



GYEL NEWSLETTER

Volume 3 January 2026

WELCOME TO OUR JANUARY 2026 GYEL NEWSLETTER!

[Read more about our program](#)

Our goal is to keep you updated on our program sessions, guest speakers, and showcase our students' global impact projects related to the UN's SDGs. We will also share helpful tips and insights to make your college application stand out, as recommended by some of the industry's most trusted professionals.

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MESSAGE FROM THE LEAD INSTRUCTOR OF PROGRAMS

As we welcome the New Year, I want to take a moment to reflect on the momentum we've built and the exciting opportunities ahead. January marks a fresh chapter, filled with renewed energy, purpose, and possibility for our students and our entire GYEL community.

Our Fall Term concluded with inspiring work from students across HSP1, HSP2, and AI Horizons. Their creativity, thoughtfulness, and willingness to tackle complex global challenges continue to affirm the importance of youth-centered leadership education. I'm continually impressed by how our students approach learning not only with curiosity, but also with empathy and a genuine desire to create positive change.

As we move into the Spring Term, we're excited to welcome new students and to build the strong foundation already in place. We look forward to another term enriched by engaging coursework, meaningful discussions, and guest speakers from around the world who bring diverse perspectives

and real-world insight into our virtual classrooms.

The start of a new year is also a time to recommit to our goals, to our values, and to one another. At GYEL, our commitment remains clear: to educate, encourage, and empower young leaders with the skills, confidence, and vision they need to thrive in an ever-changing world.

I want to extend my sincere gratitude to our incredible instructors and staff for their continued dedication and passion. Their support and expertise make our programs what they are. And thank you to our families and students for your trust, engagement, and partnership; we are honored to be part of this journey with you. Wishing you and your families a healthy, hopeful, and successful start to 2026, filled with learning, leadership, and lasting impact.

Sincerely,
Ms. Hannah Kidner, Lead Instructor of Programs

SPRING TERM 2026 UPDATES

- As of the publication of this newsletter, we are entering the new year after wrapping up Fall Term 2025. Certificates of Completion have been issued, and LinkedIn badges will be sent to our High School Part 1 (HSP1), High School Part 2 (HSP2), and AI Horizons course completers.
- Our HSP2 Alumni successfully inspired our current HSP2 students by providing mentorship for their final projects during the Instructors' Office Hours, while our current HSP2 students supported HSP1 students with their final projects.
- We are grateful to all our guest speakers of 2025, including Wes Walker, Jessica Nabongo, Kevin O'Leary, Dr. Kenneth Harris, Lemon Andersen, Ambassador Dame Didi Wong, Lisa Nichols, and Jeffrey Hayzlett, and we look forward to welcoming even more inspiring speakers in Spring Term 2026.
- We are launching the inaugural Introduction to Global Leadership course in February 2026. This introductory course is perfect for students exploring whether GYEL HS Program courses are the right fit. Students in grades 6–12 are encouraged to check our website for more information—you still have time to apply!
- For all students with pending applications for Spring Term, don't forget to complete your enrollment and submit your cohort form to ensure you are ready before the Spring Term begins on January 24–25, 2026.



Find out more about our Intro to Global Leadership course

My name is Megan Cassel, and I am a climate and social impact strategist. In my role as a GYEL Program Instructor, I guide emerging leaders in developing the strategic thinking and cross-cultural competencies essential for creating impact in today's interconnected world.

With a Master of Public Administration in Development Practice from Columbia University and six years of management consulting experience spanning multiple countries and continents, I bring a globally-informed perspective to my work. My career has taken me from Kearney in Mexico City to Dalberg in Senegal and Washington, D.C., where I was promoted to Senior Consultant and elected Deputy of the Climate Practice.

Throughout my career, I have contributed to transformative projects with leading organizations including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, USAID, COVAX, the Mastercard Foundation Africa, Tetra Tech, and the Ministry of Health in Mozambique. My work has focused on nature-based solutions, climate finance, conservation finance, and climate strategy across more than ten countries - including Mexico, Senegal, Rwanda, Mozambique, Portugal, and Spain. I speak Spanish, French, and Portuguese.

What inspires me most about working with GYEL students is witnessing their growth as they develop the skills, mindset, and networks to become effective changemakers. I believe that strategic thinking, adaptability, and authentic cross-cultural engagement are the foundations for building meaningful careers that drive sustainable development and social and environmental impact.



INSTRUCTOR INSIGHTS

COLLEGE ADMISSIONS TIP



[Learn more](#)

"Start Early!"

The admissions process takes time for personal insights, research, and gathering the right materials for applications. Starting in 9th and/or 10th grade is a perfect time to enhance your academic profile or fill in the gaps if needed. We love working with students who plan ahead!

*Elizabeth West
Founder & CEO, EWC College Consulting*

GYEL SPRING 2026

Spring Enrollment Extended! Last Chance to Enroll by January 10
Generous Financial Assistance Available (see website for more info)
Spring Term set to begin January 24th and 25th

[Apply today](#)

[Hear from our students](#)

SMART READS FOR FUTURE LEADERS

Explore articles that empower students and families to make informed choices about their academic and leadership journey.



WHY 10TH GRADE IS THE MOST OVERLOOKED BUT CRUCIAL YEAR FOR IVY LEAGUE ADMISSIONS

Most ambitious high school students and their families know that the “bookend years” of high school are critical. They know that they must lay a strong foundation during their freshman year and that they need to finish strong while crafting dynamic and eye-catching applications. There is some truth to this—the first and last years of high school can indeed have a significant impact on a student’s college prospects. At the same time, this focus on the beginning and end of a student’s secondary school experience neglects the most important year of high school for the college admissions process: sophomore year.

Tenth grade is a pivotal transition year for students. While the first year of high school offers the opportunity for students to explore their interests, establish their academic skill set, and build their support network, the second year marks the point at which they hone their passions, assume leadership roles, start a passion project, and develop a network of academic and professional mentors.

[Read More](#)



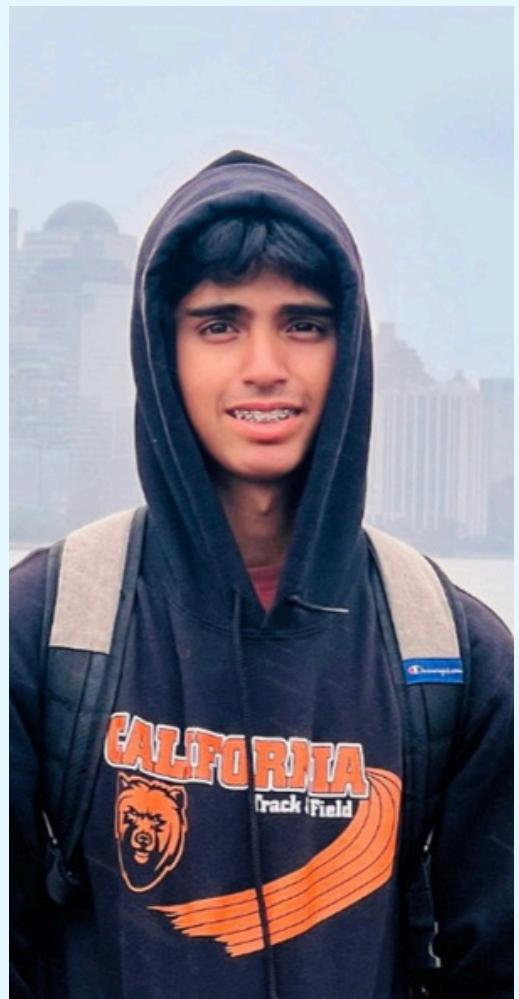
Student Spotlight

From Passion to Preservation – Ashmit Roy's Journey

This month, we're honored to highlight **Ashmit Roy**, a high school student passionate about education equity, cultural preservation, and social impact. Ashmit exemplifies the spirit of a young leader using innovation to address global challenges.

ASHMIT'S SOCIAL IMPACT JOURNEY

- Conceptualized Solar Scribes, a project that delivers solar-powered e-readers to off-grid Indigenous communities. The devices provide educational materials, oral histories, and practical knowledge in local languages while connecting communities to a global knowledge network.
- Focuses on preserving endangered languages and cultural heritage, teaching Bengali language and culture to children from Bengali families in the U.S.
- Plans research on Indigenous communities' educational needs, language preservation, and access to electricity and internet to guide equitable and sustainable solutions.
- Balances academics with extracurriculars, including running track and playing guitar, demonstrating commitment to personal growth alongside community impact.



Through GYEL, Ashmit has strengthened his understanding of how technology, education, and cultural advocacy intersect, showing how one student's initiative can make a global difference.

Ashmit's journey reflects the heart of GYEL—young leaders who think globally, act compassionately, and lead with purpose.



SOLAR SCRIBES

Solar Scribes provides solar-powered e-readers to off-grid Indigenous communities, preserving languages and expanding access to education and cultural knowledge.

WANT TO BE FEATURED IN OUR NEXT STUDENT SPOTLIGHT?

We love celebrating the incredible impact our GYEL students are making around the world.

If you'd like to share your journey, achievements, or community project, send us your details at inquiry@un.gyel.org and you could be our next feature!

