

Black Youth Mentorship and Leadership Program: July 5-November 27, 2021

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Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Project Team	4
Background	8
Methods.....	10
Summary of Workshops	14
Evaluation of Key Performance Indicators	42
Comments, Suggestions, and Recommendations	43

ABSTRACT

Black youths experience social, economic, and health inequities in Canada, and are less likely to attain a post-secondary qualification. Black-focused education can improve economic outcomes for Black youths. Strong evidence indicates mentorship is effective across behavioral, social, emotional, and academic domains of youth development. The Black Youth Mentorship and Leadership Program (BYMLP) used a participatory approach aimed at improving community belonging and leadership skills as well as fostering a positive cultural identity for Black youths. A total of 37 youths were admitted to the program and 32 took up the offer. The program activities took place between July 5 and November 27, 2021. The youths were selected through a competitive process comprising several application documents: a one-page essay explaining why they wanted to participate in the program, their high school transcript, and an application form.

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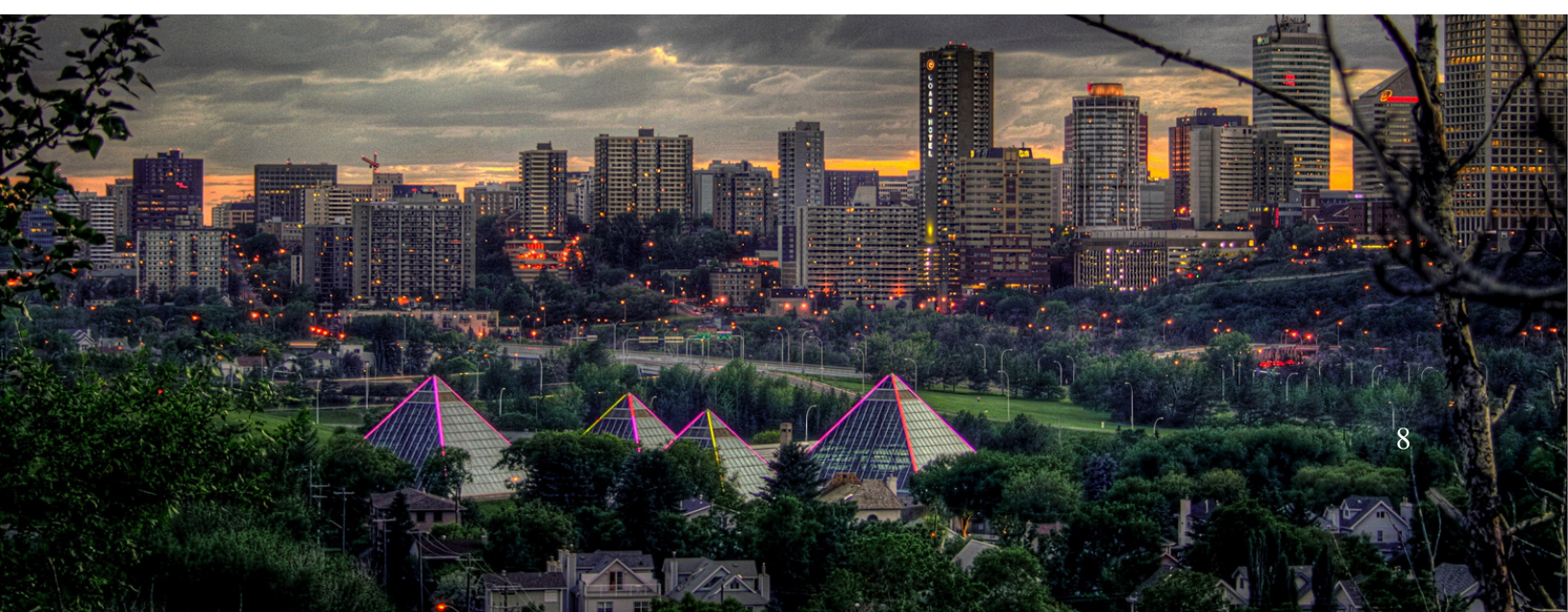
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BACKGROUND

In 2016, there were around 1.2 million Black people in Canada, including 100,245 Black youths ages 15 to 19. Alberta has the fastest growing population of Black people in Canada. In 2016, there were 57,815 Black people in Edmonton, and the number is growing. Black youths experience social, economic, and health inequities in Canada, and are less likely to attain a post-secondary qualification. Among Black boys aged 13 to 17 in 2006, approximately half had a postsecondary qualification in 2016, compared to 62% of other boys; this statistic has been declining since 2011. Young Black males were nearly twice as likely as other young males to not be employed, attending school, or completing job training. Attitudes of teachers towards Black youths, the lack of African-Canadian history and culture in the educational curriculum, systemic anti-Black racism, and the lack of mentors contribute to poor educational outcomes, which translate into poorer economic outcomes and less food and job security.

Black-focused education can improve the economic outcomes of Black youths. Furthermore, strong evidence indicates mentorship is effective across behavioral, social, emotional, and academic domains of youth development. To address these challenges, the United Nations recommends Canada should “strengthen Afrocentric education curricula”. The Black Youth Mentorship and Leadership Program (BYMLP) at the University of Alberta addresses this recommendation.



Proponents of Afrocentric educational programs assert that Black youths suffer from low self-esteem, which leads to poor performance in school, but that they can be motivated toward high achievement by studying their history. Research also shows that alienation and expulsion rates decrease and self-esteem and university attendance rates increase when Black students are taught by Black teachers.

This project is focused on delivering a mentorship program for Black youths. The impetus of this program is based on data gathered by members of our team from Black parents, community leaders, and service providers in Edmonton. In 2016/2017, we completed a participatory action research project on parenting and mental health promotion of African children. We interviewed and completed focus groups with 75 stakeholders including parents, service providers, community leaders, and policy makers. Fourteen community leaders and 32 African parents identified that parents value respect, religion, and education. However, their ability to instill their value of education in their children is limited by racism experienced by Black children, the lack of Black mentors, teachers often encouraging Black children to go into certificate or diploma programs rather than university degree programs, and bullying of Black children in schools. Participants identified the need to capitalize on the strengths of the community, including successful Black professionals, and to create opportunities for



mentorship. Upon completion of the research project, we held a stakeholder engagement day that was attended by over 150 stakeholders including members of the Black community, religious leaders, community leaders, teachers, professors, researchers, doctors, nurses, and other professionals. The stakeholder engagement day emphasized the need to create mentorship opportunities for both parents and youths and also to capitalize on the resources within the community. With respect to improving Black child and youth well-being, African communities prioritized improving the economic outcomes of Black youths.

METHODS

A Steering Committee made up of Black faculty members and an Advisory Committee made up of community leaders and youths were set up. The Advisory Committee met two times to discuss the recruitment process and contribute to the development of the curriculum for the mentorship program. Thirty-seven youths were selected to participate in the 6 month mentorship program, which took place from July 5 to November 27, 2021. The youths were selected via a competitive process based on a one-page essay explaining why they wanted to participate in the program, their high school transcript, and an application form. Seventy applications were received. A recruitment committee was created made up of the Project Coordinator, two members





of the Advisory Committee, a graduate student, and a Research Assistant. The Research Assistant and the graduate student assessed the applications independently and assigned scores based on pre-designed evaluation criteria. The Project Coordinator then compared the resulting assessments and prioritized the applicants from most to least qualified. A final meeting was held with all three assessors and the Project Lead, Dr. Salami, for final selection of candidates to be invited for interview. Forty-one candidates were invited for interviews, and 37 were sent acceptance letters. A number declined the offer prior to program start date, or during the first week, for various reasons, including opting for summer school or taking on a job. A total of 32 mentees went through the program. One could not attend the fall portion of the program due to a change in school circumstances and two failed to meet overall attendance requirements. A total of 29 mentees graduated and received completion certificates.

Mentees were assigned to groups based on their subject/discipline preference. During the interviews, each youth was asked to choose in order of priority their top three from five options: (i) Health, (ii) Social Science/ Law, (iii) Physical Science/ Engineering, (iv) Medicine, and (v) Business/ Administration. Based on their choices, selected mentees were assigned a mentor.

The BYMLP was divided into two streams this year: an Individual/Research Mentorship stream and a Group Mentorship stream. In the Individual/Research Mentorship stream, students worked on a Individual Project. They met with mentors for 1 hour or more each week to discuss career goals and progress on their project. For the Group Mentorship stream, two groups were formed, made up of 10 students each. Under the mentorship of a university student, each group worked on a project three days a week, culminating in a 6- to 10-page group paper. The program involved attendance at workshops that were held on Mondays and Fridays during the 6-week summer program. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, mentees could not attend the workshops in person. Sessions were held online via Zoom. During the fall, a total of four in-person workshops were held one or two Saturdays a month. In the summer, students met for one hour a week with their mentors, and in the fall they met for one hour a month.

Before the start of the program, the BYMLP was approved by Edmonton Public School District for high school work experience credit. Youths who were interested applied through their respective schools and the Project Coordinator, in liaison with their school's Work Experience Coordinators, supported them to obtain high school credits for their participation.



To evaluate the program, a link for an online survey was sent out to mentees on the first day of the mentorship program, after every workshop, and on the last day of the mentorship program. Responses to survey questions were used to determine if the short- and medium-term objectives of the program were being met. The survey was also used to obtain feedback on aspects of the program that require improvement.



SUMMARY OF WORKSHOPS

July 5 – Opening

The official opening for the Black Youth Leadership and Mentorship Program was held July 5, 2021. Guests at the Opening Ceremony included: the Honorable Bardish Chagger, MP; the Honorable David Sheppard, MLA for Edmonton-City Centre; Wendy Rodgers, Deputy Provost of the University of Alberta; Professor Diane Kunyk, Acting Dean, Faculty of Nursing, University of Alberta; and Mr. Thomas Bankole, community leader and BYMLP Advisory Committee member. The event was attended by mentees and their guardians, BYMLP Council members, and invited members of the community.

Following the opening ceremony, Lisa Dublin, from Optimum Success Strategies, gave a presentation on professionalism. Afterwards, Human Resources provided a short orientation on all things HR-related. Following this presentation was a Faculty Career Panel that included the following speakers:

James Kariuki, PhD

Associate Dean, Teaching, Augustana - Academic Planning

W. Andy Knight, PhD

FRSC Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Alberta

Temitope Oriola, PhD

Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Alberta

Jared Wesley, PhD

Associate Professor, Political Science, University of Alberta

Deng Mapiour, MD, FRCSC

General and Trauma Surgeon, Assistant Professor, Department of Medicine and Dentistry, University of Alberta

Ophilia Ziwenga (MD)

Clinical Professor, University of Alberta

Some of the feedback provided by mentees after this workshop is highlighted below:

“All of the sessions were actually really interesting. One of the sessions that I enjoyed the most was the Career Panel of Faculty Members, meeting and seeing members of my community at the success level helped me learn a lot and also motivates me everyday to work hard and get where I want. Meeting different people with different careers assisted me figure out which path I want to take. “

“My favourite was the Career Panel of Faculty Members because it was very inspiring to hear about the work they were doing and what they did in their lives to get to that point of success, and their advice for us so that we could also be successful in our studies and careers later on in life.”



July 6 – Orientation and Career Planning

The program began with an introduction and icebreaker session that was followed by an orientation to E-Class and Zoom by the Faculty of Nursing E-learning Support. Mentees were formally introduced to their mentors and their projects. The day ended with a career planning workshop by Mykaylo Bodnar from the University of Alberta Career Centre.

Some feedback that was provided by mentees after this workshop is highlighted below:

“I was able to relate with the things that the presenter said about not being fully certain about the career that I wanted. I liked the way that the presenter passed on the information. It was clear and easy to follow”

“The session with the mentors, because I had a chance to meet other mentors and really see the resources available in this program.”

“I liked the session with my mentor because it focused directly on the reason I'm attending this program, which is mentorship.”

“.... when I had a one on one chat with my mentor and I was able to ask him questions I had, long before meeting him, but had no concrete answers to.”



“I was able to relate with the things that the presenter said about not being fully certain about the career that I wanted. I liked the way that the presenter passed on the information. It was clear and easy to follow”

July 9 – Doing a literature search

On this day, students enjoyed a skills workshop on Doing a Literature Search by Librarian Thane Chambers from the University of Alberta. After the presentation, group sessions were held in which students met with group members and project leaders to brainstorm their work and apply the lessons taught in the presentation. All of the sessions were exciting and well received by the mentees.

Some of their comments are provided below:

“The literature search was my favourite because it taught me a new style on how to write and get sources for different subjects.”

“I liked learning about the literature search because it was intriguing to see the different methods used to research articles from different resources”



July 12 – Leadership and Career Panel

Mentees engaged in two workshops: Leadership in the World of Work with Lisa Dublin and a Professional Career Panel with professionals from various disciplines.

During Lisa Dublin's workshop, participants were guided through a presentation about workplace leadership and professionalism. They were taught about the “do’s and don’ts” of being a leader and the importance of different leadership styles for various roles and circumstances. The presentation was interactive, allowing mentees to share their perspectives and speak on personal experiences. While presenting, Lisa Dublin emphasized the significance of cognitive bias and how it uniquely affects Black people in the workplace. Through a group discussion and role-play activities, she was able to convey methods to becoming proactive and composed when confronting discrimination.

The career panel discussion included the following speakers: Sandra Dixon, PhD, RPsych; Dr Sylvia Mawoyo; Uduak U. Akpan, BSc., MTech, MSc; Toyemi Ogunlewe; Dr. Ibronke Popoola, Ph.D.; Chinenye Nwoke, MPH; Dr. Ekoa Amponsah Agyemang, MD; and Dayirai Kapfunde, MSW, RSW. Each panellist spoke about their respective careers and gave details about the process of becoming the professionals that they are today. They answered numerous questions posed by the moderator, Dr. Myra Kandemiri, and later responded to questions from individual mentees during breakout



“I liked the Career panel because I got to understand more about the courses I want to take in university and also I got a lot of questions that I had about these courses answered.”

sessions. The workshop was well received, and mentees shared that it was a resourceful experience, allowing them to better understand how they could accomplish their future career goals, as evidenced by the quotes below:

“Leadership in the World of Work was my favorite because it was engaging and very informative.”

“Career panel because I really got an insight on careers I would like to go into.”

“Professional Career Panel because hearing from many with different career professions and learning what they do helped me comprehend more about their faculties and gave me a clear head about which faculties I may be pursuing.”

“Professional career panel was my favourite because I liked all the mentors/professors talking about medical schools and answering all of our questions.”

“I liked the Career panel because I got to understand more about the courses I want to take in university and also I got a lot of questions that I had about these courses answered.”

“Professional Career Panel because hearing from many with different career professions and learning what they do helped me comprehend more about their faculties and gave me a clear head about which faculties I may be pursuing.”



July 16

Mentees attended three workshops: (1) Doing a Literature Review by Belinda Wang; (2) Thinking about Literature and Close Reading by Dr. Uche Peter Umezurike; and (3) a Virtual Campus Tour led by the University of Alberta.

Mentees were given an introduction on how to write and research literature reviews. They were taught the essential components that define the writing process, as well as techniques such as paraphrasing to help integrate external sources into their written work. Mentees practised these skills throughout the presentation by doing writing activities organized by Belinda Wang.

Dr. Umezurike's workshop gave insight into the importance of storytelling. He highlighted the significance of being the director of your own story for young Black people, highlighting that misrepresentations can easily occur that dishonour individuality and collective identities when others occupy this role. The workshop was highly engaging as mentees shared lived experiences of witnessing the erasure of others' identities simply due to the wrong person telling their stories. Dr. Umezurike used pop culture examples to highlight how meaning is always conveyed through literature, verbal statements, and visual presentations. Mentees were taught the skill of close reading to help decipher hidden meanings in a text.

Afterwards, mentees got to experience a virtual campus tour of the University of Alberta. The tour was approximately an hour long and detailed spaces throughout the University. It offered prospective students a visual representation of what the University of Alberta looks like and provided details of what "a day in the life of a student" can entail. Following the morning sessions, mentees spent the remainder of the day learning about their group and individual projects and brainstorming ideas.

Some feedback that was provided by mentees after this workshop is highlighted below:

“Doing a literature review because I think I learned the most from that session out of them all.”

“I liked the literature review because it was good to learn to use external resources to find information.”

“My favourite session was the literature review session because it was really important for us to learn how to do a literature review for our projects.”

“The literature review because it taught me the difference between paraphrasing and summarizing.”

“The close reading session, because of the diverse topics on race we were able to discuss.”

“Defining your voice and style in an age of Social Media with Uchechukwu Umezurike. He talked about current issues that related to us and let us have some input. The cases he chose to talk about were engaging, relatable, and informative.”

“I loved the virtual tour with the UofA because it’s a school I’m aiming to attend. I believe it will make it easier for me to get to the places I need to get to and navigate around.”

“The campus tour because it was fun to see the different buildings I haven't seen before and to learn about the history of them.”



July 19

On this day, the following workshops and presentations were held: (1) Navigating University Admissions by Karen Pinkoski; (2) Awards, Scholarships and Financing by Lindsay Hennessey (Bradbury) and Lindsay Moore; (3) and Student Career Panel by Mary Olukotun, Prof-Collins Ifeonu, Oluwatobiloba Obatusin, Gift Okwa, and Fisayo Aruleb.

The first workshop by Karen Pinkoski was a straightforward exploration of how students can prepare themselves for post-secondary education, the admissions processes when applying for college/university, and ways to select a program that is best suited to students' ambitions and potential. Following this presentation was Ms. Moore and Ms. Bradbury's discussion on how to finance postsecondary education. The speakers discussed how to apply for loans and scholarships, how to budget while living and working as



a student, and how to save and prepare for emergencies that may challenge one's financial potential as a student.

After the lunch break, students returned to listen to a panel discussion hosted by Dr. Myra Kandemiri that addressed questions about the guests' career experiences. The speakers spoke on their journeys to postsecondary and obstacles they encountered while attending college, and offered advice on how to manage and enjoy one's time as a university student. The speakers were asked the following questions:

1. What reservations did you have before entering university? How did you overcome them?
2. Have you ever regretted the decision to go to university? Please explain your answer.
3. What three things account for your success in university thus far?
4. How did you choose what to study in university? What other options did you consider?
5. What courses have you taken so far and what future education do you need to reach your professional goals?



Additionally, students had questions of their own that they asked while they were in breakout rooms with one of the speakers. The panelists came from diverse academic and personal backgrounds. Students were given a brief biography of the panelists prior to the workshops to select speakers that best resonated with them and their goals. Through this process, students were assigned a breakout room with their preferred speaker, so they could ask more in-depth questions. This presentation marked the last of the day and students were dismissed shortly after closing remarks.



Some feedback that was provided by mentees after this workshop is highlighted below:

“My favourite session this week was the University Admissions because it helped me understand the application process to apply to the UofA.”

“University admissions/financial help because I've been very worried about university and how everything would work and how I would afford it so it was good to learn some info.”

“Today’s session was honestly one of my favourite sessions. I enjoyed it and I think it’s because just the way we talked about Black people and the problem in our society and that there’s a place for Black people with mental health to go, was really one of my favourites.”

“I absolutely loved the Student Career Panel. All the students were nice and because they were close to our age group and had somewhat recently dealt with the university admissions process, they were really helpful.”

“I liked the Career panel because it was fun and beneficial for me and I learnt a lot.”

“Student panel, the students were very engaging and were easy to relate to.”

“Awards, scholarships and financing was really useful as pursuing a higher education is costly and I want to be a doctor, but still come out with manageable expenses.”

“Awards, Scholarship and Financing because I was able to learn about the different scholarships I can apply for as a student and also about the different ways that I can watch my budget. The ladies who taught it were also very nice which made the experience better.”

“Scholarships and financing was my favorite because I really wish to get as many scholarships as possible so I can make my post-secondary less expensive.”

“Student Career Panel was my favourite because I learned the steps needed from high school to undergraduate and to master. Moreover I got the opportunity to observe the experiences that different people go through to pursue their goals/ dreams.”

“I absolutely loved the Student Career Panel. All the students were nice and because they were close to our age group and had somewhat recently dealt with the university admissions process, they were really helpful.”



July 23

The following sessions were held on this day of the program: (1) Qualitative and Quantitative Research Process and Quality by Dr. Omolara Sanni and Dr. Bukola Oladunni Salami; and (2) Science Research and Quality by Dr. James Kariuki.

All of these sessions offered workshops to address the scientific and methodological issues relating to how to produce quality research in the forms of qualitative and quantitative analysis. Dr. Sanni and Dr. Salami taught students the distinction between the two approaches and techniques to analyze and interpret information presented in both forms by having mentees review academic papers. This lesson was incorporated to support students in the writing process as they worked towards completing their projects. Given that the students, whether working on an individual or group project, were required to utilize research to support their papers, this skills training workshop was useful for the students' current and future writing demands.





The presentation by Dr. James Kariuki focused on the theme of “science”, addressing what it is, its value, and its contributions to society. Given Dr. Kariuki’s background as a Professor of chemistry, the ideas shared stemmed from his deep passion for science. The presentation was engaging and contained many useful facts that seemed to intrigue the youth in attendance.

Some feedback that was provided by mentees after this workshop is highlighted below:

“I feel like the Quantitative research will be the most useful in school.”

The theme of the third week, July 26-30, was Leading as a Black Youth. During the Monday workshop, mentees listened to presentations from Dr. Jennifer Kelly, The Council of Canadians of African and Caribbean Heritage, Ray Williams, and Dou Ndegwa.

The focus of Dr. Kelly's presentation was Black Canadian history. Dr. Kelly taught mentees about the early migration of Black communities to Canada. She explained the history of discrimination and its effects on Black communities. Further, she educated youth about activists such as Viola Desmond, whose leadership and bravery helped support civil rights for Black Canadians. Dr. Kelly's presentation was well received by the mentees. A common sentiment amongst mentees was that the presentation exposed them to topics they were not familiar with nor taught at school. For example, many youths shared that they were not aware that Black people resided in Canada prior to the contemporary waves of immigration.

Following Dr. Kelly, The Council of Canadians of African and Caribbean Heritage (CCACH) gave a short presentation about their organization. The presenters highlighted some of the work and initiatives they led, as well as shared resources about other like-minded organizations in the City of Edmonton. Afterwards, the presenters shared a jeopardy/trivia game they created for mentees, which was based on some of the facts they previously presented. The mentees really enjoyed the activity and were playfully competitive, especially because a prize was offered to whomever won the game.

Mentees were later dismissed for lunch and returned to a presentation by Ray Williams. Mr. Williams is a managing director and vice-chairman of financial markets at National Bank Financial. Additionally, he is the chair of the board of directors at the Black Opportunity Fund. In his presentation, Mr. Williams spoke to mentees about the concept of “Black excellence” and how the mentees could honour the principle throughout their professional and academic work. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period, in which mentees asked Mr. Williams whatever questions they had regarding the subject.

The last session of the day was led by Doug Ndegwa, a chemical engineer and vice president at Spartan Controls. Mr. Ndegwa spoke about his journey to becoming an engineer as well as his leadership role at his company. He offered mentees advice on pursuing post-secondary education, which was highly valuable for mentees interested in STEM. He concluded the session by answering questions posed by mentees and offering his personal perspective on the issues and concerns they brought up. The day prior to this presentation, a Sunday, Mr. Ndegwa had given five mentees, accompanied by the BYMLP coordinator, Myra Kandemiri, a private tour of Spartan Controls' plant

located in south Edmonton. The tour began with a sit down with Doug in a room containing a model of the valves used in his company and the control system the company uses to control the various valves. He then defined ‘engineering’ and the job of an ‘engineer’ to the youths. This was followed by a tour of the engineering company, with highlights of the different departments and their roles. The tour culminated in a massive warehouse housing hundreds of millions of dollars worth of inventory, and huge valves the height of a



standing man, used to control massive pipelines in the oil and gas industry.

Some feedback that was provided by mentees after the Black Excellence and Black Leaders workshop is highlighted below:

“Black Excellence and Black Leaders. I liked the way that the speakers were able to tell their stories of how they grew into what they are today. It really inspired me to try harder in everything I do because I also can make it.”

“I really enjoyed the Black History lesson because we don’t often learn about black history in Canada. Usually in schools they only tell us about black history in the United States, slavery, the Jim Crow laws and colonization. And even then, they say the same names and never really dig deep into it. So I think it was really informative and interesting hearing about the history of racism (and black history) in Alberta and Canada. I also enjoyed the Jeopardy session because it really tested my knowledge and it was very competitive and fun 😊.”



“I liked the black history because it was fun going over a history that is important to me.”

“The black excellence and black leaders session, because I liked hearing how Mr. Ndegwa broke down some strategies to success very simply and in a way that seemed easy to enact in my own life.”

“It was super super cool and interesting to get another look at black history, that was my favourite class.”

“Black excellence and black leaders because it was informative and insightful into working in a workplace.”



July 30

For the Friday workshop, mentees got a follow-up presentation by Belinda Wang about academic writing skills. This presentation focused on teaching mentees techniques to improve their overall reading and writing abilities. Further, it gave them perspective on what academic work should look like. This was helpful for most of the mentees because it gave an example of how to manage the writing component of their projects. Also, it gave insight into what to expect as future university students. Afterwards, students went for lunch and returned to work on their projects for the remainder of the day. They were allocated three hours to work on writing with their group and planning for their campaign.

At this point in the program, mentees were better accustomed to the weekly expectations of the BYMLP. They rarely asked administrative questions and understood the routine for the Monday and Friday workshops. Some feedback that was provided by mentees after this workshop is highlighted below:

“Improving writing and academic schools because I am a big writer and the tips were very clear and easily applicable. I used to feel intimidated by the long and large papers that are imminent in my post secondary career, but this session soothed a majority of those fears.”

“Improving your writing and academic skills because I learned the most.”

“I liked the writing workshop the most because it taught me a lot of new information.”

August 6

During this workshop, a presentation on how to communicate research was organized by Belinda Wang. The premise of the presentation was to teach students about how to effectively relay information and integrate research findings into their work. Belinda Wang previously taught mentees some key research and writing techniques but expanded on her teachings during this session. Because the mentees were nearing the end of their projects, this gave them the opportunity to review their own work and integrate the ideas they had learned. After the lunch break, it was decided that mentees would have the opportunity to use the afternoon period to work on their projects. Mentees performed this task until the end of the program session that day.



August 9

This marked the final week of the BYMLP summer program before the transition into the fall quarter. On Monday, August 9, the following three presentations were delivered: (1) Leadership and Conflict Resolution with Lisa Dublin; (2) Budgeting and Financial Management with Joshua Duarte; and (3) Résumé and Interview Skills with Sharon Thach.

Lisa Dublin was a program favourite amongst mentees. Her presentation attracted high engagement as the youth openly asked questions, talked about personal experiences, and reflected on topics of professionalism and leadership. The presentation focused on conflict resolution, in which Ms. Dublin discussed approaches that leaders should take to dissolve tension while meaningfully addressing their grievances. Furthermore, Ms. Dublin emphasised the unique challenges Black people face in collaborative settings — whether in the workplace or at school — as a result of racism and discrimination. She worked with mentees to brainstorm personal techniques they could adopt when facing difficult situations. Overall, the session was well received and a helpful exercise to prepare attendees for some real-life experiences they may confront.

Joshua Duarte, a representative from the Royal Bank of Canada, facilitated the next workshop, on Budgeting and Financial Management. Mr. Duarte taught mentees about the importance of financial planning and skills young people should adopt to better reach their financial goals. He outlined saving techniques such as digital tools/apps, budgeting spreadsheets, and important ratios to consider when saving and spending. Additionally, he taught mentees about credit and the positive and negative implications it can have on their financial futures. Mentees shared their knowledge about financial literacy and asked questions pertaining to financial planning, credit scores, student loans, and more. The workshop was invaluable given how few resources are available that teach and prepare young people for the financial world.



The last presentation of the day was a skills workshop organized by Sharon Thach. Ms. Thach taught mentees how to create résumés and cover letters and how to conduct themselves during an interview. The workshop was highly interactive and engaged mentees in multiple fake scenarios to assess and evaluate what good resumes, cover letters, and interviews look like. Participants performed the roles of hiring managers and job seekers so they could better visualize what employers are looking for in applicants. Many students expressed that they already had jobs or were in search of part-time work, which made the workshop relevant and useful to the experiences of mentees. This marked the last workshop of the day before mentees were dismissed.

Some feedback that was provided by mentees after this workshop is highlighted below:

“I think today was one of my favourite .. just hearing everybody talk about how much they enjoyed the program and hearing everybody’s presentation.”

“The leadership and conflict resolution session was my favourite because conflict resolution is an ability that everyone needs everyday. It is very important to me and I learned a lot.”

“Conflict resolution and budgeting - I liked to see people's thought process on how they would handle different situations and for budgeting it was nice to know ways to save and use money in useful ways.”

“My favorite session was on conflict resolution because it was very insightful.”

“Resume and interview skills because i have not been in many interviews so anything I can get helps.”

“Resume and interview skills. I am going to be applying to jobs soon and having this presentation helped me to understand what I can add to my resumes and cover letters when the time comes.”

“My favourite was the resume and interview skills because with the end of the program I was going to start looking for a part time job. I believe the session provided me with the skills and knowledge that I need to be successful and that I wasn't aware of before.”

“Resume and interview skills was very informative and interactive. It also inspired me to actually get my resume done, which I did a day later.”



August 13

August 13 was the last day of the summer program. During the opening session, parents, mentors, advisory members, staff, and honoured guests were invited to share some remarks about the BYMLP initiative and its value to the community and participants. Afterwards, mentees were given an opportunity to share their projects, with each group giving a 15-minute presentation that included a question-and-answer period. The presentation topics ranged from research on vaccine hesitancy, personal poems/short stories, STEM-based research, policy research, and intersectionality. The mentees were well versed on their topics and had insightful ideas and questions to share. The session incorporated a prize component for whichever presentations were the most successful; however, considering how well they all went, everyone earned a small prize.

Following this segment of the day, mentees and staff had lunch. All mentees were given an UberEats gift card so they could order themselves a meal before the lunch break. The participants who remained on the chat had a playful discussion addressing topics such as school and their experience with the program. Mentees laughed, joked, and happily interacted with their peers on the Zoom chat. This was a pleasant way to end the program.



September 12: Professional Image

This workshop was led by Mr. Joshua Duarte with a focus on the topic of ‘Developing Your Personal Brand’. He highlighted some branding successes and failures, and talked to the youths about ways they can create and control their own personal brand. Ideas he shared included:

1. What is a “brand” and how does it manifest in various areas of life such as school and work?
2. What does ‘good’ and ‘bad’ branding look like?
3. How to manage personal branding in the age of social media?
4. Lastly, how can a personal brand help advance one’s personal ambitions?

Mr. Duarte had mentees practice giving an elevator pitch. This task was very interactive and had mentees collaborate in groups to share ideas about various scenarios that Mr. Duarte selected. The day ended with lunch during which students socialized amongst themselves. At the end of the workshop, the mentees received their honorariums and left.



October 2, 2021: Promoting Mental Health for Black Youth

During this workshop, Dr. Sophie Yohani, Associate Professor at the University of Alberta and Registered Psychologist, led students in a discussion about mental health. Dr. Yohani shared her experience working with young people and immigrant communities, and highlighted some of the research she completed in these areas.

Dr. Yohani spoke on the following topics:

1. Mental health risk factors for youth;
2. The impact of trauma on brain development;
3. Coping strategies to manage stress and/or heavy emotions; and
4. The importance of self-care and working towards mental wellness.

During the presentation, students broke into small groups to complete an activity curated by Dr. Yohani. The activity required them to have small-group discussions on some of the key topics he addressed and then to share their ideas with the rest of the groups. Afterwards, Dr. Yohani led a question-and-answer session and addressed any concerns or ideas mentees had about the topic or relating generally to the theme of mental health.

Some feedback that was provided by mentees after this workshop is highlighted below:

“I didn't have a least favourite aspect, I enjoyed the workshop a lot, it was very interesting.”

“My favourite part of this workshop was the beginning when she asked us all 'what is mental health?'

“I don't think I would change anything. It was very informative and I learned a lot. I also gained a lot of knowledge that I didn't have before.”

“All the workshops that I attended we're helpful and interesting.”

“It was a perfect workshop.”



November 6, 2021: Becoming Albertan - Dr. Jared Wesley

Dr. Jared Wesley shared his political science research project, which addressed how youth in Alberta conceptualize being Albertan. The premise of his work was to unravel stereotypes of who is deemed to be an ‘actual’ Albertan and discuss where Black and other racialized groups fit into this definition. His work involved some mentees who had him as a mentor during the summer program and BYMLP alumni from the previous year.

He addressed critical ideas of how far removed non-white and non-rural people were when interpreting their status as Albertans despite living and growing up in the province. To illustrate this idea, Dr. Wesley had students draw characters of what a “typical” Albertan looked like on a piece of paper. Students each shared the significance of their drawings and explained why they thought their images depicted an average Albertan. The exercise was well organized and fostered meaningful participation. Later, Dr. Wesley spoke of some key findings in his research and highlighted his overall interest in pursuing the topic. He shared the methodological process of arriving at his research conclusions and highlighted the ongoing work needed to finalize his project.

After the presentation, lunch was served, and youth were allowed to leave as early or as late as they wanted, as long as it was following the set workshop schedule. Upon dismissal, mentees collected their honorarium and left for the day.



November 27: Challenging Systemic Discrimination and Racism: Dr. Shirley Anne Tate

This marked the final workshop session of the Black Youth Mentorship and Leadership Program. To begin the day, the University of Alberta Faculty of Science held a brief recruitment presentation about programs and opportunities available in their faculty. They addressed the high school admission process, highlighting grade and class requirements, scholarship opportunities, study abroad programs, and careers in science. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer session.

Following this presentation, Dr. Shirley Anne Tate spoke on racism and its effects on Black communities. She began by discussing key terms that surround the topic, the history of systemic racism and how it presents in Western societies, and, lastly, ways to combat or challenge racism and discrimination as individuals and as a community. Dr. Tate organized an activity that had youth answering some questions, and doing so based on their experiences with racism, its impact, and what they would do with the knowledge they now had to address those scenarios. Students were incredibly vulnerable in discussing their experiences — speaking on events that happened to them or people they knew.

To close the presentation, Dr. Tate spoke on the power of knowing one's worth as a Black person and the importance of speaking up against any form of racial discrimination experienced or witnessed. Her speech was powerful and hopeful.



Dr. Bukola Oladunni Salami provided closing remarks where she thanked mentees, mentors, staff, and all those involved in making the BYMLP a reality. She spoke to the inspiration behind the program's development and its proposed impact on young Black students. A graduation ceremony capped the day, with mentees who had met the program completion requirements receiving a completion certificate.

Some feedback that was provided by mentees after this workshop is highlighted below:

“I liked to hear from my group members about their ideas and experiences with systemic racism and discrimination.”

“I liked talking with everyone about their experiences and knowing that we're not alone.”

“My favourite aspect of the workshop was hearing about the different experiences of my peers and understanding the problems that those my age have faced, and the feelings it created. I thought it was very interesting to discover and learn more about the way systemic racism and discrimination affects the youth of today.”

“Listening to the words of Dr Shirley Anne. Very inspirational.”

“It was fun, engaging and motivating, it opened my eyes to quite a lot of different racism people experience and made me also think about a way to fight against racism.”



EVALUATION OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

We tracked the number of youths who applied to our mentorship program, the number who participated in our mentorship program, the attendance rate of youths in workshops, and the number of youths who indicated satisfaction with our mentorship program. We also evaluated other key indicators of success for our program. The evaluation of key indicators of the success of this mentorship program is summarized below:

1. **Indicator:** Having more than 30 youths apply for our mentorship program, at least 30 youths admitted to our mentorship program, above 80% attendance rate at each workshop, and an average overall satisfaction score of 4 out of a 5-point scale at the end of the program.

Evaluation: A total of 70 youths applied to our program, 37 were admitted and 32 took up the offer. There was an average of 20 in attendance at each workshop. A total of 29 youths completed the program and received completion certificates. Mentees gave an average satisfaction score of 4.5 out of 5 for all the workshops that were organized during the mentorship program.

2. **Indicator:** Youths' verbal report on their confidence in starting and finishing university before and at the end of the program; pre- and post-test measure of changes in knowledge (e.g., related to financing education, thriving in university, and leadership). Indicators of success include a 10% increase in level of confidence to start and finish university, and a 30% increase in knowledge related to entering and succeeding in university.

Evaluation: Mentees did not indicate that the mentorship program improved the confidence they will start or finish University. However, verbal report of mentees in the program from previous year (2020) indicated that the mentorship program motivated them to start University and lessons learned with literature review and academic skills was helpful.

3. **Indicator:** The number of youths who begin university (collected one year and two years after program completion) and the number of youths who complete university (collected five years after program completion). Indicators of success include 80% of youths beginning university and 70% completing university.

Evaluation: This outcome will be measured one, two, and five years after this program

COMMENTS, SUGGESTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The BYMLP involved Black youths selected from across Edmonton, Alberta. Feedback provided by mentees and project personnel to understand the strengths, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in a future program are summarized below.

Strengths

1. Despite COVID-19 restrictions on social gatherings, the organizers were able to facilitate in-person workshops for mentees during the fall phase of the program. Mentees expressed that it felt good to meet one another in person.
2. The opportunity for youths to network with professionals/professors who had similar ethnic backgrounds was very empowering for mentees.
3. The youths acquired skills that will help them prepare for university and beyond, including literature review, research, critical thinking, group engagement, resume writing, and self confidence.
4. The program improved youths' cultural identity
5. The program contributed to a stronger sense of community, friendship and community belonging among Black youth



CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In-person Program

1. Due to COVID-19 restrictions on gathering, this program was delivered virtually throughout the summer. Virtual media made it difficult to create a traditional teaching environment, and very challenging to provide support to youth who needed more help than others. As expected, mentees suggested that having in-person meetings would be beneficial, especially with respect to socializing and forming long-lasting connections with one another.
2. It was difficult to get youths to interact with presenters and each other in the online environment. Many youths tended to be passive in the main sessions, though small group work sessions in breakout rooms encouraged them to come out of their shell.
3. Some youths had additional challenges including health issues, being newcomers to Canada and having unique family environments. We provided computers to 4 youths during the program who did not have access to a computer. In the future, it will be important to have a social worker affiliated with the program to ensure we are able to support youths in vulnerable circumstances.
4. We provided \$700 honorarium to youths. Some youths were unable to attend our program as they were low income and needed more than this amount to sustain themselves and save money over the summer. It will be important in the future to increase the funding provided to youths, to the level in similar program at the University of Alberta or the rate of Full time minimum wage for the summer.
5. Attendance was lower in the Fall semester as the sessions were in person and the youths were in school. We need to further rethink the Fall sessions.



Evaluation completion

1. The completion rate of weekly program evaluation surveys declined significantly over time. A strategy needs to be developed to increase mentees' response rates to evaluation surveys, especially if the program will continue to be held virtually.
2. A suggestion would be for the program evaluator, or proxy, to be a fixture at each workshop, attending for 0.5 to 1 hour specifically to facilitate the completion of the survey.

Time management

1. Longer or frequent short breaks
2. Less time should be allotted to some workshops that were less interactive and more time allocated to other activities such as group projects, academic writing, literature searches, and reviews.
3. More time should be assigned to discussions in breakout rooms, and sessions should include interactive elements such as quizzes and polls.



CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this program helped in improving the cultural identity of Black youth. Many mentees reported that the opportunity to network with successful professionals with similar ethnic roots was an experience that has helped in boosting their self-confidence. This year's program ended with improved sense of identity and community belonging among mentees. This year's program was successful and comes highly recommended by the mentees. Majority of the mentees expressed that they would recommend the program to their friends and family.