**Project Summary**

Empowerment is a term often found featured in the mission statements of youth programming and interventions, but what exactly that means for the youth who participate is unclear. Not only is the meaning of the term vague, but organizations who aim to empower individuals through Youth Empowerment Programs (YEPs) rarely examine the effectiveness of their programming in systematic ways. There is little known about what strategies make for the most empowering YEPs as research examining curricular models is scarce. This project evaluates the impact of an entrepreneurship-based education model compared to a more traditional, sport-based model on empowerment and civic engagement of youth. The effects of entrepreneurship is of particular interest to this study because a newer trend seen within some YEPs is the integration of an entrepreneurial-based education model (Robinson, 2016).

From a theoretical perspective, empowerment is both a process and an outcome. At the individual-level, psychological empowerment (PE) can be conceptualized into three components: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral. Intrapersonal refers to one’s perceived ability to exert control and perceived competence; behavioral refers to one’s involvement in decision-making processes and their community; and interactive refers to one’s critical awareness of their sociopolitical environment.

In this study, empowerment and civic engagement were measured using the Sociopolitical Control Scale for Youth (SCS-Y), developed by Peterson et al. (2011), and the
Civic Engagement Scale (CES), developed by Dolittle and Faul (2013). SPCS-Y and CES are relevant for measuring PE because the tests combine measure the three components of PE: intrapersonal, interactional, and behavioral. The SPCS-Y measures the intrapersonal and the CES measures civic attitudes and civic behaviors, which measures the interactional and behavioral aspects of PE, respectively. This study provides the first documented use of these metrics for measuring entrepreneurial-based youth programming.

Applying these metrics pre- and post-summer programming, we find that there is no statistically significant increase in perceived levels of empowerment as a result of program participation. The results of our study seem to contradict the purpose of the empowerment programs as participants did not show growth in sociopolitical control, civic attitudes, or civic behavior regardless of participating in an entrepreneurship-based or a sports-based YEP. However, youth with entrepreneurship experience, regardless of their affiliated program, show statistically significant high scores in empowerment and civic engagement.

These results suggest the value of entrepreneurship experiences on youth PE. This study validates findings of other research that suggests a positive relationship between entrepreneurship and resulting PE (Saboe, Kantor, & Walsh, 2002; Osborne, Falcone & Nagendra, 2000; O’Connor & Ramos, 2006). This relationship is important because it implies entrepreneurship-based YEPs may be one of the more effective curriculum methods in which to empower youth. Emphasizing the feasibility of measuring YEPs through a simple pre- and post-survey, this study contributes to empowerment literature by applying the SPCS-Y and CES to a new sociopolitical and geographic context as well as encourages future research to measure the impact of program models to additional populations in order to improve the effectiveness of YEPs.
Methodological Overview

Two self-identified youth empowerment programs (YEPs) participated in this study. The first program applies an entrepreneurship model that provides teens with a business opportunity to develop a skill set in management, budgets, work ethic and teamwork by creating producing and selling a product. The stated goal of the program is to empower youth to become leaders within their community and reduce negative stigmas of teens in the area held by some members of the community by demonstrating how the teens can serve as productive, engaged community members. The second program included in this study is a basketball camp, which served as a comparison control group. These teens are also engaged in summer programing, with an aim towards youth empowerment, but without an entrepreneurship-based model. The stated goal of this program is to empower community members, promote educational and economic growth, and transform families in one generation. Both programs include a monetary incentive for participation, but the role of active decision-making and skills involved are distinctly different. Youth from both groups were surveyed in the summer of 2017 and this project and methods were approved through Rice University’s Institutional Review Board (Number: #IRB-FY2017-322).

Current Status

As of January 2019 this project is considered complete. All funds for the project have been spent and the results of the project have been presented at two academic conferences. Initial results were presented as a poster at the Annual Meeting of the International Association for Research on Service Learning and Civic Engagement in Galway Ireland in September of 2017. The research was acknowledged with the “Outstanding Poster Presentation” award at the conference. A finalized version of the research was presented at the Gulf South Summit in spring
of 2018 in Birmingham, Alabama. Since this time, an academic article based on this project was produced. The article is currently under peer-review after a revise & resubmit at an academic journal and a copy of the published article will be forwarded to the Doerr Institute upon publication.

**Moving Forward**

This research suggests that programs may see an increase in perceived levels of empowerment by integrating entrepreneurship activities into their models as entrepreneurship is related to subsequent personal empowerment. However, more investment is necessary in measuring effectiveness in order to understand how such programming affects perceived levels of empowerment. In the meantime, empowerment as an end goal, will only loss meaning and purpose if not rigorously tested. While entrepreneurship as an avenue for empowerment is evident, there is still a need for more research to understand long-term effects and generalizability. Critical limitations to this study are the relatively small sample size and a lack of a true control group. However, even with a limited sample size, there is a clear association between entrepreneurship-based experiences and higher levels of empowerment. Future research could also lead to tools that engage communities to systematically measure their impact and advance the work of local practitioners striving to improve quality of life through empowerment.

**References**


