



UNIVERSITY  
OF ALBERTA

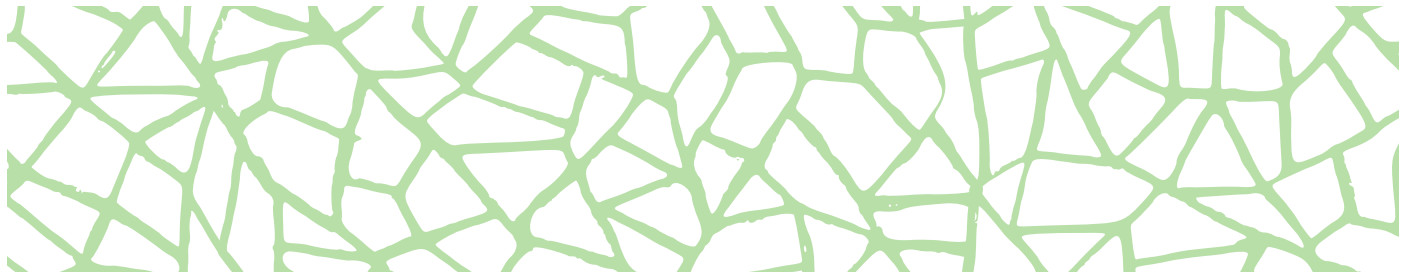
2024

REPORT

**BLACK YOUTH FOR  
SOCIAL INNOVATION** (BYSI)

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# 1. Introduction

The **Black Youth for Social Innovation (BYSI)** program aims to empower Black youth in Alberta by providing mentorship, research opportunities, and social innovation experiences to lead a pluralistic society. With the aim of addressing systemic inequities and fostering the development of leadership skills, BYSI stands as a transformative initiative that nurtures the next generation of change-makers. This report outlines the key activities, collaborations, and achievements of the program in its first eight months, focusing on the impact it has had on students, the broader community, and the partnerships forged along the way.



# 2. BYSI Program and Structure

Launched in Spring 2024 by the University of Alberta, BYSI seeks to create pathways for Black students in the College of Social Sciences and Humanities to gain essential skills in research, mentorship, and social change. The program focuses on offering opportunities in Arts, Business, Education, and Law to address the disparity in mentorship and internship opportunities available to Black students in these fields.

## Our Partners include

Berlin  
[www.berlin.ca](http://www.berlin.ca)

Ubuntu  
[www.ubuntuisr.com](http://www.ubuntuisr.com)

Government of Canada  
Summer Jobs Program

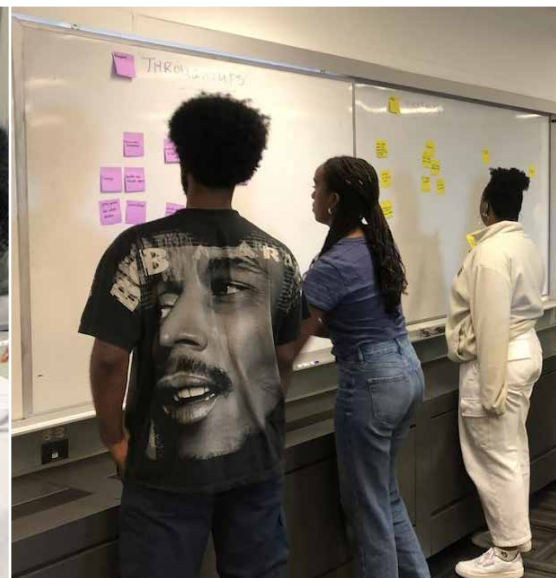
Office of the  
Vice-Provost (Equity,  
Diversity and Inclusion)

Office of the Provost  
and Vice-President  
(Academic)

Kule Institute for  
Advanced Studies

## 2.1 Strategic Plan Development

The development of the BYSI Strategic Plan was a dynamic, youth-driven process designed to empower young Black students and redefine mentorship in a way that centres their voices and cultural practices. The plan was crafted through a series of facilitated exercises that encouraged youth to engage deeply with their emotions, aspirations, and challenges. The first stage focused on helping mentees envision the mentorship experience through personal reflection, where they explored the emotions they hoped to experience and shared a collective purpose for the program. In the second stage, students used logic modeling to transform their broad aspirations into actionable goals, structuring the process from inputs to outcomes. The third stage involved identifying key strategies for achieving these goals and “How Might We” activities, fostering innovative thinking and problem-solving. In the final stage, students collaboratively identified core principles to guide their journey, ensuring the program’s vision remained anchored in their collective values. This strategic plan represents a living, evolving framework that continues to shape and be shaped by the needs and aspirations of Black youth today and into the future. Access the full document [here](#).



# 3. Key Achievements

## 3.1. First Cohort of BYSI Students

The first cohort of BYSI students, consisting of 10 students, embarked on a four-month journey of research. Each student was placed in one of the following faculty-led research projects, where they served as research assistants:

- **Black Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub (BEKH): Qualitative Study**  
This study aimed to generate a deeper understanding of Black entrepreneurship in Canada through qualitative research, aiming to create evidence-based personas that reflect the experiences of Black entrepreneurs. Leads: Dr. Jared Wesley, Dr. Eyene Okpanachi
- **Color in Green – Outdoor Recreation among BPoC Groups in Edmonton’s Urban Forests**  
This project focused on the barriers faced by Black and People of Color (BPoC) communities in accessing outdoor recreational spaces, particularly urban forests, in Edmonton. The project involved participatory mapping and focus groups to explore how socio-cultural factors and lack of access to green spaces influence recreational activities. Lead: Dr. Elizabeth Onyango
- **Common Ground**  
Investigating shifts in Alberta’s political culture, this research sought to understand the ongoing transformation of political behavior and public opinion in the province. Students contributed to focus groups, surveys, and community engagements. Lead: Dr. Jared Wesley
- **Community Engagement for Food Security Project**  
Using an Afrocentric lens, this project explored the underrepresentation of African immigrants in food security policy discussions and community initiatives in Alberta. Students contributed to data collection through interviews and community sharing circles. Lead: Dr. Josephine Godwyll
- **Harnessing Educational Remittances for Development: A Jamaican Case Study**  
This study examined the role of the Jamaican diaspora, particularly alumni chapters, in supporting educational development in Jamaica. BYSI students helped explore the impact of diasporic practices on the educational sector. Lead: Dr. Giselle Thompson
- **Storylines in Public Discourses about African Immigrants’ Youths’ Mathematics Learning**  
This research focused on analyzing how African immigrant youths are represented in public discourses surrounding mathematics learning, with the goal of identifying new, asset-based practices for engaging these students in the classroom. Lead: Dr. Kwesi Yaro
- **Viewpoint Alberta**  
This project, ongoing since 2019, focused on shifting public opinions in Alberta. BYSI students contributed to surveys and research on Alberta’s evolving political landscape. Lead: Dr. Jared Wesley

### 3.2. BYSI Representation at the University of Alberta Board of Governors Retreat

On September 6, 2024, the Black Youth for Social Innovation (BYSI) program had the privilege of being featured at the University of Alberta Board of Governors Retreat. This event marked a significant milestone for the program as BYSI students and the program's Executive Director delivered presentations that showcased the program's vision, ongoing projects, and transformative impact on participants. The students shared personal stories and experiences, illustrating how BYSI has empowered them through mentorship, research opportunities, and skill development. Their testimonials highlighted the importance of fostering equitable opportunities for Black youth in the Social Sciences and Humanities. The Executive Director further emphasized the program's strategic goals and its alignment with the university's broader commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. The presentation not only resonated with the Board of Governors but also reinforced the critical role of BYSI in shaping a more inclusive academic environment at the University of Alberta.



### 3.3. Participation in the Dagen Project

In 2024, BYSI students participated in the Dagen Project, a community-based initiative about men's mental health. It is purposefully designed to support and empower disconnected, unmotivated, and uninspired men. BYSI students participated and spoke at this important event, sharing personal experiences.



### 3.4. Fireside Chat with The Hon. Greg Fergus: The Journey to the Speaker's Chair

The BYSI program, in collaboration with the African Canadian Civic Engagement Council (ACCEC), the Africa Centre, and other Black organizations at the University of Alberta, hosted an inspiring Fireside Chat featuring The Hon. Greg Fergus, P.C., M.P., the first Black Speaker of the House of Commons. Titled "The Journey to the Speaker's Chair," the event provided a space for students, faculty, and community members to engage with Speaker Fergus as he shared insights from his groundbreaking career in public service. Throughout the discussion, Speaker Fergus highlighted the challenges and triumphs he faced on his path to becoming the first Black Speaker, offering valuable lessons on leadership, perseverance, and the importance of mentorship. Speaker Fergus shared his inspiring journey of overcoming systemic barriers to reach influential positions, highlighting the importance of diversity and inclusion in Canadian politics. The Fireside Chat encouraged students to pursue leadership roles and create meaningful change in their communities. It showcased the power of collaboration between academic institutions and community organizations, empowering Black youth and celebrating achievements within the Black community. Students left motivated, inspired, and equipped with insights for their own leadership.



BYSI student giving closing remarks at Fireside Chat event with The Hon. Greg Fergus

# 4. Media Coverage and Testimonials

The Black Youth for Social Innovation (BYSI) program has garnered significant attention in recent months, reflecting its growing influence and the transformative role it plays in the lives of Black youth. Here are a few recent features:

## CBC Feature

BYSI was highlighted by CBC in an article detailing its efforts to drive change through community engagement and innovation. The piece emphasized BYSI's commitment to mentorship and the creation of sustainable pathways for success among Black youth. [Read more here.](#)

## University of Alberta Folio

The University of Alberta spotlighted BYSI in its Folio publication, showcasing the program's impact in fostering mentorship and driving social change. The article includes interviews with participants who shared how BYSI has shaped their leadership skills and empowered them to address systemic inequities. [Read more here.](#)

## Impactful Testimonials

Many students expressed how the program has provided them with a platform to apply their skills in meaningful ways. Several testimonials highlighted the program's role in fostering their growth.

Participants consistently describe BYSI as a life-changing experience. One participant shared:

**"As a Black woman navigating spaces, it's become my first instinct to hide certain aspects of myself. But two weeks in, I found that this is a safe space that welcomed all kinds of perspectives."**

Another youth leader reflected:

**"There are mentorship programs that create a space for Black youth, but not many that target Black youth creating the change. This is an opportunity to develop creativity and innovation, connecting us with positions that will allow us to further our ideas."**



# Post Summer Survey

## Did the BYSI program meet your initial expectations? Why or why not?

*"The BYSI program goes beyond what I expected and surprised me in such a positive way. It allows me to be myself and helps inform my work and actions flexibly and creatively, and it is a comfortable environment to do so. Instead of just telling us what to do, the program allowed time and space for conversation on how our work could be impactful through our weekly meetings. I also learned so many skills when it came to things such as logic modelling and creative ways to create action items and for them to be effective. The leadership team is so welcoming and has helped me think outside the box regarding what a program like this can look like and what it can do. I had been in similar initiatives for youth before that felt more bureaucratic and restricted in what is possible, but BYSI has allowed me to see there is a possibility for change. What most surprised me is that we, the students, have such a big role in working on the program itself from the ground up. BYSI is more than the work experience program I expected; it allows me to find out more about myself, what I like to do and how I want to be involved in my community"*

- BYSI Student 1

*"The Black Youth Social Innovation (BYSI) program largely met my initial expectations as a Research Assistant. It provided a valuable platform to engage in meaningful research, collaborate with a diverse and driven team, and develop actionable strategies to address challenges faced by Black youth. The program exceeded my expectations by offering deeper insights into social innovation practices and fostering a supportive environment for professional growth."*

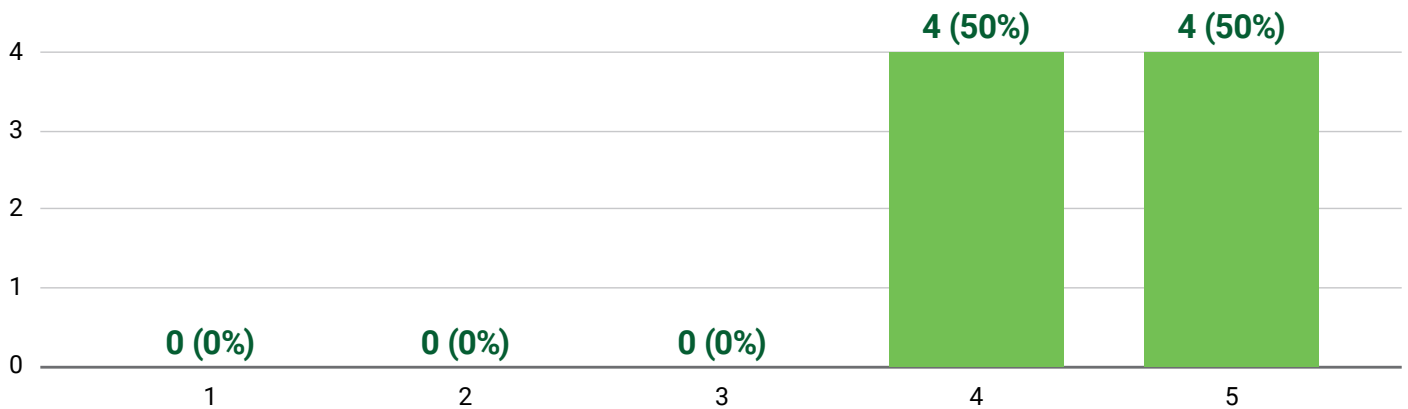
- BYSI Student 2

## How has the BYSI program contributed to your personal development in the following areas?

(Matrix Scale: 1 = No Impact, 5 = Significant Impact)

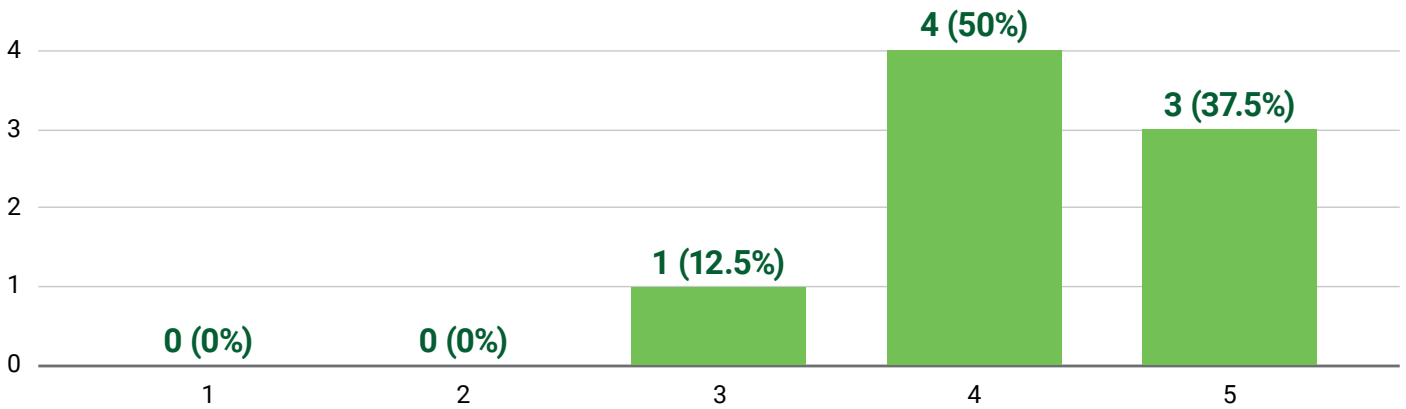
### Confidence and self-esteem

8 responses



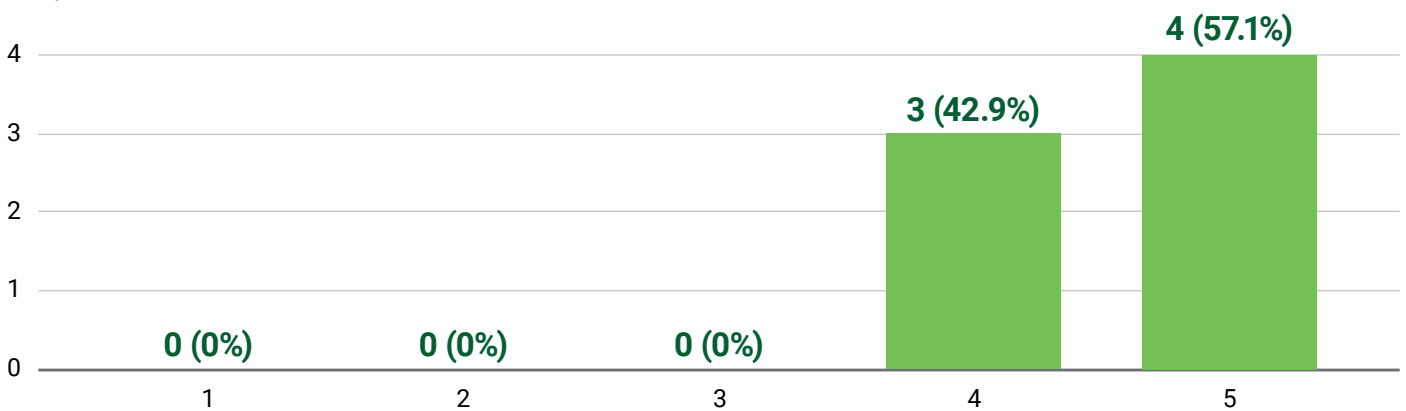
### Leadership skills

8 responses



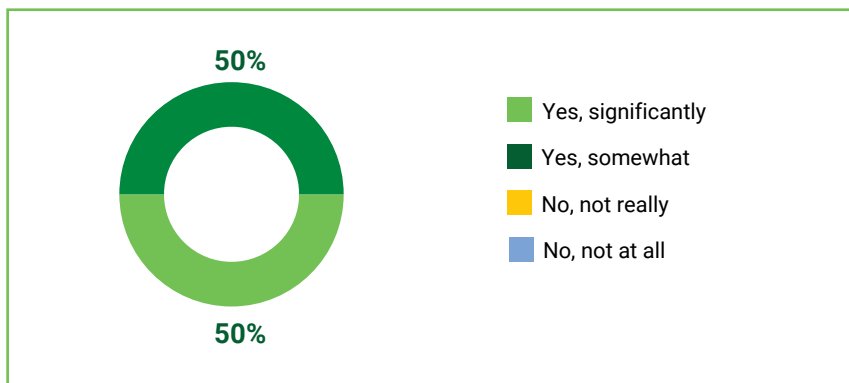
### Workshops/Seminars

7 responses



### Do you feel better prepared for academic, professional or personal challenges after completing this program?

8 responses



# 5. Looking Ahead: Plans for 2025 and Beyond

As the BYSI program continues to evolve, its mission remains focused on offering transformative opportunities for Black youth, empowering them through mentorship, research, and practical experience. Building on the successes of its first cohort and program offerings, BYSI has outlined an ambitious set of plans for 2025 and beyond that will broaden its impact and extend its reach.

## 5.1. Expanding the Number of Research Projects and Opportunities

In 2025, BYSI will expand the range of projects available to students, creating new opportunities for collaboration with local organizations, academic institutions, and community groups. Students will gain hands-on experience and strengthen their academic skills through these initiatives.

## 5.2. Strengthening Mentorship Opportunities

BYSI recognizes that mentorship is a cornerstone of student success. To enhance its impact, the program plans to further diversify and expand mentorship opportunities. A key part of this will be the introduction of a three-stream mentorship model for students:

### **INDEPENDENT STUDENT RESEARCHER STREAM**

This stream, a part of the University of Alberta's Undergraduate Research Initiative (URI), is designed for students with their own specific research projects. Students in this stream will secure a faculty supervisor and gain full ownership of their research, receiving guidance and mentorship throughout the process. This stream is perfect for students who have an independent research idea and wish to develop it with faculty support.

### **RESEARCH ASSISTANT STREAM**

In this stream, students will be employed as Research Assistants on faculty-led projects. These positions are fully funded through research grants and provide students with practical, hands-on experience in academic research. Students in this stream will not need to propose their own research but, instead, will assist faculty members in advancing their ongoing studies. This stream is ideal for those looking for practical research experience, with opportunities to build data collection, analysis, and academic writing skills.

### **INTERNSHIP STREAM**

The Internship Stream connects students with external organizations in various sectors, including private, non-profit, and public sectors. In this stream, students gain real-world experience by working on research tasks, policy analysis, or organizational development projects. This stream is designed for students who want to apply their academic knowledge to practical challenges, explore career paths outside of academia, and gain exposure to professional environments. These three streams will provide students with a holistic mentorship experience, allowing them to choose the path that best fits their career interests, research goals, and academic ambitions.

# 6. Conclusion

2024 was an important year for the BYSI program. Through its successful first cohort, impactful community engagement, and collaboration with other organizations, BYSI has made significant strides in empowering Black youth. The program continues to serve as a beacon of social innovation, mentorship, and leadership development for future generations. The success of BYSI in 2024 highlights the program's potential to create lasting change in communities while addressing critical gaps in research, mentorship, and social development for Black youth. With a clear vision for the future, BYSI is poised to continue making a significant impact in the years ahead.



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**Learn More About Black Youth  
for Social Innovation**

Visit our website [uab.ca/bysi](https://uab.ca/bysi)

BYSI opportunity page is also live on the [EL Hub](#)

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