

Urban investigators

Bobby Glover, Marisa VanBrakle, and Mary Acheampong — grand prize winners in the citywide Urban Barcode Project organized by CSHL's DNA Learning Center (DNALC) — hail from Hostos-Lincoln Academy of Science in the Bronx. (They're seen here with their teacher, Allison Granberry.) The team's research project uncovered a surprising absence of the dietary supplement Ginkgo biloba in products claiming to contain the herb. As Alfred P. Sloan Foundation program manager and DNA barcoding pioneer Jesse Ausubel described, the student competitors selected a range of fascinating topics:

Projects about moss and lichens and birches and Christmas trees, about Biblical citrons and Mexican melons and Chinese pears, about fungal diversity in Central Park and mushrooms

for sale in Chinatown. About cod and catfish and crab and small killifish...About salamanders and mosquitoes and nematodes and bedbugs, about Jamaica Bay and about weeds and tree boxes and about ants of the South Bronx. About the content of pet food, and animal and plant origins of adhesives and glues in artwork.

This first-ever NYC barcoding project succeeded in attracting students — over 300 students in all — into the laboratory as collaborators and allowing an unprecedented number of science students to work as teams in many locations simultaneously. DNA barcoding integrates different methods of scientific investigation — from *in vivo* observations to *in vitro* biochemistry to *in silico* bioinformatics. DNALC Executive Director David Micklos hopes that “this core New York project provides a well-oiled infrastructure on which to build additional initiatives in other locations in the U.S. and abroad.”

Dagnia Zeidlickis

