

Enhanced Theory of Change (EToC) Institutional Data Use: Nottingham Trent University – Black Leadership Programme (BLP)

September 2024

Table of contents

ENHANCED THEORY OF CHANGE DIAGRAM	4
ENHANCED THEORY OF CHANGE UNDERPINNING NARRATIVE	5
VERSION	5
NAME	5
WHY IS THE INTERVENTION BEING RUN?	6
References	7
WHO IS THE INTERVENTION FOR?	9
WHAT IS THE INTERVENTION?	11
WHO IS DELIVERING THE INTERVENTION?	14
HOW IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?	15
WHERE IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?	17
HOW MANY TIMES WILL THE INTERVENTION BE DELIVERED? OVER HOW LONG?	17
WILL THE INTERVENTION BE TAILORED?	17
HOW WILL IMPLEMENTATION BE OPTIMISED?	17
WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS / STAKEHOLDERS?	18
CHANGE MECHANISMS	19
Change mechanism 1	19
Change mechanism 2	19
Change mechanism 3	20

Change mechanisms 4 and 5

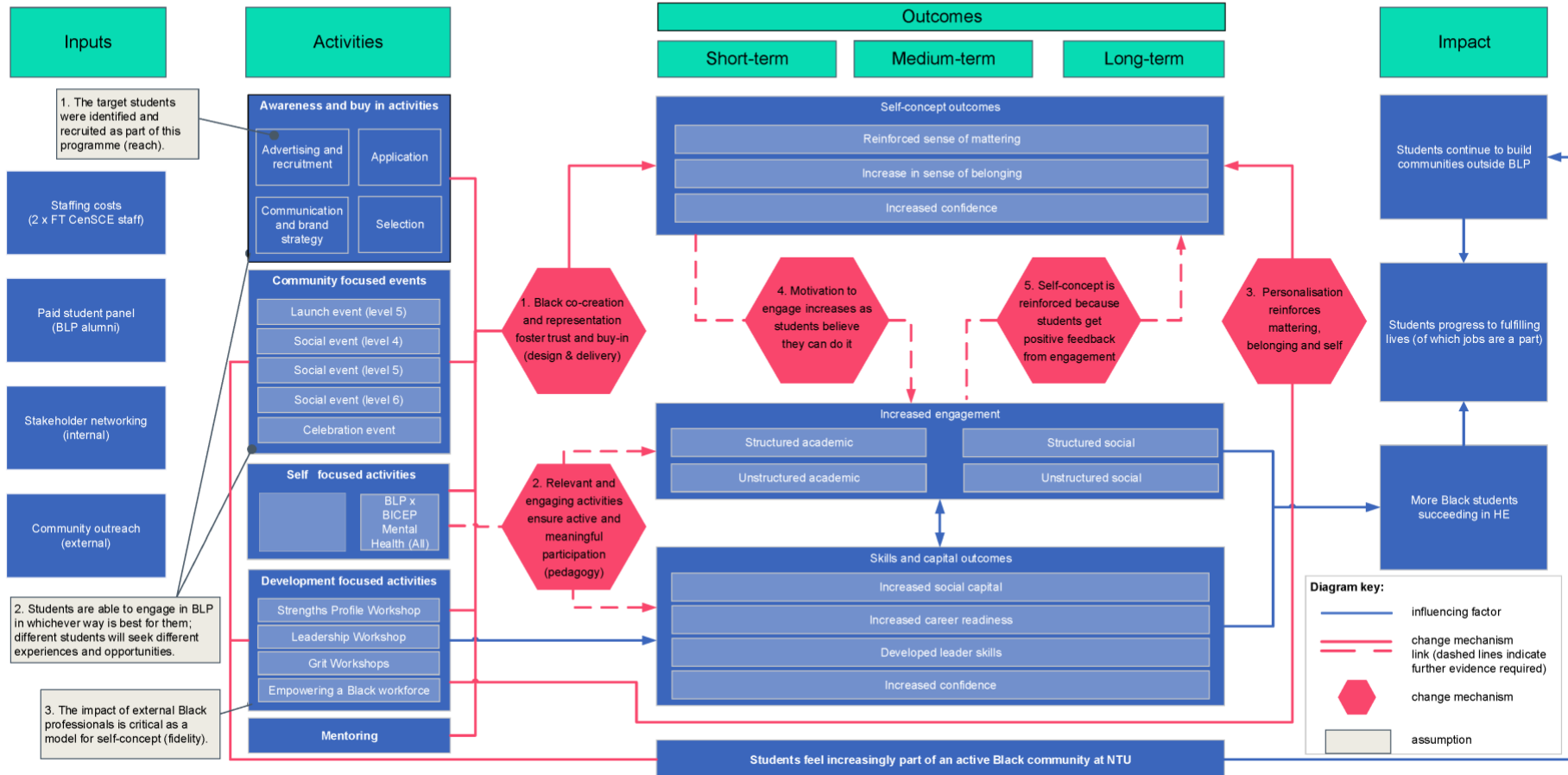
ASSUMPTIONS	23
Assumption 1	23
Assumption 2	23
Assumption 3	23
WHAT IS THE EVALUATION AIM?	25
WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS?	25
WHAT METHODOLOGY ARE YOU USING?	25

ENHANCED THEORY OF CHANGE DIAGRAM

Black Leadership Programme (BLP) Enhanced Theory of Change



SCoLPP
Staffordshire Centre of Learning and Pedagogic Practice



ENHANCED THEORY OF CHANGE UNDERPINNING NARRATIVE

VERSION

V4 – April 2024

NAME

NTU Black Leadership Programme (BLP)

WHY IS THE INTERVENTION BEING RUN?

The intervention is being run to increase Black heritage students' social capital, confidence, and ultimately engagement in all aspects of their university experience at NTU primarily by facilitating a space for Black heritage students who are at higher risk of isolation in academic and social spaces. The BLP is the result of a student consultation which identified the need for interventions that prioritise Black representation, identity, and leadership in addition to ensuring equal access to important soft and professional skills opportunities.

Despite a renewed focus on disparities of attainment in disadvantaged groups, ethnicity degree awarding gaps persist in higher education (HE) institutions across the UK. The term BAME (Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic) has been used as a label for these students who may be disadvantaged, however this is problematic. Bunglawala (2019) in a Gov.UK Civil Service blog for example, describes how the only commonality between individuals within the BAME community is that they are non-white. In fact, this label masks a wide range of cultures, backgrounds, experiences, issues, and assets. Breaking this label down, therefore, highlights an important sub-group, Black-heritage students, who are particularly susceptible to disadvantages within HE. This includes Black-heritage (including Black African, Black Caribbean, and other Black backgrounds) being less likely to be awarded an upper second or a first-class degree (AdvanceHE, 2021), and having an average lower earning and employment rate post-graduation (Department for Education, 2023).

The reasons behind these disparities are multifaceted, and despite significant research and literature, still not fully understood. This in part is due to the indirect and complex nature of the problem; the awarding gaps are not a direct result of one specific issue, but a symptom of a wider spectrum of issues that are caused by societal, sector-wide, and institutional factors as well as issues that may be personal or individual, influenced by each person's intersectional demography and complex history. Connor et al. (2004) conducted research on behalf of the UK Government, and found that factors that disproportionately impacted Black students included: financial difficulties, lack of time as a resource, lack of facilities and support, challenges in the transition into the HE environment, lack of confidence, lack of representation and role models particularly in leadership positions and future careers, and social integration

including belonging and relationship building. The latter issues have been subject to further investigation in recent years and are the focus of the intervention.

Additional research into each of these areas provides evidence of the impact of these factors. For example, there is significant evidence that Black students face more challenges in adapting to the UK HE educational environment, and that this challenge is only compounded for those that were previously educated in a different country (Dhanda, 2009; Shaheen, 2016). A lack of 'preparedness for success' is also a factor disproportionately affecting Black students (Singh, 2011), as is a lack of role models in leadership positions (Universities UK, 2019). Carson (2009) for example identified that Black students are more likely to report feeling socially isolated, experience 'microaggressions', and stereotyping. Walton and Cohen (2011) describe how the cumulative effects of these stressors can subsequently lead to poor academic performance, as well as poor psychological outcomes. From a UK perspective, research conducted at a northern English university reflected these feelings of isolation and lack of belonging amongst their Black student population (Davies and Garrett, 2012), highlighting the importance of this issue contributing, in part, to the Black awarding gap.

Representation, belonging, mattering, and further issues that have been discussed all play into student behaviour and decision making not just within university, but even prior to enrolment. For example, Read et al. (2003), after interviewing Black students at a post-1992 UK university found that many based their decision of which university to go to on the proportion of people 'like them' at that institution.

References

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<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/education-skills-and-training/after-education/des>

Dhanda, M. (2010). Understanding Disparities in Student Attainment: Black and minority ethnic students' experience. *University of Wolverhampton*.

Read, B., Archer, L., & Leathwood, C. (2003). Challenging cultures? Student conceptions of 'belonging' and 'isolation' at a post-1992 university. *Studies in higher education, 28*(3), 261-277.

Shaheen, N. (2016). International students' critical thinking-related problem areas: UK university teachers' perspectives. *Journal of Research in International Education, 15*(1), 18-31.

Singh, G. (2011). Black and minority ethnic (BME) students' participation in higher education: improving retention and success: A synthesis of research evidence. *Higher Education Academy*.

Walton, G. M., & Cohen, G. L. (2011). A brief social-belonging intervention improves academic and health outcomes of minority students. *Science, 331*(6023), 1447-1451.

WHO IS THE INTERVENTION FOR?

The BLP is primarily designed for second year (level 5) undergraduate students at NTU, and specifically for students of Black heritage. Regarding year group, this was chosen as these students have progressed through first year and are better able to understand the range of extracurricular activities available at NTU, when applications open. There are additional activities available to undergraduate students in other years, such as the 'Community Building Events' or the mental health workshop (jointly delivered with University of Nottingham, [UoN]), however the bulk of the programme, particularly the skill development sessions, are exclusively for second year participants.

Regarding ethnicity, this programme is open to students of Black heritage; this categorisation covers a significant variety of ethnicities, including but not limited to, Black British, Caribbean, or African, mixed or multiple ethnic groups (for example, White and Black African), home students or international students.

Community focused events

- Launch event (level 5 only) – Programme staff, student panel (in part designed, but delivered), external staff – this changes year on year)
- Social event level 4 – Designed by student panel, delivered by student panel
- Social event level 5 – Designed by student panel, delivered by student panel
- Social event level 6 – Designed by student panel, delivered by student panel and external (due to the design)
- Celebration event (all years) – Programme staff, student panel (designed, not delivered), external staff – this changes year on year)

'Self' focused events

- Black studies – External (designed and delivered, design support by programme staff and student panel)
- Joint BLP x BICEP (Black Industry Connections and Empowerment Programme¹) workshop: Mental health (all years) – Designed by student panel from UoN and NTU and delivered by student panel and external staff

Development focused events

- Strengths profile workshop – NTU employability

- Leadership workshop – External
- Grit training – External
- Empowering a Black workforce workshop – NTU employability

Mentoring – NTU alumni, NTU fellowship programme

¹ The BICEP programme is delivered by UoN, and is exclusively for UoN students. This programme has similarities to the BLP in terms of target group, however, it is a distinct programme with a different, albeit comparable, focus.

WHAT IS THE INTERVENTION?

The intervention comprises four strands of activities:

- Awareness, and buy-in activities
- Community focused events
- 'Self' focused events
- Development focused events

Activities are designed to effect outcomes in students' awareness, understanding and buy-in of the programmes aims, to increase students' soft and professional skills, to develop students' feeling of identify, representation and sense of belonging, to develop trust in themselves and their university and wider community, and to increase students' engagement on their course, in careers opportunities and with their own communities. These outcomes, in turn, are theorised to have an impact on students overall on-course and post-HE outcomes. A full table of activities with details for each event is found in the *How is the intervention being delivered?* section.

Awareness and buy-in activities

These are activities that promote and communicate the programme's aims and establish its brand and mission. It is also a means of disseminating through social media and via NTU communications streams crucial information about the BLP including what activities are offered when, to whom, and how to apply.

Community building events (CBE)

The launch event takes place is specifically for the programme's core participants: second year students. It helps both staff and students to become more aware and understanding the intervention, its aims and how it works, i.e., how it is of benefit to individuals and the wider Black student community at NTU. It sets the tone and lays the groundwork for longer term buy-in and trust in the programme's core aims, and desired outcomes and impact.

Community building events are delivered separately for first and second year students and can include regular social activities such as games and quiz nights. These are theorised primarily to boost students' social opportunities which help to reinforce identity and a sense

of belonging and community. Community events for second year students include networking opportunities that also encourage the development of communication skills and social capital defined by programme leadership as: “understanding of which opportunities to go for and their value.”

A celebration event is held at the end of each delivery year, with participants who successfully complete the programme (by attending a minimum of three mentoring sessions) awarded a certificate and programme success stories celebrated. This is expected to increase student motivation and buy-in for the programme and to create a space to celebrate Black student success thereby increasing confidence, belonging and trust in the university.

‘Self’ focused events

Activities in this strand are designed with the intention of reinforcing Black students’ feeling of representation so that a stronger sense of identity and belonging to a community can develop to address the potential for on-course or social isolation. Black studies sessions are designed to address gaps in Black representation in formal curricular study. Student check-ins are a chance to monitor students’ needs and progress and mental health support (in partnership with UoN’s BICEP) - available to all BLP participants) are offered to ensure Black students have a safe space in which to talk about mental health issues more directly. These activities ensure Black students involved in the programme are given the opportunity and space to develop a stronger sense of identity and community and prioritise mental health so that they can achieve positive academic, social and professional outcomes.

Development focused events

The development of soft skills is facilitated through workshops and mentoring sessions. The student panel is a vital resource here, consisting of third year students who have participated in the programme mentoring second year students. The student panel receives training and supports with designing and leading this strand of activities.

The core outputs of these activities are workshops and mentoring sessions designed to enable the development of professional and social skills (of indirect and direct benefit to students' academic growth), post-HE skills and workplace skills in communication, leadership, resilience, self-awareness, self-trust, and increase social capital.

Some of these activities (Empowering a Black workforce, GRIT workshops, and mentoring sessions) share desired outcomes with the identity strand (see above). Empowering a Black workforce activities and externally delivered GRIT sessions are not only designed to empower students' professional skills but also provide the space for students to feel represented and to increase a sense of identity and belonging. Mentoring sessions, due to their highly tailored nature also intersect with belonging and identity outcomes as sessions are flexible and depend on what the student needs mentoring in at the time of meeting. For example, a student might need solely social support over the course of their meetings or a range of support that encompasses increasing their social capital from through interactions with a more experienced mentor to having a space for socialising with a relatable peer.

WHO IS DELIVERING THE INTERVENTION?

The primary resource for the BLP relates to staffing costs. This is in the form of two full time members of CenSCE staff who have primary responsibility for the programme. In addition, a paid student panel of former BLP participants are also involved in design and deliver of some parts of the programme.

In addition to cost, inputs include strong relationships with internal and external stakeholders, both relating to design, delivery, and promotion of the programme. Community outreach and wider networking is required, not only to promote the programme, but to allow participants to establish social connections to employers and professionals outside of the HE sector. Collaboration is required with the UoN specifically related to the joint mental health workshop, which is delivered to participants of the BLP and to participants of the BICEP. Finally, collaboration is needed with specific teams across NTU such as Child and mental Health Services, Employability, and Academic Registry for logistical, administrative, and marketing support.

HOW IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?

The BLP is delivered almost exclusively (except for mentoring) as a physical in-person event. The rationale for this is that ensuring participants are committed to attending, and engaging in, the programme throughout is more easily achieved through in-person delivery. Furthermore, physical delivery compliments the active and participatory pedagogical approach taken in the Self-focused and Development-focused events. The Community-focused events do not have a pedagogical component as these events are social rather than involving teaching or learning.

Table 1: BLP Activity Schedule 2023-24:

Event	Date	Delivery type
Awareness and buy-in		
Marketing	1 Sep – 5 Nov 2023	Virtual
Recruitment	18 Sep – 5 Nov 2023	Virtual
Shortlisting	6 Nov – 10 Nov 2023	Virtual
Community-focus events		
Launch Event	20 Nov 2023	Physical
CBE BLP	21 Nov 2023 13 Feb 2024	Physical
CBE	22 Nov 2023 23 Nov 2023 14 Feb 2024 15 Feb 2024 19 Mar 2024 20 Mar 2024	Physical
Celebration Event	12 April 2024	Physical
Self-focused events		
Black Studies	7 Feb 2024 8 Feb 2024	Physical

BLPxBICEP Mental Health Workshop	14 Mar 2024	Physical
Development-focused events		
Grit Resilience Workshops	27 Nov – 19 Nov 2023 4 Dec – 6 Dec 2023	Physical
Grit Follow up	21 Feb 2024 22 Feb 2024	Physical
Empowering a Black Workforce	21 Feb 2024	Physical
Strengths Profile Workshops	6 Mar 2024 7 Mar 2024	Physical
Leadership Workshops	19 Mar 2024 20 Mar 2024 21 Mar 2024	Physical
Other		
Mentoring	15 Jan – 30 June 2024	Mixed

WHERE IS THE INTERVENTION DELIVERED?

See *Table 1: BLP Activity Schedule 2023-24* in the section above for specific sessions and delivery method.

There are two key aspects of space and environment that are fundamental to the BLP. Firstly, the space in which the programme takes place is always physically on campus except for the community building events, where the location is at the discretion of the students and often outside of university grounds. The physical aspect is key to enhancing the interpersonal relationship and community building between the participants themselves. Hosting events on campus reinforces the message that the university spaces are reserved for that group specifically and is a key part of establishing a sense of belonging at the university.

HOW MANY TIMES WILL THE INTERVENTION BE DELIVERED? OVER HOW LONG?

Core programme activities run from January until June. A flexible approach to delivery is employed for mentoring sessions. A minimum of three sessions are required for programme participants to officially complete the programme and earn a certificate. However, students may meet mentors an unlimited number of times. The annual launch and celebration events bookend programme delivery and take place once per academic year. See *Table 1: BLP Activity Schedule 2023-24* in the *How is the Intervention Delivered?* section for specific sessions and delivery period.

WILL THE INTERVENTION BE TAILORED?

Mentoring sessions are highly personalised and dependent on student needs. Due to the wide array of programme needs, these sessions may cover a range of needs from skills development and networking to social support.

HOW WILL IMPLEMENTATION BE OPTIMISED?

Activities are either co-designed, and or led, by Black students and delivered by Black staff to ensure programme beneficiaries are appropriately represented, activities evidenced by a clear need and are relevant, and engaging. The programme mantra “something by us, for us” underpins a commitment to Black student owned activities delivered in a safe space.

WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS / STAKEHOLDERS?

Black Leadership Programme staff and facilitators (which include both final year student panel members and NTU alumni) are key actors in ensuring the success of the programme. They are responsible for designing and delivering relevant and appropriate activities that engage participants and provide them with the tools to succeed on their academic, social and career pathways.

CHANGE MECHANISMS

Change mechanism 1. Black co-creation and representation foster trust and buy-in (design and delivery).

Black ownership of design and delivery, including student co-creation of activities and facilitation by Black professionals are anticipated to foster trust in the programme's aims and the process. Representation is core to developing students' sense of mattering, belonging and self-concept. This, in turn, helps to ensure students are motivated to participate in activities. Freeman et al. (2021) position 'modelling' and 'relatedness' as key to developing a sense of identity and, subsequently, motivation to participate meaningfully in academia in a study exploring the impact of racial identity on academic motivation for STEM students at a Historically Black College or University (HBCU) learning environment.

Evidence:

- Freeman, K. E., Winston-Proctor, C. E., Gangloff-Bailey, F., & Jones, J. M. (2021). Racial Identity-Rooted Academic Motivation of First-Year African American Students Majoring in STEM at an HBCU. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.669407>
- Additional evidence for this change mechanism comes from a combination of informal anecdotal evidence through discussions with students, formal consultation that precipitated the programme's creation and qualitative interviews with programme participants.

Change mechanism 2. Relevant and engaging activities ensure active and meaningful participation (pedagogy).

Skills development activities require active participation from students involved in the BLP. As discussed above, the design of activities that are relevant and interesting to participants, and delivered by individuals who represent the lived experience of participants is a precursor to ensuring active participation.

Evidence:

- Untested change mechanism

Change mechanism 3. Personalisation reinforces mattering, belonging and self.

Participants are paired with alumni mentors from the same discipline. Personalisation reinforces mattering, belonging and self, which, in turn, increases motivation to engage and activates potential for development activities to be impactful. As discussed above, relatedness and modelling can be transformational in activating motivation among BLP participants. Additionally, personalised mentoring can create a social bridge to their subject, facilitate subject-specific on-course support, and increase social capital widening post-HE pathways. An example of using subject-specific mentoring effectively can be drawn from a short course designed by the British Society for Research into the Learning Mathematics (BSRLM) (Crisan, 2020).

Evidence:

- Crisan, C. (2021). Mentor-Mentees conversations: Making explicit the teaching and learning of mathematics. *Proceedings of the British Society for Research into Learning Mathematics* 40(3). November 2020, 30 (3). UK.

Change mechanism 4. Motivation to participate increases as engagement increases, and that behaviour becomes habitual.

Change mechanism 5. Self-concept is reinforced because students get positive feedback from engagement.

Change mechanisms 4 and 5 are presented together due to the dependent relationship they hold in the EToC. As noted in *Change Mechanism 1*, co-creation and representation are a prerequisite for design and delivery of BLP activities that are meaningful to Black students participating in the intervention. This creates the conditions for students engaged in activities to develop a sense that they

matter to their academic institution and that academic and social spaces are place in which they belong, thereby motivating increased engagement. Increased engagement then provides students positive feedback that increases their confidences and reinforces their self-concept. This process is vital to strengthening self-concept and community activity in and out of HE. A sense of identity fosters higher levels of engagement and motivation to continue and succeed within, outside of, and beyond academia. Self-reinforcing motivation and engagement are critical to improving academic outcomes for students involved in the programme (Anderman & Anderman, 1999; Goodenow, 1993; Goodenow & Grady, 1993; Yap et al, 2011; Walton and Cohen, 2011).

Evidence:

- Anderman, L. H., & Anderman, E. M. (1999). Social predictors of changes in students' achievement goal orientations. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*, 21–37.
- Goodenow, C. (1993). The psychological sense of school membership among adolescents: Scale development and educational correlates. *Psychology in the Schools, 30*, 79–90.
- Goodenow, C., & Grady, K. E. (1993). The relationship of school belonging and friends' values to academic motivation among urban adolescent students. *Journal of Experimental Education, 62*, 60–71.
- Yap, S. C., Settles, I. H., & Pratt-Hyatt, J. S. (2011). Mediators of the relationship between racial identity and life satisfaction in a community sample of African American women and men. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 17*(1), 89.

References for the change mechanisms

- Anderman, L. H., & Anderman, E. M. (1999). Social predictors of changes in students' achievement goal orientations. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25*, 21–37.
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- Freeman, K. E., Winston-Proctor, C. E., Gangloff-Bailey, F., & Jones, J. M. (2021). Racial Identity-Rooted Academic Motivation of First-Year African American Students Majoring in STEM at an HBCU. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12.
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ASSUMPTIONS

Assumption 1. The target students were identified and recruited as part of this programme (reach).

The application and selection process in participant recruitment is key to ensuring the 'correct' students benefit from the BLP. The aim of application and selection, which includes a personal statement, questionnaire and review of student demographic characteristics is to identify students who are less engaged (academically and socially) and less likely to achieve at the same rate as their peers.

Evidence:

- Untested assumption

Assumption 2. Students can engage in BLP in whichever way is best for them; different students will seek different experiences and opportunities.

While multiple different events are run through the project, students can 'opt in' to various aspects as they would like. This is because different students will be seeking different things from the programme, and on a holistic level it works best by providing a safe community specifically for Black heritage students. Though different in terms of stated objectives, there is evidence to support this assumption in models of flexible learning programmes, where increased student engagement amongst 'disengaged' student groups was observed (Thomas & Dymont, 2019).

Evidence:

- Thomas, J. and Dymont, J. (2019). The role of flexible learning programs in enabling behavioural engagement. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 24(4), 405-420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2019.1633740>

Assumption 3. The impact of external Black professionals is critical as a model for self-concept (fidelity).

This ensures outputs are meaningful to students and are therefore more likely to result in students engaging meaningfully with the programme resulting in positive outcomes and impacts.

Evidence:

- The evidence for this derives from a combination of informal anecdotal evidence through discussions with students, formal consultation that precipitated the programme's creation and qualitative interviews with programme participants. This is based on previous years of programme delivery and participant feedback that co-designed activities are relevant and engaging. Representatives and facilitators of the BLP are core to the effectiveness and potential impact of the activities delivered. Part of the programme's mantra: "something by us, for us" is that all activities are designed and delivered by Black students and staff to ensure activities are appropriate, relevant, representative, and able to meet Black students where they are.

References for all assumptions

- Thomas, J. and Dymont, J. (2019). The role of flexible learning programs in enabling behavioural engagement. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 24(4), 405-420. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632752.2019.1633740>

WHAT IS THE EVALUATION AIM?

The evaluation will explore the impact of the BLP on engagement, degree outcomes and graduate.

Comprehensive evaluation aims can be found in the [trial protocol document](#).

WHAT ARE THE EVALUATION QUESTIONS?

RQ1. Does BLP participation influence students' engagement at NTU?

H₀: Participation in BLP has no relationship with engagement at NTU.

H₁: BLP participants have significantly different engagement scores across four domains of engagement (structured academic, structured social, unstructured academic, unstructured social) compared to those that did not participate in BLP.

RQ2. Does academic engagement mediate the relationship between BLP participation and degree outcomes?

H₀: Academic engagement has no relationship with BLP participation and degree outcomes.

H₁: BLP participation impacts student engagement which in turn impacts degree award.

RQ3. Does social engagement mediate the relationship between BLP participation and graduate outcomes?

H₀: Social engagement levels do not mediate the relationship between BLP participation and graduate outcomes.

H₁: BLP participation impacts employability and structured social engagement levels which in turn impacts graduate outcomes.

WHAT METHODOLOGY ARE YOU USING?

The impact of the BLP on degree outcomes and graduate outcomes using MANOVA (Multivariate Analysis of Variance) comparing BLP participants with eligible potential participants using Propensity Score Matching. The impact of BLP on degree outcomes and graduate outcomes will be tested using path analyses. If a relationship emerges between BLP participation and degree outcome and graduate outcome path analyses can help to understand the relative contribution of the different engagement domains through mediation.

A complete evaluation methodology can be found in the [trial protocol document](#).