



Western
Equity, Diversity
& Inclusion

WESTERN B.L.U.E.

**Annual Report
2025/2026**

Office of the AVP, Equity, Diversity & Inclusion



“Western B.L.U.E. has always been more than a placement program — it is a community.”

Dr. Opiyo Oloya
Associate Vice-President
Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

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& Inclusion

Executive Summary

The Western B.L.U.E. Program continued to grow in reach and impact during the 2025–2026 academic year, creating meaningful opportunities for Black students through paid placements, mentorship, and professional development. This year’s cohort contributed to impactful projects across campus and community organizations while building confidence, practical skills, leadership capacity, and clearer career direction. Students applied academic knowledge in real-world settings, strengthened communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, and supported lasting project outcomes for partner organizations.

Program Highlights



142 Applications

Record student interest and growing demand for the program.



21 Students Selected

16 Undergraduate and 5 Graduate students joined the 2025–2026 cohort.



21 Host Partners

Placements delivered across campus, healthcare, community, and industry sectors.



About B.L.U.E.

The Western B.L.U.E. Program (Black Leadership University Experience), led by **Western University's Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**, is a **paid work-integrated learning initiative** designed to support the academic, professional, and leadership development of Black students. Through meaningful placements with on-campus departments and community partners, **students work approximately 15 hours per week from November to March**, gaining hands-on experience while building leadership skills, professional networks, confidence, and valuable career connections through mentorship, workshops, and project-based learning.



"I contributed a fully modernized and scalable digital asset by transforming the Local Jobs Hub into a user-centered platform that clearly serves employers, job seekers, and service providers. This work now provides the organization with a more effective tool that directly improves how community members access employment resources."

Tamaki Konan

4 Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce Planning and Development Board (EMOWPDB)

B.L.U.E. 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.



B.L.U.E. Mission

1

Provide hands-on work experience through meaningful placements that connect students with real-world projects

2

Develop leadership and professional skills through mentorship, training, and workplace learning

3

Create pathways to career opportunities by building networks and strengthening connections with community and industry partners

Our Impact

Supported research, programs, and community initiatives

Students contributed to projects that strengthened operations, services, and community impact.

Brought fresh ideas and strengthened engagement efforts

Students introduced new perspectives while supporting outreach, communications, and participation initiatives.

Built leadership skills and professional networks

Students gained practical experience, mentorship, and connections to support future career growth.

Advanced equity and inclusion priorities

Students supported initiatives that promoted belonging, representation, and inclusion.

Applied academic learning in professional settings

Students translated classroom knowledge into practical solutions and workplace experience.

The work completed through the program extended beyond **short-term tasks**, resulting in practical outputs such as **reports, databases, educational materials, and digital content**. These achievements were also showcased at the Western **B.L.U.E. Student Showcase** and Closing Ceremony, attended by more than 100 guests celebrating student success and project impact.



“Driving meaningful contributions through student-led work that creates real value for organizations and communities”.

Our Partners

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.

- Careers & Experience
- Schulich EDI-D Office
- Radio Western
- Nootropic Food Lab
- School of Nursing

WESTERN
UNIVERSITY

- Residence Life and Education Housing
- Office of Research Services
- Housing & Ancillary Services
- Dept. Physics & Astronomy
- Faculty of Arts & Humanities
- Dept. Gender, Sexuality & Women's Studies



- LHSC Research Institute
- LHSC South West Regional
Cancer Program
- LHSC Office of Black Health

HEALTHCARE &
RESEARCH

- London Black Heritage
- London Community Chaplaincy
- Canadian Medical Hall of Fame
- Nestlé London Manufacturing
- Type Diabeat It
- Elgin Middlesex Oxford Workforce
Planning and Development Board

COMMUNITY &
INDUSTRY

Our Students

During the 2025–2026 academic year, the Western B.L.U.E. program continued to grow in both scale and impact, attracting strong student interest and demonstrating its increasing visibility across campus.



142

Applications
117 Undergraduate
25 Graduate



21

Students Selected
16 Undergraduate
5 Graduate

A highly competitive cohort of diverse and motivated students contributed to meaningful projects while building leadership skills, networks, and real-world experience.

Growing Demand

2022

Program launched with **52** applications and strong early student interest.



2023

Applications increased to **54**, showing continued momentum.



2024

Demand grew significantly to **101** applications, nearly doubling.



2025

A record **142** applications were received, reflecting the program's growing impact.





Shayo Olaiya



Yetunde Owolabi



Wendy Gachagua



Tamaki Konan



Casey Byano Akase



Salaamat Toure



Bright Ofori



Isaac Mpinda

2025/2026 B.L.U.E. Cohort



Boris Ngassam



Khaleya Linton-Smellie



Sulemana Saaka



Leah Holt



Abbay Merawi



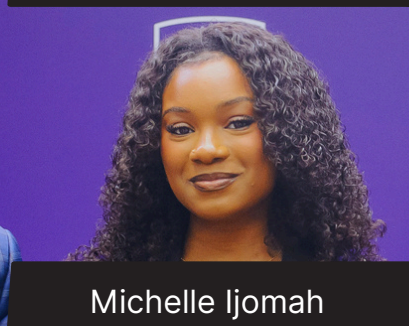
Angeer Manguen



Toluwani Oyeyinka



Abdelrahim Sadiq



Michelle Ijomah



Victor Bolaji



Yeni Shekan



Christian Grant

Professional Development



4 WORKSHOPS

Delivered Across the Program



2 KEY PARTNERS

RBC & Western Student
Experience



100% PARTICIPATION

Career Readiness Support

Students participated in career-focused workshops that strengthened employability, confidence, and professional networks.

Throughout the program, participants engaged in professional development workshops designed to prepare them for career success. Sessions delivered by **RBC focused on career readiness, financial literacy, personal branding, speed networking, and career launch strategies. Western Student Experience provided workshops on networking, resume writing, cover letters, and personal branding.** These sessions complemented placements by helping students build practical skills, confidence, and meaningful industry connections.

Student Voices

Student experiences reflected strong personal growth, increased confidence, and the ability to take initiative in real work environments. Many participants highlighted how the program pushed them beyond their comfort zones and helped them recognize their strengths while contributing meaningfully to their placements.

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

Yetunde Owolabii
Type Diabeat It

"I improved my ability to work with different teams and stay organized while helping coordinate a shared action plan."

Abbay Merawii
LHSC Research Institute

"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



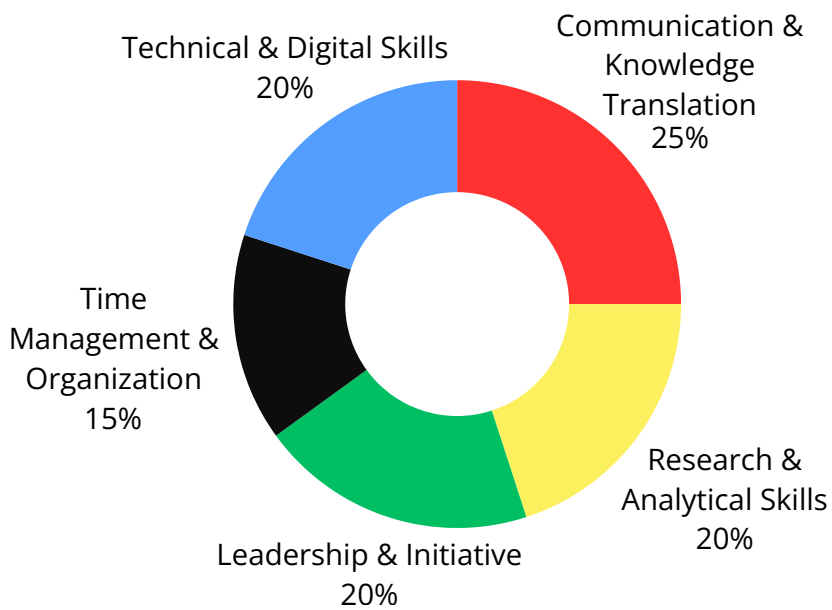
"Through this experience, I discovered that I am more adaptable, resourceful, and capable in community engagement settings than I had initially realized. Overall, this experience helped me better understand my ability to contribute meaningfully to spaces that support empowerment, inclusion, and growth."

Bright Ofori
London Community Chaplaincy



The Western B.L.U.E. 2025–2026 program developed both **technical and transferable** skills across placements. Students showed strong growth in **communication and knowledge translation**, learning to present ideas clearly, engage diverse audiences, and simplify complex information. **Research and analytical** skills were also strengthened through data organization, reporting, and evidence-based work, especially in health and equity-focused projects.

Students built **leadership, initiative, and adaptability** by taking ownership of projects in real-world settings. They improved **time management** while balancing academic and placement demands, and enhanced **technical skills** in digital tools, content development, and data systems. Overall, the program supported well-rounded skill development for both immediate performance and future careers.



Key Skills Gained (Student Feedback-Based Estimate)



Key Challenges

While the Western B.L.U.E. 2025–2026 program was highly successful, students identified several challenges that highlight opportunities for improvement. A common challenge was adapting to new roles and unfamiliar types of work, especially when tasks differed from students' academic backgrounds. This often required additional time to adjust, learn new tools, and build confidence in applying new skills in a professional setting; however, steps are being taken to better support students and mitigate these challenges in future cohorts.

“As Program Coordinator, I see these challenges as important learning points. We are continuously strengthening the program by enhancing student support, clarifying expectations, and creating more structured onboarding experiences to help students transition more confidently into their roles.”

Dr. Arun Jentrick, EDI Coordinator



Next Cohort

Students interested in future cohorts are encouraged to apply and be part of a program that builds leadership, skills, and professional networks. This experience provides a strong foundation for career growth while creating opportunities to contribute to impactful projects across diverse sectors.

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

Photos featured in this report are courtesy of Chris Kindratsky.



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