

The Raymond Ackerman Academy goes national

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Innovative programme aimed to empower young people by developing their entrepreneurial mindsets moves from face-to-face lessons to an online programme.

The Raymond Ackerman Academy of Entrepreneurial Development (RAA) has for 17 years provided a successful Cape Town-based programme to foster entrepreneurial mindsets. In an exciting new chapter, the programme will now be extending the inspiring programme to entrepreneurs nationwide as it reshapes the format to reach a wider audience.

The Raymond Ackerman Academy of Entrepreneurial Development (RAA) launched in 2005 as a partnership between the Raymond Ackerman Foundation and the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB) to provide innovative entrepreneurial training to post-matric learners. Over the period, the programme saw many entrepreneurs graduate and become successful in their respective fields.

The Cape Town programme – hosted at the historic Breakwater Campus at UCT's Business School – will conclude in September 2022 after graduating its final class. The Academy will then become available online for entrepreneurs nationwide.



Raymond Ackerman

Leonora Sauls, head of philanthropy at the Ackerman Foundation, says that the RAA will move from face-to-face teaching to an online model to provide greater opportunities to those wanting to develop their entrepreneurial mindset. “Over the past two years we have witnessed how technology has enabled a different level of impact and we believe that this is the right time to implement the new model into the Academy.”

Sauls adds: “The Academy at UCT GSB had produced an impressive array of successful entrepreneurs, and it has been wonderful to work with the UCT GSB on this programme that has benefited so many individuals.”

The purpose of the RAA was to develop the culture of entrepreneurship among young people and to provide business management skills to enable young entrepreneurs to establish, grow and sustain a business. The result of this collaboration between UCT GSB and RAA was a full-time semester course that ran twice a year, for youth between the ages of 18 and 35 years, as well as a year-long business accelerator.

Many RAA graduates have gone on to find meaningful employment, study further or start their own businesses in a variety of industries.

The director of the UCT GSB, Dr Catherine Duggan, expressed her thanks to Dr Raymond Ackerman and his family, the founding and sole funders of the programme, for their vision and support during nearly two decades of partnership with the UCT GSB. “Dr Ackerman and his family were pioneers in recognising that – by helping youth to develop not only entrepreneurial skills and business acumen, but also life skills and an entrepreneurial mindset – a programme like RAA could empower young people to make a difference in their own lives and the future of their communities.”

“We have witnessed so many lives changing as young entrepreneurs turn ideas into reality and start to provide for their

families,” says Ms Siphokazi Mngxunyeni, manager of the RAA programme at the UCT GSB.

Some of the success stories include Unathi Zincina, founder of Umyezo Juicery, who said that her RAA experience is the reason she is still an entrepreneur today. “The classes there were so real and true to life that to this day I still live by some of their teachings, both in business and life in general.”

Gcobisa Maqanda, who currently works as alumni relations officer at the UCT GSB, said her experience at RAA was life changing. “The highlight of the course was the personal development side. I thought I knew myself, but I soon realised that I was wrong.” Since completing the RAA, Maqanda has also obtained a PGDip qualification from the UCT GSB.

Digital marketer, Zizipho Dyubheni, noted that what she is most grateful for are the skills she developed that have informed her growth as a professional and keen entrepreneur. “The programme ingrained in me the power of collaboration, agility and having an attitude that enables continuous learning.”

Nkgetheleng Bocheletsana, who started an early childhood development centre, said that the RAA taught her that there is no easy way to success, and the importance of building a culture, not a company. “The most important lesson I learnt at RAA is that you can’t help everyone, but everyone can help someone to be a better person in life,” she added.

“Youth in South Africa continue to bear the burden of South Africa’s high unemployment rate,” explained Dr Solange Rosa, the director of the Bertha Centre for Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship at the UCT GSB, who oversaw the RAA. “An entrepreneurial education empowers and equips young people for a successful career, to study further or start their own business and create jobs. This is key in the fight for social equity and justice.”

While the shift from face-to-face activities in Cape Town to online instructions marks the end of a remarkable chapter, Dr Duggan noted, the UCT GSB remains committed to the goals of youth empowerment and social change embodied in the RAA programme. “We are extremely proud of our RAA alumni and we look forward to identifying new ways to collaborate with them, the Ackerman family and others who are similarly committed to supporting youth and entrepreneurship as a means to broad community development.”

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