

Black Leadership University Experience (**B.L.U.E.**) Program

Impact Report 2025-2026



About B.L.U.E.

Since launching in November 2022, the Western B.L.U.E. program has empowered Black students through four years of paid placements, mentorship and professional development opportunities. During a five-month placement (November to March), students contribute to meaningful projects with local organizations while receiving guidance from dedicated mentors. Participants build practical experience, strengthen leadership skills and gain the confidence needed to thrive in their careers through:

- **Paid placements** that help students build valuable, transferrable skills and real-world experience.
- **One-on-one mentorship** offering career guidance and real-time support to help students step into leadership roles with confidence.
- **A strong professional network** that fosters a pipeline of Black mentors and future leaders who uplift and guide the next generation.



Vision

To create an inclusive and empowering environment where Black students are supported to thrive, lead, and succeed in their academic and professional journeys, while increasing representation and equity across sectors.

“Western B.L.U.E. has always been more than a placement program - it is a community. The program helps students build leadership skills, confidence and a stronger sense of belonging while preparing them for future success.”

Dr. Opiyo Oloya

Associate Vice-President (Equity, Diversity & Inclusion)

Key Takeaways 2025-2026

The Western Black Leadership University Experience (B.L.U.E.) empowers the next generation of Black professionals with the skills, confidence and experience to excel, building a pipeline of leaders ready to break barriers and shape the future.

The program continued to grow in reach and impact during the 2025–2026 academic year, creating meaningful opportunities for 21 Black students. With over 140 applications to Western B.L.U.E., this year's cohort contributed to impactful projects across campus and community organizations. Students applied academic knowledge in real-world settings, strengthened communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills.



142 Program Applications

The program demonstrated strong demand this year, having experienced a 173% surge in applications since its launch in 2022 (52 applications).



21 Students and Host Sites

With 16 undergraduate and 5 graduate students, the cohort worked alongside 21 host sites at Western and in the London community.

4 Student Workshops

Students participated in 4 professional development workshops hosted by our key partners, Western Student Experience and the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC). Sessions covered topics such as financial literacy, networking, resume and cover letter development, personal branding, speed networking and career launch strategies.

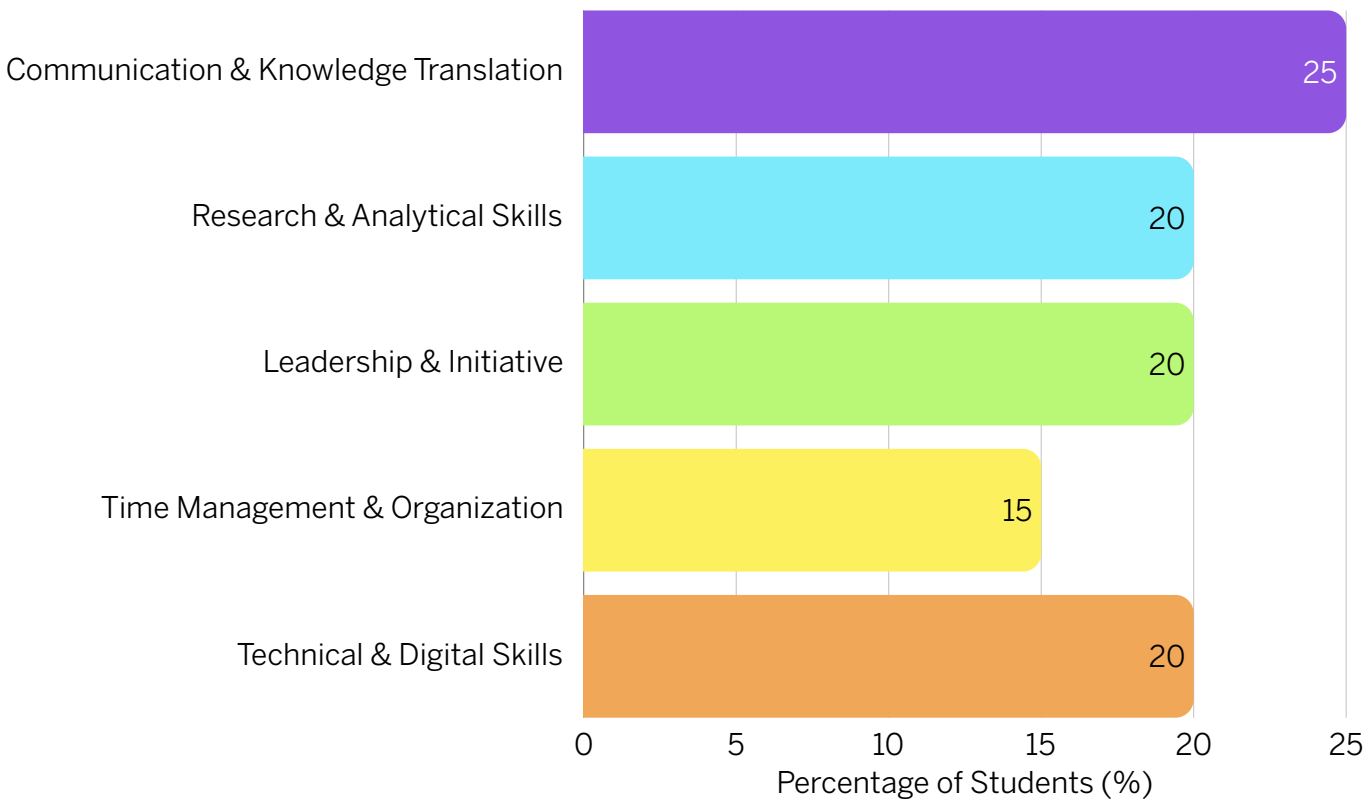
Key Contributions and Outcomes of Student Participation

Through their placements, students strengthened organizational capacity, expanded community outreach and engagement, advanced equity and inclusion efforts, applied academic learning to real-world challenges, developed leadership skills and professional networks and created lasting resources that continue to benefit organizations beyond the program.

These accomplishments were celebrated at the **Western B.L.U.E. Student Showcase and Closing Ceremony**, where more than 100 guests gathered to recognize student success and project impact.

Key Skills Developed Through the Program

Based on student feedback, communication and knowledge translation was the most frequently reported skill developed through participation in the program.



Student Reflections

Building Confidence, Leadership and Career Readiness

Student experiences reflected significant personal and professional growth. Participants developed confidence, strengthened workplace skills and gained a deeper understanding of their abilities and career interests.



“Through this experience, I discovered that I am highly capable of taking on complex, self-directed work, even when I initially doubt my abilities. I realized that I tend to underestimate my skills, but when given responsibility, I am able to produce meaningful and impactful work.”

Victor Bolaji

Canadian Medical Hall of Fame (CMHF)

“This experience has sharpened my career direction toward roles that integrate research, knowledge mobilization and community partnership.”

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“I learned that I am more adaptable, resourceful and capable in community engagement settings than I had initially realized. Overall, this experience helped me better understand my ability to contribute meaningfully to spaces that support empowerment, inclusion and growth.”

Bright Ofori

London Community Chaplaincy



Our Partners 2025-2026

The Western B.L.U.E. program is made possible through the support of valued campus, healthcare, community, and industry partners who provide placements, mentorship and learning opportunities for students.

Western University

- Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing
- Careers & Experience - Employer Relations Unit
- Dept. of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies
- Dept. of Physics and Astronomy
- Faculty of Arts and Humanities
- Housing & Ancillary Services
- Office of EDI-D - Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry
- Office of Research Services
- Radio Western
- Residence Life & Education - Housing & Ancillary Services
- Western Biology: Nootropic Food Lab

Community and Industry

- Canadian Medical Hall of Fame (CMHF)
- Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board (EMOWPDB)
- London Black Heritage Council
- London Community Chaplaincy
- Manufacturing - Nestlé
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Healthcare and Research

- London Health Sciences Centre Research Institute
- Office of Black Health - London Health Sciences Centre
- South West Regional Cancer Program - London Health Sciences Centre



Learn More

B.L.U.E. provides students with opportunities to strengthen leadership skills, expand professional networks, and contribute to meaningful projects across diverse sectors. A new investment from CIBC will support the program's continued growth and expansion, helping extend its impact through 2032-33.

To learn more about the Western B.L.U.E. program, including timelines, opportunities and host sites, please visit the program website.



westernblue@uwo.ca



[@westernuedi](https://www.instagram.com/westernuedi)

Experience B.L.U.E. In Action - Noah's Story



Western invests in Black leadership through work-integrated learning

Through Western's Black Leadership University Experience program, Noah Matsakawo-Fugar gained hands-on leadership training and mentorship during a placement at Nestlé Canada's factory in London, Ont.



Western



Equity, Diversity & Inclusion