



2024

# YOUTH INVESTIGATORS SUMMIT

*PROGRAM FOR RESEARCH ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGEMENT (PRYDE)*

*Bronfenbrenner Center for Translational Research*



**Cornell  
Human Ecology**



**PRYDE**  
Program for Research  
on Youth Development  
and Engagement



# INTRODUCING THE 2024 YOUTH INVESTIGATORS



From left to right:

Morgan Satchell, Daury Taveras, Mary Colaco,  
David Rivera, Shannon Gadry, Emmaline Lefkow,  
Mikaela Lagman, Michaela Annan,  
Crisbel Narvaez, Chaniya Santiago,  
Kailey Rojas Martinez, Silas Bobrow, David Fyffe

Not pictured:

Jocelyn Bartz, Daniella Marte, Jada Murphy, Jarlin Polanco,  
Christopher Rodriguez, Taraji Spence



# PROGRAM BACKGROUND

“Participatory Action Research (PAR) empowers community members to learn and apply research techniques in order to discover solutions to issues in their community. **Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) is when youth and adults partner to improve the conditions of youth lives – using research techniques.**”

– Youth Activism Project

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Among adolescents, YPAR often fosters critical thinking, interpersonal skills, and decision-making abilities.

Involvement in the research process can encourage sociopolitical skills among young people, including motivation to positively influence their schools and communities.

(Powers and Tiffany, 2006)  
(Ozer and Douglas, 2012)



For the second year in a row, we here at PRYDE partnered with Kristin Ruggiero (4-H Resource Educator from Rockland County) to host a ten-week crash course in youth participatory action research: the Youth Investigators Program.

Hosted in North Rockland High School, 20 bright and motivated ninth-grade students (i.e. Youth Investigators) learned about the social science research process – including the generation of a research question, methods often associated with YPAR, research ethics, and the dissemination of findings. In June, 14 of these students came to Cornell to put their classroom learnings into action.

The Youth Investigators in Action Summit empowered students to ask their own questions and use social science research skills to answer them – providing teens with the tools to make critical observations about their own communities. This brief report will outline key events of the Youth Investigators in Action Summit, including an overview of activities, a summary of students' findings and recommendations, and data collected from surveys with the Youth Investigators.



# DAY ONE



Upon arriving at Cornell, Youth Investigators and PRYDE staff gathered to discuss social identity, social justice, and youth participatory action research. In doing so, Youth Investigators were encouraged to think about how their overlapping identities (race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.) might inform the research that they conduct – and, likewise, how these identities might play a role in the educational experiences of high school and college students.

Following this, students headed to Mann Library, where they took part in a data scavenger hunt activity. Using demographic data from several sources, Youth Investigators explored how social identities can affect educational attainment, earnings, pathways after high school, and more. Youth Investigators – some of whom had never used Excel before – created graphs and charts to demonstrate their findings. In particular, they recognized a lack of racial diversity among the student bodies at many prestigious universities – and the expensive tuition that many of these institutions charge, especially when compared to state schools.

Once this secondary data analysis was completed, students and PRYDE staff teamed up to generate a research question: **How do social identities impact pathways to college and career?** Youth Investigators would spend the next two days collecting additional data to answer this question

After the first day, students went back to their dorm – where they got a taste for what the college experience might look like.

# DAY TWO



Day two was jam packed – and started bright and early. To answer their research question, the Youth Investigators kicked the day off by preparing to interview Cornell students and recent college grads. Investigators brainstormed questions about race and class in the university setting, factors that influenced college decisions, and more. Investigators were prepped on best-practices in conducting an interview, and then they were off!

Many of the Investigators cited these interviews as their favorite part of the Summit. Not only were these interviews a rich source of qualitative data, but the Investigators were given an opportunity to learn a bit more about life at university.

Following these interviews, Investigators were tasked with making sense of this data. Students worked together to conduct a thematic analysis of what they learned, finding emerging themes and ideas that cut across each of these conversations.

After lunch, Youth Investigators completed a photovoice activity. Photovoice uses photography as a data collection tool to document observations about one's environment. In Anabel Taylor Hall, they captured photos of student support services, representations of diverse voices, and examples of accessibility and inaccessibility – among other things. Youth Investigators noticed that the majority of paintings in the building represented white men; interested in this, Investigators took it upon themselves to research Cornell's past and present leadership, discovering that 12 of Cornell's 14 presidents have been white men. They also took note of gender neutral restrooms across the Cornell campus; this made them reflect on a lack of such restrooms in North Rockland High School.

# DAY TWO



While exploring this part of campus, Investigators were also able to check out the amazing resources available at the Durland Alternatives Library, and learned a bit about some examples of social justice and activism on the Cornell campus – including the 1969 Afro-American Society takeover of Willard Straight Hall. Upon returning to the classroom, Investigators made sense of these photovoice images, identifying themes that they recognized across campus.

Now that the Investigators had gathered data and drawn conclusions, it was time to take action. Investigators were encouraged to think about how they could use their voices to encourage equity in educational settings, including both Cornell and North Rockland. Based on their learnings and reflections, students conjured a list of recommendations for Cornell faculty and staff, administration at North Rockland High School, and other members of their community.



# DAY THREE



On the final day of the Summit, Investigators arrived early in the morning, ready to get to work. Investigators broke into groups to prepare a presentation for Cornell faculty and staff – sharing what they learned from their three methods of data collection, their interpretation of their findings, and their recommendations for equitable changes.

Students shared their presentation with a room of Cornell faculty, Bronfenbrenner Center staff, and North Rockland leadership.

Afterward, the Investigators answered audience questions – sharing their experience on the Cornell campus, what surprised them about the applied social science research process, and what they plan to do with these new skills. You can view their slides [here](#), or by scanning the QR code on the next page.

## Among their recommendations, the Youth Investigators posited:

- Cornell should diversify the representation of notable alumni and figures throughout university libraries and common spaces.
- Cornell should increase diversity among university faculty.
- North Rockland High School should build gender inclusive restrooms.
- North Rockland High School should increase campus accessibility.



# VIEW THEIR PRESENTATION



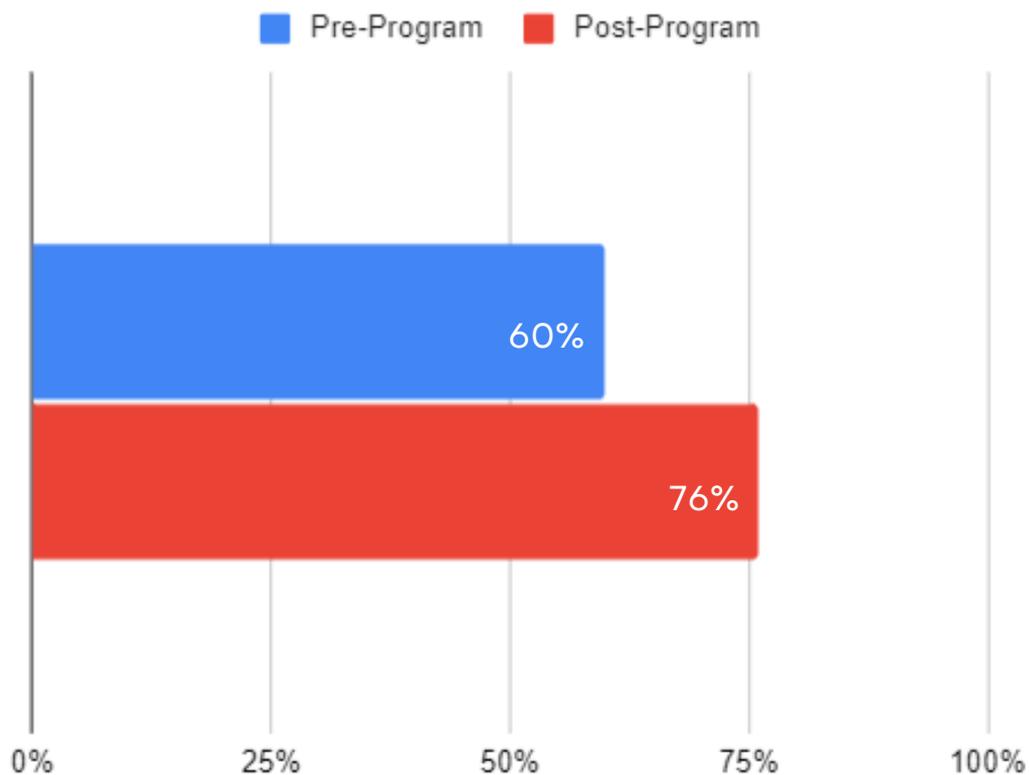
After receiving certificates for their successful completion of the Youth Investigators Program, students again prepared to present their findings – this time at the closing ceremony of 4-H Career Explorations. Two Investigators, Chaniya Santiago and David Fyffe, confidently took the stage at the Alice Statler Auditorium, reflecting on their experience at the three-day Summit.

# YOUTH INVESTIGATORS EVALUATION

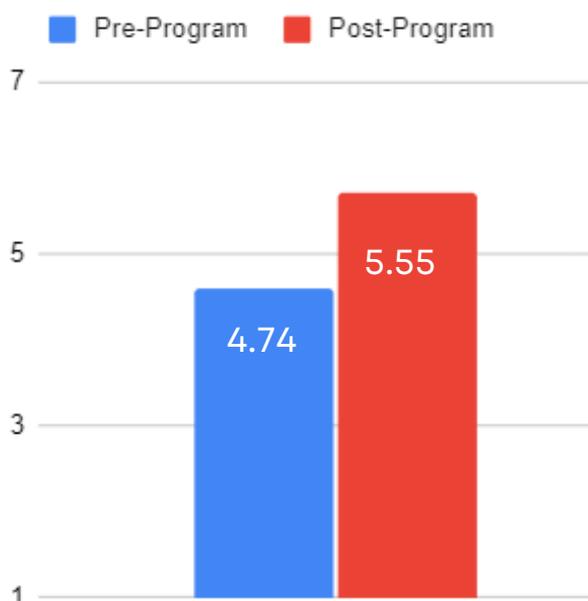
Youth Investigators answered multiple-choice questions, assessing their knowledge of the social science research process.

These questions challenged students to identify credible information sources, define important scientific terminology, and think critically about research ethics.

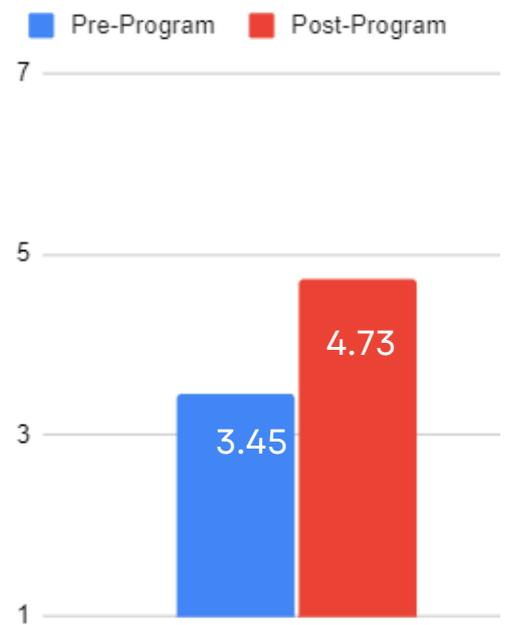
On average, students scored 16% higher after completion of the Youth Investigators Program.



Confidence in being part of a research project, where 7 = "Extremely Confident"



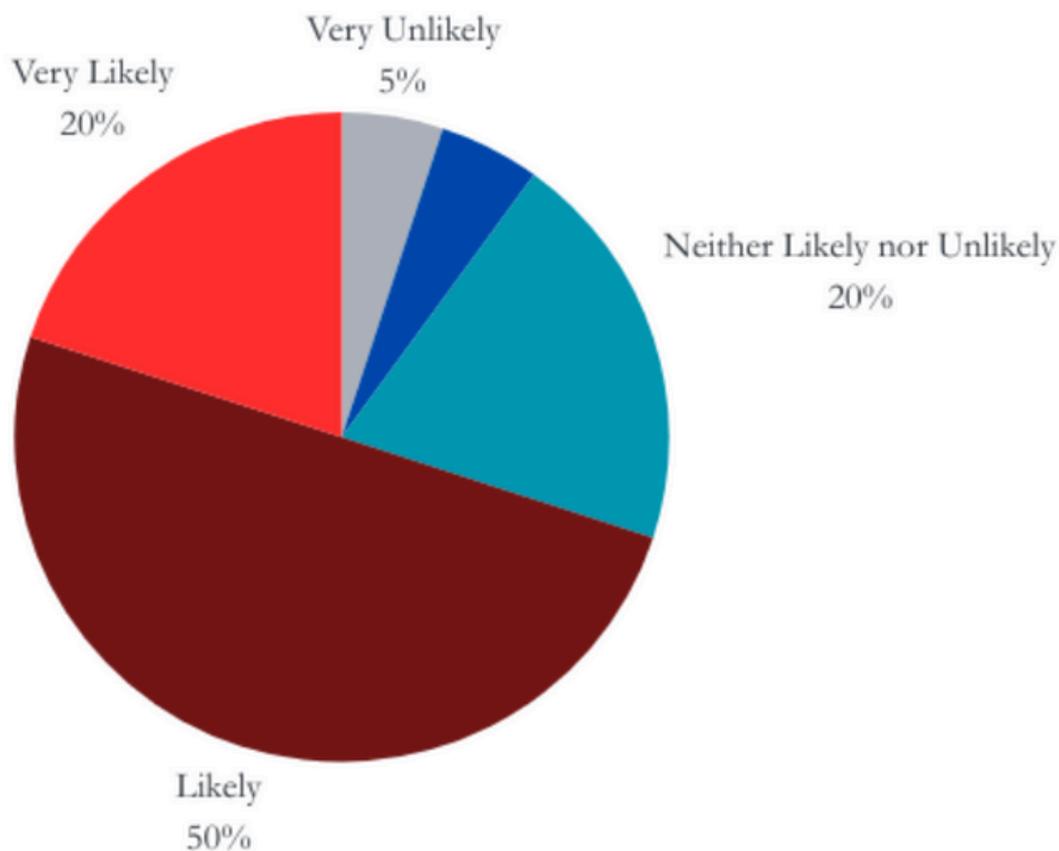
Confidence in leading a research project, where 7 = "Extremely Confident"



# YOUTH INVESTIGATORS EVALUATION (CONTINUED)

Following the Youth Investigators program, we asked students:

“How likely are you to take a research-related class that you are not required to take?”



When asked about the most successful part of the Youth Investigators in Action Summit, some students said:

*“Being able to now see problems in my community and surroundings and bright light to them.”*

*“The photovoice activity really opened my eyes to issues in our own community.”*

*“Growing stronger as a group and getting comfortable with everyone.”*

*“I learned about new ways to do research that I had never known were options.”*

*“I think the most successful part of the workshop was the photovoice because we got to explore campus while researching and seeing real life examples.”*



# STAY IN TOUCH!



We are thrilled to have had the opportunity to work with these sharp, bright, and curious teen researchers.

If you have any questions about PRYDE or the Youth Investigators Program, we welcome you to reach out.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**The 2024 Youth Investigators Program – including the Youth Investigators in Action Summit – would not have been possible without the contributions of several individuals and organizations:**

Kristin Ruggiero, 4-H Resource Educator from Rockland County, who is a longtime friend of PRYDE. Since its inception, Kristin has been instrumental in putting the Youth Investigators Program into action.

North Rockland Central School District, for their eagerness to support youth involvement in the social science research process. Especially Dr. Michael Gill, who happily assists with the implementation of the program each year.

The team responsible for organizing New York State 4-H Career Explorations, including Alexa Maille, for consistently including PRYDE in this wonderful event.

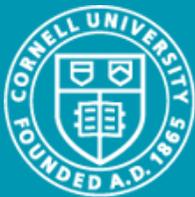
Each of the Cornell undergraduate students, graduate students, and staff people who volunteered their time to participate in interviews with the Youth Investigators.

Sophie Brown, Gary Fine, and everyone else at the Durland Alternatives Library, for sharing your space – and a few cups of tea – with these students.

Esther Kim, PRYDE's former Program Coordinator, who played a central role in developing the Youth Investigators curriculum.

PRYDE's 2024 Summer Interns, Justus Jenkins (Brooks School of Public Policy '25), Ayushi Kapoor (Brooks School of Public Policy '25), and Lucas Li (Arts & Sciences '26), who were there each step of the way.

Rebecca Morgan, whose generous gifts allow PRYDE to host such programs for young people and youth-serving organizations.



# Cornell Human Ecology



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