CYBERNETICS & DIASPOROLOGY: Udeesa Representatives work with Africana Studies to promote the use of immersive technologies in university classrooms.

Members of the organization Udeesa, a company which strives to use technology to connect the African Diaspora, have been cooperating with the Lehigh University Africana Studies Program to help establish the program as a leader within the national African, African American and Diaspora Studies ecosystem.

The team of Lehigh Students (above), made up of Miles Davis ’18 (MA), Asante Asiedu ’19 (BA), Alex Spiezio ’19 (BA), presented at the Teaching & Learning Symposium to raise awareness. They received generous grants from the Africana Studies Program, Lehigh Technology Services (LTS), the Office of Diversity, Inclusivity, & Equity, the Office of Multicultural Affairs and The Baker Institute. This enabled the team to purchase the necessary materials and equipment to build their project, as well as the opportunity to travel abroad to collect 360-degree footage of historical landmarks, cultural attractions, and sites of memory in Ghana-West Africa.

Udeesa has also presented their project at the Harvard Business School, UPenn Wharton and at Lehigh’s own 2018 Eureka Competition. Their team went on to win the people’s choice award presented at Baker Institute Awards Dinner, a gathering that invites established Lehigh friends.
& Alum engaged within the field of entrepreneurship to provide feedback to the Universities top and upcoming ventures.

Team member Miles Davis (below) with the supervision of Professor Kwame Essien was able to travel to Ghana to represent Lehigh University’s Africana Studies Program and to lay the necessary foundation for their project. Along the way, he visited several schools such as The University of Cape Coast and Ashesi University, and gave empowering talks about technology and opportunity to young students at Sunrise Christian High School in Ho, Volta Region of Ghana. While in the area, Miles also continued to work on the development of his locally produced brand of Shea butter, Superior Shea.

Lehigh University could be felt by Udeesa’s attendance at the first annual Ghana Tech Summit this Summer 2018 where they presented alongside other exhibition booths. The group also sponsored Ghana’s first Exponential Tech Summit the same week, establishing many relationships and a strong presence throughout the first of many Ghana Tech Week. The Africana Studies Program hopes to continue to promote student engagement in Ghana Tech Week in the future.

As a result of the Summits’ successes, the group is now in communication with Ghana’s Ministry of Diaspora Affairs, as well as Yaa W, an organization poised to increase the presence of women within the STEM fields. Yaa W’s founder Diana Wilson gave an empowering talk during the second Africana Studies Day program: the 1st Annual Immersive Technology Expo in fall 2018.
The deliverables from this project include immersing the 360-degree footage of historical landmarks, cultural attractions, and sites of memory in Ghana. The 360-degree footage was used for discussion forums for students to engage with innovators presently implementing sustainable technologies on the African Continent. The footage can be accessed in the classroom via computer, smartphone, or virtual reality headset (VR), allowing students enrolled in Africana Studies courses to interact with their course material on a new and immersive way. Through the leadership Africana’s interim director Professor Kwame Essien, Africana students also shared the footage with students at Liberty High School and Greater Shiloh Baptist as part of Africana’s NEH challenge grant’s public facing activities.

In addition to the work they are doing to share this content with other African, African American and Diaspora Studies Programs, Udeessa representatives Asante and Alex also proposed working with Lehigh University to invite participation from such departments as Computer Science & Engineering (CSE), Design, Mathematics, Entrepreneurship, and Philosophy that would encourage students to collaborate on various projects, through the Africana Studies Program, that would allow them to explore the interdisciplinary uses of technology. The course material for which includes the West African strategic board game, Oware.
You can currently see Udeesa’s progress by visiting their site: udeesa.org. Stay engaged in the Lehigh Community to keep updated on how the results of these collaborations will impact student engagement & education.