

Alumni Spotlight: Dodé Ackey



College of Business alumnus Dodé Ackey

USF College of Business alumnus Dodé Ackey came to the United States in 1996 as a refugee from the nation of Togo, he quickly began to study and learn English, taking advantage of education that had been limited in his native country.

Now, he is paying that education forward, giving back to youth in Africa by starting a nonprofit school.

Ackey began his studies at USF as a Gates Millennium Scholar in 2000, earning a bachelor's degree in finance and his MBA by 2004. Ackey was inspired by the education enabled by the scholarships he received to think he might one day do the same for other African youth.

"I told myself that if I did anything to help people back home, because I know how they struggle over there, it has to be in the area of education," he said.

In a class taught by entrepreneurship professor Michael Fountain, Ackey came up with the idea to start a university in his homeland to provide students with quality education. Despite it being the only idea in the class that was nonprofit, five classmates signed on to help him make the idea a reality. When he graduated, he started saving his money to put toward the nonprofit.

Now, Ackey, an assistant vice president with Citigroup in Tampa, has finally realized a portion of his dream. In 2011, he opened the [International Academy of Niamey](#) in his wife's home country of Niger, providing education as well as school supplies to nine seventh- and eighth-grade students over the past year. The school costs about \$2,000 per month to operate. He hopes to raise more money to be able to support more students, and he is looking for volunteers to help meet the nonprofit's needs. He has worked with churches in Niger to help identify children that are in need of education but can't afford it.

In its first year, all of the school's students graduated to the next grade level, far outpacing Togo's national average graduation rate. Ackey said he's especially focused on helping girls receive an education, since families forced to choose between whether to send a son or daughter to school often choose to send the son.

Eventually, Ackey still hopes to launch a university in Africa. For now, though, he is concentrating on doing what he can in the present with the funds he has. However, he plans to travel to Africa at the end of this year to look for a piece of land that might be suitable for a university in either Niger or Benin.

"I knew that the need is everywhere in Africa, whether it's an elementary school, middle school, high school, or university," Ackey said.