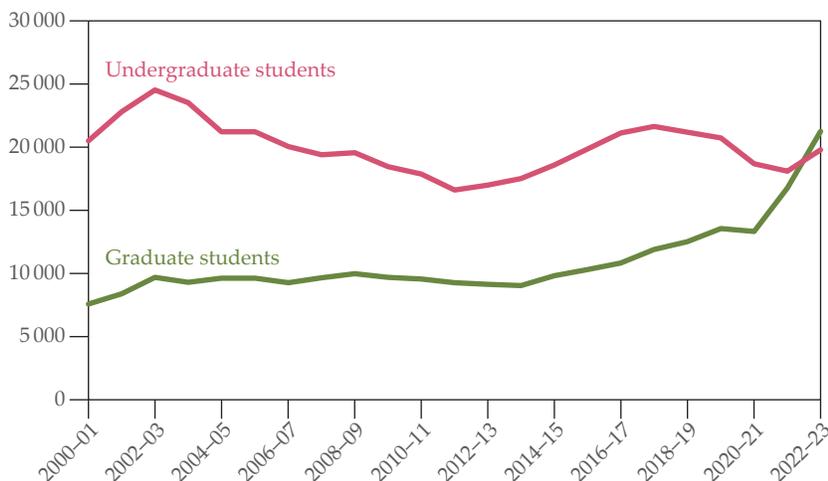


school has expanded to host programs for high school teachers and students. In 2019 it launched a mentorship program that brings college students from Africa to Brookhaven to do research. Getting a visa to go to the US or Europe “is a formidable threshold” for Africans, Assamagan says. It seems that “visa-processing authorities at embassies assume the applicants will stay in the country and become illegal immigrants.”

As for Mbi, he says that “at some point during my graduate program, I had a crisis of identity. I am going to get a PhD and go back to Cameroon. What will I do there?” Parts of Cameroon are politically unstable, he says. “I heard that one of my undergraduate professors is now in the US driving a taxi.” Mbi left Mississippi State with a master’s degree and moved to Georgetown University for his physics PhD. He then earned a business degree from Cornell University. He remained in the US and has held several jobs in consulting and investment banking. He is currently a vice president in JP Morgan’s global research division. “When I came to the US,” he



SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA had the highest growth of students in the US of any global region in 2022–23 compared with the year before. The plot shows the numbers of undergraduate and graduate students in the US from Sub-Saharan Africa over time. (Based on data from the Institute of International Education’s resource Open Doors.)

says, “I could solve equations, but I didn’t have a good sense of the landscape of physics. I didn’t know what I wanted for my career.”

“I mourn the brain drain that occurs

in my home country,” says Mbi. “But I think there is a balance for individual fulfillment: What do I want to do with my life? Where is the best place to do that?”

Toni Feder

Join four African students for their MIT journeys

The students share their academic and personal experiences and impressions.

The film *Brief Tender Light* follows four African students from the time they are awarded spots as undergraduates at MIT through their studies and graduation in 2015 as they learn about a new culture, confront racism and homophobia, and begin to move into careers. They all feel a responsibility toward their home countries. “I want to amass skills, amass knowledge. I want to amass leadership. I want to amass opportunities here, which are all going to be used in Zimbabwe,” says Fidelis Chimombe, who is from that country (second from left in photo); the others are, from left, Sante T. Nyambo from Tanzania, Billy Ndengeyingoma from Rwanda, and Philip Abel Adama from Nigeria.

They grapple with how to balance helping their home countries with the opportunities open to them in the US. “At its core, *Brief Tender Light* is about whether youthful idealism can survive the process of growing up,” says the engineer-turned-



ARTHUR MUSAH

filmmaker Arthur Musah, who moved from Ghana to attend MIT in 2000. *Brief Tender Light* premieres on PBS on 15 January and will be available free for streaming at www.pbs.org and on the PBS app until 14 April 2024.

Toni Feder