Themed Learning Communities (TLCs)

Qualitative Report
(Fall 2010)

University College

Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI)

Daniel J. Trujillo, M.S., Qualitative Research Analyst
Michele J. Hansen, Ph.D., Director of UC Assessment

April, 2011

Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to enhance understanding of students' perceptions of their 2010 Themed Learning Community (TLC) experiences. A total of 717 students were enrolled in 33 TLC program sections. The TLC program is designed facilitate students transitions to the university and promote higher retention rates and levels of academic performance. National research has shown that participation in a TLC increases a student's academic achievement, campus involvement, and provides a constructive way to form relationships with peers and faculty (Pike, Kuh, & McCormick, 2008; Zhao & Kuh, 2004). This in turn leads to a more successful first-year college experience, persistence into the second year, and higher rate of graduation (Andrade, 2008; Tinto, 2000).

Participants enrolled in a TLC were asked to voluntarily respond to an anonymous questionnaire administered at the end of the semester. Students' provided open-ended feedback in the areas of how TLCs contributed to their learning, what they liked most and least about the program, why they choose to enroll in the program, and suggestions for improvement.

Major Findings

Students described several ways in which the TLC contributed to their learning. These included but were not limited to: developing critical thinking skills; meeting new friends and developing connections; receiving college transition assistance; and forming a peer support network. This is consistent with findings from student data from the previous program year (2009) with a few noteworthy exceptions. For example, developing critical thinking skills was described by students as a way that TLCs contributed to their learning in 2010 but not in 2009. Participants also described what they liked the most about their TLC experiences. Students responded that meeting new people and forming friendships, having the same students in their classes, and positive instructional team support were attributes of the program that they liked the most. These were the top three (3) most discussed areas by both 2010 and 2009 program participants. However, it is noteworthy that two areas, college transition assistance and community and service learning, emerged as most liked program aspects in 2010 but not in 2009. In contrast, the area of group activities and discussions emerged as being a most liked program aspect in 2009 but not in 2010.

Least liked aspects of the TLC program were also described by student participants. Responses occasionally described a specific linked course or component (i.e., First-year Seminar, English) while others simply stated N/A, none, or nothing. Other students reported that a lack of organization and course structure, as well as time commitments and restraints, as being what they liked the least about their TLC experiences. These least liked program aspects were also reported by students participating in 2009. TLC participants in 2010 also discussed several least liked program aspects that did not emerge in the 2009 data. These components included the personal development plan (PDP); writing papers, essays, and journals; experiencing a large workload; and having negative interactions with peers and the environment.

TLC students provided insight into the specific reasons of why they choose to enroll in a Themed Learning Community. Some students explained that they enrolled in a TLC because they were required to participate – or that they thought that they were required to participate. This was the most common response (#1) provide by 2010 students but the fourth (#4) most common response provided in 2009. TLC participants also provided a variety of suggestions for improvement. These included but are not limited to: more program organization and communication; more outside class activities (field trips); more group discussions and activities; increased instructional team support; and a call to improve course linkages.

Possible Implications

Analysis of the 2010 TLC qualitative data reveals several p*ossible implications*. First, students are self-reporting that the TLC program is contributing to their learning. For example, participants have indicated that through the program they have been able to further develop critical thinking skills while also forming

a peer support network. It is noteworthy that group activities and discussions were described by 2009 TLC students as a most liked program aspect but not 2010 students. It is also interesting that 2010 students identified community and service learning as being a most liked TLC component when 2009 students did not. Program effectiveness may be increased by examining these areas further. Do students benefit more from "outside" activities that encompass community and service learning than more traditional "in-class" discussions and activities?

TLC students also described what they perceived to be least valuable program components. Participants in both the 2009 and 2010 programs identified some of the same least valuable aspects. These included the reported areas of a lack of organization and course structure, and time commitments and restraints. Instructional team leaders will benefit from being cognizant of these concerns when planning their TLC program sections for the upcoming 2011 program year. Furthermore, 2010 TLC students also identified new - previously unreported - least liked aspects (i.e., PDP, workload, etc.). While these new least liked aspects were discussed with less frequency it is still important that they remain salient in program planning and implementation.

Students also self-reported their reasons for enrolling in a specific TLC. Many of the reasons provided were positive such as the opportunity to meet new friends and develop connections, and the ability to receive college transition assistance. Still, students in both 2009 and 2010 described that they enrolled in a TLC because it was required – or that they thought that it was required. Enrollment in a TLC is not mandatory of University College (UC) students. However, enrollment in a First-year Seminar (FYS) course is required of incoming first-year UC students; and some FYS courses are connected to a TLC program section. Students and instructional teams alike will benefit from receiving more information and clarity on this subject. This is in harmony with the second (#2) most common suggestion for improvement – more program organization and communication.

Assessment of the Themed Learning Community program is an on-going process. This process is designed to identify both program areas of achievement and those in need of improvement. It is also intended to examine best teaching practices. Focus group interviews are currently being conducted with former TLC students with the goal of gaining a more in-depth understanding of their experiences. For example, what are students actually conveying when they report that they enjoy community and service learning? Furthermore, what are they learning from these experiences? Ideally, through gaining a greater understanding of students' TLC experiences we will be able to further understand effective teaching and learning.

Table of Contents

Page # / Content

Introduction

"Themed Learning Communities (TLCs) are a group of linked courses ranging from 7-15 credit hours. Each TLC consists of approximately 25 students who co-enroll in 2-4 academic courses and a First Year Seminar (FYS) course. TLCs offer an intentional first semester experience for students. They provide a comprehensive perspective about higher education and help students see relationships among academic courses, co-curricular activities, and the world" (IUPUI, 2011). The purpose of this investigation was to understand students' perceptions of their participation in a TLC during the Fall 2010 semester. Students enrolled in a TLC were asked to voluntarily respond to an anonymous questionnaire administered at the end of the semester. Within this questionnaire students were encouraged to provide open-ended response feedback in the areas of what they liked the most and least about the community, suggestions improvement, and their reasons for participating in a specific TLC program. It is our hope that highlighting these responses will assist in recognizing areas of achievement of the TLC program while also providing pathways to improving teaching and learning.

Sample

The qualitative section of the Themed Learning Community Evaluation Form consisted of five (5) open-ended questions that provided students with an opportunity to provide feedback about their TLC experiences in their own words (Appendix A). This report reflects questionnaire responses of students who participated in a TLC during the Fall 2010 semester. During this time period a total of 717 First-Time Full-Time (FTFT) IUPUI students were enrolled in 33 separate TLC sections. The number of student questionnaire responses varied depending on the question asked:

Questions:	Fall 2010
18.) Please describe how your TLC experience contributed to your learning:	585
19.) Please describe what you liked most about your Themed Learning Community experience:	609
20.) Please describe what you like <u>least</u> about your Themed Learning Community experience:	585
21.) Please describe the reason(s) why you enrolled in a TLC. Why, specifically, did you choose this TLC?	603
22.) What specific suggestions do you have for improving the Themed Learning Communities?	541

Method

Most students responded to the five open-ended items included in the questionnaire. Student participants' open-ended questionnaire responses were first cleaned for errors and then uploaded into ATLAS.ti, a software program that assists in qualitative data analysis. A *coding* process was then employed as a means of examination. Through this process student responses were arranged into topical theme categories. These categories allowed for individual student perceptions of TLC experiences to be considered collectively. Topical theme categories were considered to be "emerged or notable" if 5% or more of students responded in a similar manner. In a number of occurrences a singular student comment addressed more than one topic or category. In these instances, student comments were included in multiple analyses

and considered in multiple areas. An understanding of student comments in the aggregate facilitates a greater understanding of TLCs. While this method of analysis essentially quantifies student comments, it does allow for the students' key perceptions and feelings about the program to be identified. Many of the comments are concise statements and may not fully reflect the entirety of students' opinions.

Co-Occurrence

As previously noted, in a number of instances a singular student comment addressed more than one topic or category. For example, a singular student response could address the thematic categories of *Major and Career Discovery*, *Meeting New People and Developing Connections*, and *College Transition Assistance*, simultaneously. This singular student response would be considered in multiple analyses (and accompanied tables). Listed below is the total number of individual student comments and the average number of codes assigned to those comments.

Total Individual Student Comments, Fall 2010   2933

Total Codes Assigned: 4021

**Average Number of Codes Assigned
per Student Comment:**   1.37

Results

Through the examination of open-ended response feedback students' perceptions of the TLCs were obtained. These perceptions included students' opinions regarding what they liked most and least about the program, suggestions for improvement, and reasons for enrolling in a specific TLC. First, a *General Result Highlights* section outlines notable opinions and perceptions of students in the Fall 2010 TLC cohort. Next, a *Comparison Highlights* section is included in an effort to gain a better understanding of how Fall 2010 students responded similarly or differently to questions than Fall 2009 TLC students. Finally, tables are also provided that detail student responses to each of the five (5) open-ended questions. These tables are sorted by survey question item, and include numerous examples of actual student comments.

2010 General Result Highlights (Specific Codes in Italics)

Question 18.) Please describe how your TLC experience contributed to your learning:

- "Meeting New Friends and Developing Connections" was the #1 most common coded response provided (13%) by student participants when they were asked to describe how their TLC experiences contributed to their learning.

- 11% of students described "College Transition Assistance" as an aspect of their TLC experience that contributed to their learning, the #2 most frequent response provided.

- 10% of students described that "Developing Critical Thinking Skills" contributed to their learning, the #3 most frequent response provided.

- Students indicated that many other aspects of their TLC experience contributed to learning: "Developed Peer Support Network" (10%), "Became Familiar with Campus" (10%), and the ability to participate in "Helpful – Linked Courses" (9%), among many others.

Question 19.) Please describe what you liked <u>most</u> about your Themed Learning Community experience:

- "Meeting New People & Forming Friendships" was the #1 most common coded response provided (44%) when student participants were asked to describe what they liked most about their Themed Learning Community experience.

- 21% of students described that having the "Same Students in Classes" was what they liked most about their TLC experience; the #2 most common response provided.

- 10% of students reported "Positive Instructional Team Support" as desirable program aspect. Similarly, 8% of students indicated "Positive Academic Environment" as what they liked most about their TLC program experience.

Question 20.) Please describe what you like <u>least</u> about your Themed Learning Community experience:

- 12% of students reported a "Specific Linked Course or Component" when describing what they liked the least about their TLC program experience. Within these responses students specified the areas of "First Year Seminar (FYS)" and "English Course" with the most frequency.

- 11% of students indicated "N/A, None, or Nothing" when they were prompted to describe what they liked least about their program experiences; the #2 most common response provided.

- 11% of students described a "Lack of Organization & Course Structure" and "Time Commitments and Restraints" as being what they liked least about their TLC experience.

Question 21.) Please describe the reason(s) why you enrolled in a TLC. Why, specifically, did you choose this TLC?

- When asked to describe the reason(s) for enrolling in a TLC, 19% of students reported that the program was "Required or they thought that it was required". This was the #1 most common coded response provided.

- 18% of student participants indicated that they enrolled in a TLC to "Meet New Friends & Develop Connections". Similarly, 18% of students described enrolling in a TLC for "College Transition Assistance".

- 15% of students reported that they enrolled in a TLC because they were "Recommended or Referred" into the program.

Question 22.) What specific suggestions do you have for improving the Themed Learning Communities?

- 26% of students indicated "N/A, None, Nothing" when asked to provide suggestions for improving the TLC program; the #1 most frequent response given.

- 13% of students provided the suggestion of "More Program Organization & Communication" for improving the TLCs; the #2 most frequent coded suggestion provided.

- 11% of students responded with the suggestion to "Improve or Cancel Specific Courses or Components". Within this suggestion the areas of "Personal Development Plan (PDP) and "English Course" were specified most often.

Comparison Highlights: 2010 and 2009 TLC Cohorts

Question 18.) Please describe how your TLC experience contributed to your learning:

- 13% of students in both the 2010 and 2009 TLC cohorts reported that "Meeting New Friends and Developing Connections" contributed to their learning. This was the #1 most common coded response provided in 2010 and the #2 most common response in 2009.

- "College Transition Assistance" was the #2 most common response given (11%) by students in the 2010 cohort when they were asked to describe how their TLC experience contributed to their learning. It was the #1 most frequent response provided by the 2009 TLC cohort (15%).

Question 19.) Please describe what you liked most about your Themed Learning Community experience:

- "Meeting New People & Forming Friendships" was the #1 most frequently coded response provided by students in both 2010 (44%) and 2009 (48%) when they were asked to identify what they liked most about their TLC experiences.

- "Same Students in Classes" was the #2 most common response provided by students in both 2010 (21%) and 2009 (16%) when they were asked to describe what they liked most.

Question 20.) Please describe what you like <u>least</u> about your Themed Learning Community experience:

- "Specific Linked Course or Component" was the #1 most common coded response provided by students in the 2010 cohort (12%) when they were asked to describe what they liked least about their TLC experiences. This was the #2 most frequent answer given in 2009 (10%).

- "Lack of Organization and Course Structure" was the #3 most common coded response provided by TLC students in both 2010 (11%) and 2009 (9%).

Question 21.) Please describe the reason(s) why you enrolled in a TLC. Why, specifically, did you choose this TLC?

- "Required to Participate in a TLC (or thought was required)" was the #1 most frequently coded reason given by students in the 2010 cohort (19%) when they were asked to identify why they enrolled in the program. It was the #4 most common reason given by the 2009 cohort (16%).

- 18% of students in both the 2010 and 2009 TLC cohorts identified that the opportunity to "Meet New Friends & Develop Connections" was a main reason for enrolling in the program. It was the #2 most common coded response in 2010 and the #1 response given in 2009.

Question 22.) What specific suggestions do you have for improving the Themed Learning Communities?

- "N/A, None, Nothing" was the #1 most frequent suggestion for improvement provided by students in both the 2010 TLC cohort (26%) and the 2009 TLC cohort (24%).

- "More Program Organization and Communication" was the #2 most common suggestion for improvement given by students in the 2010 TLC cohort (13%). It was the #9 most common suggestion for improvement provided by the 2009 TLC cohort (5%).

Table 1: How the TLC Experience Contributed to Learning (Student Reported), Fall 2010

Please describe how your TLC experience contributed to your learning:

(N = 585)

Contributed to Learning Through…	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Meeting New Friends & Developing Connections	78	13%	• "Good for meeting new friends." • "Helped with meeting new people." • "I gained friendships that made college easier." • "Helped m(e) network myself." • "It helped me open up and get to know people." • "Making new friends, and being connected has helped grades." • "It helped me established friendships with people in my major." • "(I) was forced to make connections between classes; I became friends w/ students who shared & countered my viewpoints."
College Transition Assistance	62	11%	• "Helped me transition into college." • "Made transition less stressful." • "It helped me adapt to college quicker and easier." • "TLC helped me make the transition to college life." • "It helped me to get use to college life & what's expected of me here." • "My TLC experience contributed to my learning by making the transition from high school to college."
Developed Critical Thinking Skills	60	10%	• "Helped me think outside the box." • "In (----) I learned how to critical think." • "Helped me organize my ideas." • "It made me think more broadly." • "Worked on fully developing ideas." • "It gave me the ability to look into topics much deeper." • "I found a better way to relate myself to my studies."
Developed Peer Support Network	59	10%	• "Gave me a group of peers to work with." • "It established a base to discuss assignments with my peers." • "It helped me find people to bounce ideas off of so that I can find a way to effectively study." • "Being in three classes with a common group of peers formed a support network." • "My TLC allowed me to effectively get better grades in my courses by giving me people to rely on when I have a question or problem."
Became Familiar with Campus (Resources & Navigation)	59	10%	• "It helped me better understand the campus." • "It helped me by teaching me about campus and resources available." • "Taught me to use the library." • "Helped me learn how to use oncourse, onstart…" • "The TLC helped learn what programs (MAC, Bepko, etc) are open to me as a student."
Helpful – Linked Courses	55	9%	• "Combing the classes made me realize how things connect." • "Helped me connect all my classes and learn from each." • "Many of my papers were connected to three of the same classes. I was focused on improving my papers more." • "It showed me how learning can be established and integrated with other courses for a better learning experience."

(Continued)

Continued – Table 1:

Please describe how your TLC experience contributed to your learning:

Contributed to Learning…	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Became More Comfortable / Confident	41	7%	• "Made me more confident." • "I felt so comfortable! It helped me learn! =)." • "It was much more comfortable so I was willing to ask questions." • "It helped me become more confident as a freshman here at IUPUI." • "It helped me gain more confidence with my learning capabilities.
Developed Study & Time Management Skills	37	7%	• "It helped me learn new study habits." • "It helped me become more organized." • "I learned how to manage my time better." • "I feel I have developed a better learning style more appropriate for a college student."
Major & Career Discovery (Connections)	36	6%	• "Helped me understand more about my major." • "I learned about my career and what it takes to achieve it." • "Learned about personality tests and how they relate to careers." • "My TLC experience contributed to my learning because it helped me decide on a major."
Nothing (Negative Comment)	34	6%	• "It really didn't help that much." • "The TLC really didn't contribute anything to my learning." • "I didn't really. I would have learned the same in regular classes." • It didn't. (---) was a terrible experience. We literally learned nothing."
Developed Application of Knowledge Skills	33	6%	• "Helped me think about concepts covered in all the classes and relate them to real world situations." " • "They helped to apply the things I learned in my observation of health care."
Learned about New Topics & Issues	31	5%	• "I learned new things from each class." • "I learned a lot about my culture." • "It contribute(d) to my learning community by helping with knowledge on things I didn't know."
Same Students in Classes	30	5%	• "I liked having the same students in different classes." • "It was easier to be yourself when with the same people in 3 classes."
Developed Reading & Writing Skills	27	5%	• "It advanced by skills in reading and writing." • "Helped me learn the proper way to analyze texts, writer better." • "TLC experience helped my writing skills a lot because I wasn't use to writing at least one paper a week in high school."

Notes: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole. The remaining responses were so varied that no major themes emerged.
(N) indicates the number of student responses included in analysis; percentages (%) are based on the number of question respondents.

Table 2: Student Reported Most Liked Aspect of the TLC Experience, Fall 2010

Please describe what you liked the <u>most</u> about your Themed Learning Community experience:

(N = 609)

Most Liked Aspect	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Meeting New People & Forming Friendships	<u>269</u>	<u>44%</u>	• "Making the most amazing friends!" • "Meeting people / making friends." • "Meeting people with similar goals." • "Meeting all the diverse people." • "Making friends to walk to class with." • "Meeting people in my major." • "Loved meeting new people and spending my semester w/ them." • "Maintaining and building friendships."
Same Students in Classes	<u>130</u>	<u>21%</u>	• "I enjoyed being with the same students." • "Having familiar faces in classes." • "I like how it was the same 25 students." • "I got to work with the same people the whole semester." • "Staying in smaller classes with the same people." • "The variety of individuals, but how homogenous our schedules are." • "Easier to bond with classmates because we have multiple classes together."
Positive Instructional Team Support (Faculty, Staff, Mentors)	<u>61</u>	<u>10%</u>	• "I liked my teachers and the advice I received." • "The instructors very helpful, nice, & fun." • "How helpful the staff was." • "The mentor & the professor! Both helped me realize things about myself." • "I liked the faculty. They were very nice and understanding." • "(----); She makes you feel important & welcomed to the campus."
Positive Academic Environment	<u>48</u>	<u>8%</u>	• "I liked the laid back atmosphere." • "I liked how we all could communicate with each other." • "I most liked the freedom to express ideas within an academic setting with fewer restrictions." • "I like how open it felt everyone was just able to come in and talk with one another."
Developing Peer Support Network	<u>44</u>	<u>7%</u>	• "I loved how close we were as a group. We all were like a family." • "I liked having the same people throughout a few different classes to communicate problems with." • "Being able to talk to a group of people with common interests & collaborate with my peers." • "I liked having a close group of students. It was easy to communicate and especially useful for sharing ideas and critiques."
College Transition Assistance	<u>26</u>	<u>4%</u>	• "Transition from high school to college." • "It made it easier to adapt to college." • "I liked the jump start it gave me." • "I liked how it prepared me to be a very successful student."
Service Learning & Community Service	<u>25</u>	<u>4%</u>	• "The volunteer work." • "I really enjoyed the community service project." • "The opportunity to participate in service learning."

Notes: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole.
The remaining responses were so varied that no major themes emerged.
(N) indicates the number of student responses included in analysis; percentages (%) are based on the number of question respondents.

Table 3: Student Reported Least Liked Aspect of the TLC Experience, Fall 2010

Please describe what you liked least about your Themed Learning Community experience:

(N = 585)

Least Liked Aspect	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Specific Linked Course or Component ***First-year Seminar (27)** ***English Course (15)**	<u>71</u>	<u>12%</u>	• "I dislike taking my (----) quiz." • "Not very interested in (----) class." • "(----) was pretty pointless." • "I didn't like the particular classes that were linked." • "(----). Not really what I expected." • "First year seminar." • "I felt (FYS) was unproductive." • "(FYS) was pointless, felt like a freshman in HS." • "(FYS) class, too much work, no learning." • "English (---)." • "My English class was not a beneficial experience." • "English. I felt like a failure for every paper even though I thought I was improving."
N/A, None, Nothing	<u>67</u>	<u>11%</u>	• "N/A." • "None." • "Nothing." • "There wasn't anything I really liked least."
Lack of Organization and Course Structure ***Lack of Class Scheduling Flexibility (12)** ***Lack of Credits Earned for Completion (9)**	<u>65</u>	<u>11%</u>	• "Unorganized." • "Not enough structure." • "The unplanned classes." • "Completely unorganized & just unnecessary." • "Having lectures over material too late in the semester to be useful." • "Not being able to choose date/time." • "We couldn't choose our three classes." • "There was no choice of when I could take the classes. There was only one choice." • "It was only a 1 credit class." • "The abundance of work in the one credit UCOL class." • "The amount of work we had for a one credit hour class-I didn't have time to worry/care about the class."
Time Commitments & Restraints	<u>62</u>	<u>11%</u>	• "I disliked how long the days were." • "9 AM classes." • "It was a really long class period." • "How long the class was (about 3 hrs)." • "Waking up early, time consuming." • "The long gaps between some classes."
Waste of Time (Not Helpful or Meaningful)	<u>41</u>	<u>7%</u>	• "I felt like sometimes we were in class for no reason." • "Sometimes the class just felt like a waste of time." • "Some of the lessons were pointless." • "I felt like we could have learned more." • "The lack of learning useful information."

(Continued)

Please describe what you liked least about your Themed Learning Community experience:

Least Liked Aspect	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Boring, Repetitive, Uninteresting (Busy Work)	38	6%	• "Monotonous." • "Became very repetitive." • "Busy work type assignments." • "It started to feel redundant w/the same people." • "The (---) class, however very helpful was boring to the "Nth" degree. The advisor helped lighten the mood." • "I did not always understand some of the tasks and at times felt as if it was just busy work." • "Sometimes hearing the same things/doing the same things in almost every class gets annoying and repetitive."
Writing Papers, Essays, Journals	31	5%	• "I didn't like writing the essays." • "The writing responses." • "Writing the papers :(." • "I did not like all of the journals." • "I did not like all the Reading." • "Writing journals & all the papers for the PDP." • "I did not like the PDP prep papers."
Lack of Connections with Theme or Linked Courses	30	5%	• "Inconsistencies in shared assignments." • "I dislike the English class it had little to do with our classes." • "The instructors were supposed to work together. They didn't at all." • "I didn't like how many assignments there were. The classes were supposed to be based around each other but they didn't look at what the other class was doing."
Personal Development Plan (PDP)	30	5%	• "The PDP." • "I did not like PDPs very much." • "PDPs because they took too long." • "PDP-it was hard to do that & service learning." • "PDP-Busy work."
Same Students in Classes	29	5%	• "I didn't like that it was the same people." • "If there was a student I didn't like, I couldn't get away." • "Being around the same people too much." • "With the same people all the time. Would like variety." • "Some classmates are annoying there was nowhere to."
Workload	28	5%	• "The amount of work." • "Way too much homework." • "It felt like I was completely overwhelmed with papers all assigned and due at the same time." • "Workload. I'm overwhelmed and feel I do more work in my 1 credit (FYS) than Calculus."
Negative Interactions w' Peers & Environment	27	5%	• "Some people complain too much." • "It allowed some students to treat the group with apathy and act as though they were in high school." • "Level of intellect among peers (not present). Level of cultural diversity (not present)."

Notes: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole. The remaining responses were so varied that no major themes emerged.

(N) indicates the number of student responses included in analysis; percentages (%) are based on the number of question respondents.

(*) indicates a sub-code of the larger thematic category; numbers in parenthesis (N) are based on the total number of respondents.

Table 4: Student Reported Reasons for Enrolling in a TLC, Fall 2010

Please describe the reason(s) why you enrolled in a TLC. Why, specifically, did you choose this TLC?

(N = 603)

Reasons for enrolling in a TLC	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Required to Participate in a TLC (or thought was required)	112	19%	• "It was required." • "I thought that it was required." • "For my major - it was required." • "I didn't know I could choose not to be in one." • "It was required that I enrolled in a TLC." • "Because the University makes all freshman do it." • "Scholarship required it, but religion sounded interesting." • "I had to in order to receive my 21st century scholarship." • "I enrolled into a TLC because it was required. I chose the science TLC because it better deals with my major." • "I enrolled in a TLC because it was required of me. I chose this one because it sounded fun."
Meet New Friends & Develop Connections	106	18%	• "To make friends in college." • "To get to know more people." • "So I could make new friends better." • "To get to know people in my major." • "So that I could take W131 and create friendships." • "Seemed like a good idea to meet people." • "To meet new people and get comfortable." • "To form connections with people and learn more about other cultures."
College Transition Assistance	106	18%	• "I wanted to transition to college better." • "In order to make my transition into college easier." • "To get more adjusted to college." • "I chose the TLC to do better in the start of college." • "To get a good foothold on my first semester of real college." • "Wanted the transfer from high school to college to go smoother." • "I thought it would help me transition from high school to college expectations, which it did!" • "They said it will help with your G.P.A and help with transition from high school to college student."
Referred or Recommend… *By Academic Advisor (28) *By Orientation Leader (18)	93	15%	• "Highly recommended." • "It was recommended." • "I was encouraged to do it." • "I was encouraged by family and friends." • "My parents wanted me to participate." • "My advisor suggested it." • "My advisor strongly recommended the TLC." • "Because my advisor said it was a lot of fun and help." • "My advisor recommended it because I had an interest in law." • "It was recommended at orientation." • "They made it sound good at orientation." • "I chose it because many O Team mentors recommended it." • "It sounded beneficial & (----) from O Team promoted it."

(Continued)

Continued – Table 4

Please describe the reason(s) why you enrolled in a TLC. Why, specifically, did you choose this TLC?

Reasons for enrolling in a TLC	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Connected to Major / Career Choice	78	13%	• "Because it seemed good for my major." • "This one is most relevant to my future career." • "I felt it would prepare me for BSN program." • "It was offered w/ my major and looked fun." • "It fit with my major and courses I had to take." • "I enrolled in this TLC become of my major, it is science based." • "I believed it would help me discover if nursing was the right major for me and I think it looks good on nursing applications." • "This TLC correlated with my major. I enrolled in TLC in order to have a better understanding of my studies. I am doing better in school because of TLC."
Interested in Community "Theme"	60	10%	• "I liked the theme." • "Loved the description." • "TLC because the topics are interesting." • "I wanted to learn more about women's studies." • "I was intrigued by the concept of 4 hr political theme." • "I chose this one because I am very interested in culture." • "I did this to learn more about my culture." • "I liked the cultural diversity part." • "Interested in law, phil. Major, poly sci minor."
Potential to be Beneficial	60	10%	• "I thought it sounded helpful." • "To improve my grades." • "I want to succeed and this seemed the best way." • "I felt it would be interesting and beneficial." • "I choose it because it seemed like a good idea for a freshman." • "I thought it would be a good learning experience." • "Thought it would help my freshman year, it has." • "I thought it was the one that would benefit me the most."
Desirable Course Schedule	39	6%	• "Fit my class schedule." • "Needed some classes and TLC was only open." • "So I didn't have to mess with different schedules." • "It was the one that would let me take English 131." • "It was the schedule that worked well with my time." • "A TLC was the only thing that could fit in my schedule." • "Because I thought it would be the easiest way to do my classes." • "I scheduled it once and didn't have to worry about scheduling it separately."
"Did Not Chose TLC"	38	6%	• "I did not choose TLC." • "I was placed in it." • "I was thrown into a TLC." • "I did not choose it, it was given to me." • "I didn't really know I was in the TLC until I started school." • "I didn't. I have no idea how I ended up in a TLC at all. I didn't have a choice not to do it."

Notes: Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole.
The remaining responses were so varied that no major themes emerged.
(N) indicates the number of student responses included in analysis; percentages (%) are based on the number of question respondents.
(*) indicates a sub-code of the larger thematic category; numbers in parenthesis (N) are based on the total number of respondents.

Table 5: Specific Suggestions for Improving the Themed Learning Communities (TLC) (Fall, 2010)

What specific suggestions do you have for improving the Themed Learning Communities?

(N = 541)

Suggestions for Improvement	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
N/A, None, Nothing	140	26%	• "N/A." • "None." • "Nothing." • "I don't have any suggestions."
More Program Organization & Communication	71	13%	• "More communication." • "More organization!" • "Make sure everyone is on the same page. Teachers especially." • "More organized (----) classes." • "Have more planned out classes." • "Better communication and notification with due dates" • "Professor Communication, staggered assignments. Less assignments made up on the fly." • "For improvement, I suggest that there be times in which the class just discusses how everything is."
Improve / Cancel Specific Course or Component	60	11%	• "Take out (----)." • "No more (----)!" • "No service learning." • "I don't think that the (----) class should be included." • "The courses need improving the community is fine."
*Personal Development Plan (PDP) (17)			• "No PDP's." • "Don't do the PDP's!" • "PDP needs to be more useful." • "Make work more meaningful. No PDP, busy work."
*English Course (13)			• "Don't offer English." • "Make English class better." • "Don't combine English & (----)." • "I don't think that the English class should be included."
*Cancel TLC Program (8)			• "86 it." • "Not have it." • "I don't think this program can be helped."
More "Outside" Class Activities (Field Trips)	46	9%	• "More outside of class events." • "More out of class activities." • "Fieldtrips, more ice breakers." • "More stuff outside of class would have been nice." • "Should go on a field trip for a few classes."
Community / Service Learning (15)			• "More volunteer work." • "Do more community service." • "More volunteer activities as a whole class." • "Allow students to come up w/ the community service project." • "My suggestion is to let the students choose their service project."

(Continued)

Continued – Table 5

What specific suggestions do you have for improving the Themed Learning Communities?

Suggestions for Improvement	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
General Positive Comment	40	7%	• "It's awesome." • "All was good!" • "Keep TLC's forever!" • "It was good, I really enjoyed it." • "It was great. Don't really know how much more it can improve." • "Maintain it the way it is, keep being helpful, interesting and fun." • "I honestly thought that the TLC did what it was supposed to do very well."
More Group Activities & Discussions (Hands-on Learning)	37	7%	• "More group activities." • "More open-ended discussion classes." • "Have more hands on activities." • "Add fun activities more often with ALL Classes." • "Make (---) more of a discussion than a homework class." • "Less busy work, more active learning." • "Make it more necessary for students to talk to each other."
More Instructional Team Support (Faculty, Staff, Mentors)	33	6%	• "No *yelling* at us." • "Some different faculty." • "Make the mentors more proactive." • "(Name), our advisor was absolutely rubbish." • "A lot. The teachers need to be more helpful & resourceful!" • "Stop allowing professors to talk to college students like they are 3."
Improve Course "Linkages"	33	6%	• "Connect classes." • "More connections between classes." • "Make sure all three connect not just two." • "Discussing the connections more between classes." • "I would like to see more projects connected throughout the classes." • "Draw the courses in closer by creating projects that require work from multiple classes."
Less Time Commitments & Restraints	25	5%	• "Shorten the time length." • "Shorter class periods." • "Not have a 3 hr long class." • "Maybe make it a shorter class period." • "Don't make class so early in the morning." • "Make the hours earlier in the day. 12 to 2 maybe."
More Meaningful, Helpful, Productive (Less Busy Work)	25	5%	• "Less busy work." • "Apply more to life now." • "More relevant homework." • "Try to make it seem more relevant." • "Better freshman information that is applicable." • "Make the material more relevant and uncommon knowledge." • "Try to think of more ideas so some classes will not be pointless."

Notes: The remaining responses were so varied that no major themes emerged. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole.
(N) indicates the number of student responses included in analysis; percentages (%) are based on the number of question respondents.
(*) indicates a sub-code of the larger thematic category; numbers in parenthesis (N) are based on the total number of respondents.

References

Andrade, M.S. (2008). Learning communities: Examining positive outcomes. *Journal of College Student Retention*, 9(1), 1-20.

Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis (n.d.). *Themed learning communities*. Retrieved April 1, 2011 from: http://tlc.iupui.edu

Pike, G.R., Kuh, G.D., & McCormick, A.C. (2008, February). *Learning Community Participation and Educational Outcomes: Direct, Indirect, and Contingent Relationships.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education, Jacksonville, FL.

Tinto, V. (2000). *Taking student retention seriously: Rethinking the first year of college*. Unpublished manuscript, Syracuse University.

Zhao, C. & Kuh, G.D. (2004). Adding value: Learning communities and student engagement. *Research in Higher Education,* 45, 115-138.

Appendix A: Themed Learning Community Evaluation Form

■   ■   ■   ■   ■

Themed Learning Community Evaluation Form

Courses:_____

The purpose of this form is to assess your thoughts and opinions of your experience in a Themed Learning Community, including experiences in your TLC courses and out of classroom activities you participated in with your cohort of students. Your participation is completely voluntary. All responses are anonymous. Members of the instructional team will receive a summary of responses and a typed version of the comments after grades are turned in. Your opinions are important to us! Results of this anonymous evaluation form will be used to improve Themed Learning Communities.

DIRECTIONS: Fill in only <u>one</u> response per item. Please read each statement carefully then select one of these five alternatives: Very Little; Little; Some; Much; Very Much

USE A No. 2 PENCIL

INCORRECT: ⊘ ⊠ ◔ ◓

Please indicate how much your experience in the Themed Learning Community helped you in the following areas:

	Very Little	Little	Some	Much	Very Much
1. Applied what I learned in one course to another course in my learning community	○	○	○	○	○
2. Understood connections between different disciplines and courses	○	○	○	○	○
3. Became more effective with communicating my thoughts in speaking	○	○	○	○	○
4. Became more effective with communicating my thoughts in writing	○	○	○	○	○
5. Became more effective in analyzing and understanding readings in essays, articles, and textbooks	○	○	○	○	○
6. Developed a better understanding of complex real world social problems and issues	○	○	○	○	○
7. Actively discussed complex issues and ideas	○	○	○	○	○
8. Applied knowledge gained in learning community courses in service to the broader community and social issues	○	○	○	○	○
9. Made connections with faculty outside of class	○	○	○	○	○
10. Discussed connections between any TLC courses with faculty	○	○	○	○	○
11. Discussed ideas from the TLC courses with peers outside of class	○	○	○	○	○
12. Exchanged ideas with student whose views are different from my own	○	○	○	○	○
13. Formed one or more friendships that I will maintain after the semester	○	○	○	○	○

14. Overall how satisfied were you with your TLC experience?

○ Very Dissatisfied   ○ Dissatisfied   ○ Neutral   ○ Satisfied   ○ Very Satisfied

15. As part of your TLC did you participate in a community service or volunteer activity? . . . . ○ Yes   ○ No
16. As part of your TLC did you participate in a campus activity or event outside of class? . . . . ○ Yes   ○ No
17. As part of your TLC did you participate in an activity or event in the Indianapolis community? . . . . ○ Yes   ○ No

18. Please describe how your TLC experience contributed to your learning:

_____

_____

19. Please describe what you liked most about your Themed Learning Community experience:

_____

_____

20. Please describe what you liked <u>least</u> about your Themed Learning Community experience:

_____

_____

21. Please describe the reason(s) why you enrolled in a TLC. Why, specifically, did you choose this TLC?

_____

_____

22. What specific suggestions do you have for improving the Themed Learning Communities?

_____

_____