private institution into the public realm and has raised the standards of conduct by training a group of competent, committed, and educated workers who are positioning themselves to be the next leaders of Ghana. These graduates are young and currently in the junior levels of employment. Like all programs, vigilance over ever-emerging trends is the only safeguard to ensure that initial aspirations and ambitions are achieved. At the time of this research, there is strong evidence that this educational intervention has been effective in influencing post-graduate behavior in the workplace and in wider social interactions. Longitudinal monitoring of Ashesi graduates as they grow in their professional capacities is essential to continue the documentation of the effects and implementation of the Honor Code and will provide additional evidence of the breadth and depth of the influence of the Honor Code on the culture, economy, and international standing of Ghana.

Appendix A

Questions for Ashesi Graduates

When did you attend Ashesi?
Why did you choose this school?
Can you describe some of your most memorable experiences?
Do you keep in touch with classmates?
Do you participate in alumni events?
The exam honor code and codes of conduct are central to Ashesi's mission to train the next generation of ethical business leaders in Africa. What are your thoughts on this mission?
Please describe your feelings about and experiences with the honor code as a student.
Please describe your feelings about and experiences with the honor code after you graduated.

Did your education at Ashesi prepare you for your life after graduation? If so, how? If not, how could it have been improved?

Please feel free to write any thoughts and feelings about your experiences at Ashesi that were not covered in the survey questions.

Thank you very much for participating in this survey. Your participation is very valued and appreciated!

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