

# THEMED LEARNING COMMUNITY PROGRAM EVALUATION AND RESEARCH REPORT

*Themed Learning Communities (TLCs) are designed to engage students, faculty, librarians, advisors, and others in a community of learners that explore interdisciplinary connections both in and out of the classroom which fosters enriching learning experiences.*

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**April 6, 2012**

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## Highlights

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- A total of 749 first-time, full-time students participated in the fall 2011 Themed Learning Community (TLC) program, while 724 first-time, full-time students participated in fall 2010. There were 37 sections offered during fall 2011 and this represented the largest number of offerings in the program's history. The program has grown tremendously since the inception in 2003 when only 138 students participated.
- It appears that the 2011 and 2010 TLC programs attracted appropriate numbers of students from underrepresented minority groups given that the proportions of students from underrepresented groups were similar to the general IUPUI FT, FT student population during both program years.
- Students from underrepresented minority groups had significantly better academic success outcomes and retention rates compared to their peers that did not participate in TLCs during 2010 and 2011 fall semesters. African American 2010 TLC participants had a one-year retention rate of 77% compared to 67% for nonparticipating African Americans. In fact, based on the results of a logistic regression analysis African American TLC participants had a 78% better odds of being retained compared to nonparticipants, even when academic preparation variables, income level, admit date (a good proxy for motivation), and sex were entered in the first step.
- Students participating in fall 2010 and 2011 TLCs had significantly higher fall-semester and first-year cumulative GPAs compared to nonparticipants, even when academic preparation variables, income level, admit date, and sex were entered as covariates in ANCOVA analyses.
- Students participating in fall 2010 and 2011 TLCs also had significantly higher retention rates compared to nonparticipants.
- There was tremendous variation between types of TLCs offered. Students who participated in Engineering, School of Nursing, and School of Science TLCs performed better academically than expected and this finding was consistent during the fall 2010 and 2011 program years.
- The combination of Summer Bridge-TLC positively affected academic outcomes and contributed to more variance in first-year cumulative GPAs compared to other high impact practices (first-year seminars and TLCs) in isolation or without the foundation of the Summer Bridge experience.
- The effect of fall TLC participation on longer term outcomes such as 4, 5, and 6-year graduation rates varied by cohort year. While the fall 2005 TLC cohort participants did not attain degrees at higher rates compared to nonparticipants, the 2004 TLC cohort had higher average 5 and 6-year graduation rates compared to nonparticipants.
- Results from a multiple regression analysis conducted on 2010 and 2011 TLC participants' responses to the end-of-course questionnaire suggested that the higher the levels of Integrative Learning and Thinking they experienced, and the higher their levels of positive Peer Interactions, the higher their Overall Satisfaction with their TLC learning experience was.
- Overall results imply that TLC interventions can have positive impacts on academic success outcomes (academic performance and persistence). Second, pedagogical strategies that facilitate Integrative Learning and Peer Interactions may be the most effective strategy for enhancing students' Overall Satisfaction with their learning experiences. Third, TLC instructional teams have developed pedagogical strategies that facilitate positive connections, interactions, equip students with skills necessary to effectively adjust to college, and help students make connections between courses. Fourth, the collective impact of TLC courses may be greater than standalone courses. Finally, the positive learning and collaborative environments created by the TLC instructional teams seem to have positive effects on the academic success outcomes for students with diverse backgrounds and with identified "risk factors."
- In terms of future research, it is important to continue to develop assessment techniques and methods to investigate impacts of TLC interventions. In order to determine meaningful impacts on direct student learning outcomes it is imperative that we begin a comprehensive study of integrative learning in TLCs using actual student work as authentic evidence of integrative learning. Finally, future investigations should be conducted to understand why there is notable variation in student success outcomes between TLC sections and types.

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## Purpose of Report and Introduction

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Offering learning communities has become a prevailing strategy in higher education for ensuring that students have enriching academic experiences and attain academic success. Learning communities have been advocated as effective interventions for enhancing student retention (Tinto, 2003), engagement levels (Yancy, Sutton-Haywood, Hermitte, Dawkins, Rainey, and Parker, 2008; Zhao and Kuh, 2004), student learning and academic success (Hegler, 2004; Henscheild, 2004; Huerta, 2009, Kuh, 2008; Stassen 2003, Pike, 2008), opportunities for service learning (Oates and Leavitt, 2003), critical thinking (Lardner and Malnarich, 2008.), and integrative learning (Lardner and Malnarich, 2008, 2008/2009, 2009). Learning communities have also been implemented on many campuses to help ensure that first-year students have successful transitions to college.

The purpose of this report was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Themed Learning Communities offered at IUPUI during the 2010 and 2011 fall semesters. The IUPUI TLC program was designed to improve student retention, persistence, and academic performance. As such, the program was designed to offer students enriching learning experiences such as integrative learning and thinking, service learning, engaging pedagogies, integrated assignments, etc. Additionally, instructional teams worked collaboratively in efforts to engage in effective educational practices widely recognized as correlates to undergraduate student success such as ensuring positive faculty and peer-student interactions, offering college transitional assistance, helping students feel a sense of belongingness, and creating opportunities for students to develop strong connections with the campus. Thus, this report describes the results of a series of quantitative analyses of program effects on academic outcomes such as retention, GPAs, integrative learning, satisfaction with learning experiences, self-reported learning outcomes, and quality of faculty-student and student-student interactions.

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## Research Methods

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### PARTICIPANTS

The participants in the current study were 2395 first-time, full-time students enrolled in fall 2010 and 2551 first-time, full-time enrolled in fall 2011. Some analyses also focused on first-time, full-time students enrolled in TLCs from 2003-2011.

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Datasets consisting of 2010 and 2011 first-time students' background characteristics, enrollment variables, academic preparation variables, program participation fields, and outcome variables (retention, academic performance, graduation rates) were assembled and analyses using SPSS version 18 or STATA version 11 were conducted.

An end-of-course questionnaire was administered to all TLC students at the end of the semester during class time. Students were asked to complete the anonymous questionnaire on a voluntary basis and no incentives for participation were provided. The 22-item questionnaire was designed to assess students' perceptions of their TLC learning experiences as related to their communication skills (writing and speaking); integrative thinking and learning; peer interactions; faculty interactions; participation in service learning, community events, and campus activities; and overall satisfaction (see Appendix A). Additionally, the questionnaire contained open-ended items designed to capture what students liked the most and least about the community, what aspects contributed most to their learning, suggestions for improvement, and their reasons for participating in the TLC program. The qualitative results are described in a separate report entitled: *Themed Learning Communities (TLCs) Qualitative Report (Fall 2011)*. For electronic copies of this and other previous assessment reports please feel free to visit: <http://research.uc.iupui.edu/>

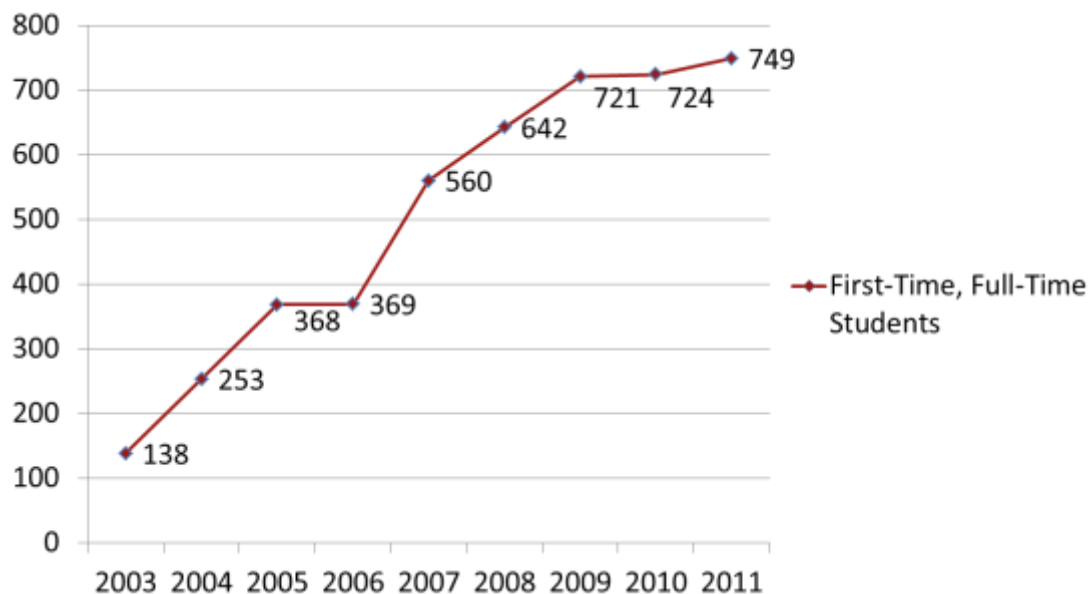
## DATA ANALYSES

A series of descriptive and inferential statistical procedures were employed in an effort to examine the impacts of TLC participation on retention rates, GPAs, and graduation rates. Students who were Administratively Withdrawn or voluntarily Withdrew from the TLCs were excluded from all analyses because these students did not complete the program. In order to understand program-related effects, first-time, full-time TLCs participants were compared to first-time full-time nonparticipants with regard to academic performance and one-year retention rates while accounting for academic preparation variables, enrollment variables, and student background characteristics. Logistical regression procedures were used when the dependent variable was dichotomous (e.g., retention) and linear regression or Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) procedures were used when the dependent variable was continuous (e.g., GPAs, or overall satisfaction reported on a 5-point scale). Significant covariates were included in the ANCOVA models or regression models to account for differences in academic preparation, motivation, or background characteristics when appropriate. Common covariates included High School Grade Point Average (HS GPA), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) Score or converted *American College Test* (ACT) Score, Income Level (received a Federal Pell Grant or not), Application Date (as a proxy for motivation), and Sex (Female or not). Independent sample t-tests (for continuous variables) and chi-square analyses (for dichotomous variables) were also employed when making comparisons between participants and nonparticipants.

## TLC Program Growth 2003 to 2011

Shown in Figure 1 is a visual representation of the TLC program growth since the inception of the program in 2003. In 2003 138 students participated and in 2011 749 students participated in the program. The program has been expanded over the years due to faculty members' interest and commitment as well as the positive evaluation results suggesting that the intervention is associated with positive educational outcomes for students.

**Figure 1. TLC Program Growth 2003 to 2011**



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## Fall 2010 TLC Evaluation Results

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### TLC PARTICIPANTS

A total of 724 first-time students participated and completed a fall 2010 Themed Learning Community (TLC). Students who withdrew or were administratively withdrawn were excluded from all analyses (N=18). There were 32 sections offered in 2010. Listed below are examples of themes:

**Liberal Arts (6)**

Transcending Perceptions  
Writing Women Back Into (Her)story  
International Perspectives

**Engineering (3)**

Global Views Local Solutions  
Motorsports

**Science (3)**

CSI: IUPUI  
Sustaining Happiness? Psychology &  
Religion

**Education (3)**

Social Justice Past & Present

**Nursing (3)**

So, You Think You Want to Be a  
Nurse

**Business (2)**

Classroom to Boardroom

**Pubic & Environmental Affairs (2)**

Dangerous Minds, Dangerous Policies

**Herron School of Art (1)**

Ways of Seeing Art & Culture

**Social Work (1)**

Smart Helpers of the World

**Physical Education (1)**

Fit N' Healthy

**University College (8)**

For Love AND Money  
Athletes  
African American Perspectives  
Multicultural Perspectives  
Health Professions Programs

Tables 1 and 2 display the demographics, enrollment characteristics, and academic preparation of students who participated in a TLC compared to the overall IUPUI population of first-time, full-time students.

The overall population of students participating in TLCs was very similar to the overall population of first-time, full-time IUPUI-Indianapolis only students in 2010 (N=2395) with regard to demographic and background characteristics. The only demographic differences were that a higher proportion of females participated in a TLC compared to the overall population of students (66% compared to 59%, respectively) and the TLC students were slightly younger. A total of 82 African American and a total of 32 Latino/a students participated in the TLC program. It appears that the 2010 TLC program attracted appropriate numbers of students from underrepresented minority groups given that the proportions were similar to the general IUPUI FT, FT student population.

TLC students scored significantly lower on the *Scholastic Aptitude Test* (SAT) compared to non-participants (1006 compared to 1023, respectively). Additionally, TLC students enrolled in more credit hours in their first semester (14.05) compared to non-participants (13.89).

**Table 1. Fall 2010 TLC Program Students' Demographics Compared to the Overall IUPUI Population of First-Time, Full-Time Students**

	Total TLC N	% of Total TLC Population	Total IUPUI FT, FT N	% of Total IUPUI Population
Female	481	<b>66%</b>	1416	<b>59%</b>
First-Generation	303	42%	967	40%
Pell Grant	316	44%	1001	42%
African American	82	11%	256	11%
Asian Americans	18	2%	80	3%
Latino/a	32	5%	103	4%
25 or Older	7	1%	31	1%
Conditional Admit	42	6%	190	8%

Note 1: Bolded items are notably different.

**Table 2. Fall 2010 TLC Program Students' Enrollment Characteristics and Academic Preparation Compared to the Overall IUPUI Population of First-Time, Full-Time Students**

	High School GPA	SAT Score	% Honors High School Diploma	Age	Credits Hours Attempted
TLC	3.31	<b>1006</b>	54%	<b>18.94</b>	<b>14.05</b>
Nonparticipants	3.30	<b>1023</b>	54%	<b>19.06</b>	<b>13.89</b>
Overall	3.30	1018	54%	19.01	13.94

Note 1: Missing cases were excluded.

Note 2: Bolded items are statistically significant based on an independent samples t-test or chi-square results ( $p < .05$ ).

## TLC PARTICIPATION AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS OUTCOMES

The 2010 TLC students had notably higher first-year GPAs and one-year retention rates compared to nonparticipants. Additionally, TLC students were less likely to earn GPAs below a 2.0. during their first year compared with nonparticipants. Results are shown in Table 3.

Table 4 shows the results of an ANCOVA analyses. Results suggest that TLC students had significantly higher first-year GPAs compared to nonparticipants, even when High School GPA, SAT Score, Admit Date, and Income Level, and Sex were entered as covariates (adjusted GPAs 2.77 and 2.61, respectively).

Table 5 shows the results of a logistic regression analysis. Results suggest that TLC students had significantly higher one-year retention rates compared to nonparticipants, even when High School GPA, SAT Score, Admit Date, and Income Level, and Sex were entered into the first step of the model. In fact, TLC participants had a 67% better odds of being retained compared to nonparticipants (based on the odds ratio).

**Table 3. Fall 2010 TLC Program Students' Academic Success Outcomes Compared to Non-Participating First-Time, Full-Time Students**

	First-Year GPA	% Below 2.0 First-Year GPA	One-Year Retention Rate*
TLC	<b>2.78</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>79%</b>
Nonparticipants	<b>2.63</b>	<b>24%</b>	<b>71%</b>
Overall	2.67	22%	73%

Note 1: Missing cases were excluded.

Note 2: Bolded items are statistically significant based on an independent samples t-test or chi-square test results ( $p < .05$ ).

\* Retention rate based on IUPUI Indianapolis only (includes all degree seeking – Bachelors, Associates, and Certificates).

**Table 4. ANCOVA Results: TLC Participation and One-Year GPA**

	N	First-Year GPA	Adjusted First-Year GPA*
TLC	681	<b>2.78</b>	<b>2.77</b>
Nonparticipants	1528	<b>2.61</b>	<b>2.61</b>
Overall	2209	2.66	

Note 1: Missing cases were excluded.

Note 2: Bolded items are statistically significant based on Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) results ( $p < .0001$ ).

Note 3: Partial Eta Squared = .009 indicating a small effect size.

\* Covariates included in the model were High School GPA, SAT Score, Admit Date, and Income Level (received a Pell Grant or Not dummy coded where 1 = Received Pell Grant and 0 = Did NOT Receive a Pell Grant), and Gender (dummy coded where 1=Female and 0 = Not Female or Male).



**Table 5. Logistic Regression Predicting One Year Retention**

	Variable	B	SE	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Wald Statistic	p
Step 1	Z H.S GPA	.53	.06	1.70	[1.52, 1.92]	79.15	.000
	Z SAT Score	.10	.06	1.11	[.98, 1.24]	2.75	.097
	Z Admit Date	.17	.06	1.18	[1.06, 1.32]	8.60	.003
	Low Income	-.13	.10	.88	[.72, 1.07]	1.63	.202
	Female	-.19	.11	.82	[.67, 1.02]	3.30	.069
Step 2	Z H.S GPA	.53	.06	1.71	[1.52, 1.92]	78.94	.000
	Z SAT Score	.11	.06	1.11	[.99, 1.25]	3.11	.078
	Z Admit Date	.15	.06	1.16	[1.04, 1.30]	6.96	.008
	Low Income	-.14	.10	.87	[.71, 1.06]	1.86	.173
	Female	-.23	.11	.80	[.65, .99]	4.38	.036
	TLC	.51	.11	1.67	[1.33, 2.08]	20.10	.000

**Note 1:** Low Income is a dummy coded variable for received a Pell Grant or not. TLC s a dummy coded variable for participated in 2010 TLC Program or Not.

**Note 2:** TLC participants have 67% better odds of being retained compared to non-participants (based on the odds ratio). Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .097$  for Step 1; Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .109$  for Step 2

**Note 3:** H.S. GPA, SAT Score, and Admit Date (weeks prior to Fall census) were converted to Z-scores to standardize the continuous variables and aid in the interpretation of results.

## TLC STUDENT GROUPS/UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITY PARTICIPATION AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS OUTCOMES

Analyses were also conducted to examine the effects of 2010 TLC participation on academic success outcomes for various subgroups of students. Results suggested that experiencing the TLC environment during the first semester seemed to benefit students from diverse backgrounds and students from underrepresented minority groups. For example, African American TLC participants had a one-year retention rate of 77% compared to 65% for African American nonparticipants. Additionally, first-generation college students that participated in a TLC had an 82% one-year retention rate compared to a 67% for nonparticipating first-generation students. Results are shown in Table 6.

Table 7 shows the results of an ANCOVA analyses. Results suggest that TLC African American students did not have significantly higher first year GPAs compared to nonparticipants, once High School GPA, SAT Score, Admit Date, and Income Level, and Sex as covariates (adjusted GPAs 2.30 and 2.11, respectively).

Table 8 shows the results of a logistic regression analyses. Results suggest that TLC African American students had significantly higher one-year retention rates compared to nonparticipants, even when High School GPA, SAT Score, Admit Date, and Income Level, and Sex were entered into the first step of the model. In fact, African American TLC participants had a 78% better odds of being retained compared to nonparticipants (based on the odds ratio).

**Table 6. TLC Student Groups/Underrepresented Minority Participation and Academic Success Outcomes**

	TLC PARTICIPANTS				NON-PARTICIPANTS		
	N	First-Year GPA	% First-Year GPA Below 2.0.	One-Year Retention Rate	First-Year GPA	% First-Year GPA Below 2.0.	One-Year Retention Rate
Female	481	<b>2.82</b>	17%	<b>78%</b>	<b>2.67</b>	22%	<b>69%</b>
First-Generation	303	<b>2.69</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>82%</b>	<b>2.47</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>67%</b>
Pell Grant	316	<b>2.59</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>2.40</b>	<b>32%</b>	<b>66%</b>
African American	82	<b>2.34</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>2.11</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>65%</b>
Asian American	14	<b>3.19</b>	14%	100%	<b>3.06</b>	8%	91%
Latino/a	35	<b>2.76</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>2.51</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>69%</b>
25 or Older	7	<b>3.30</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>86%</b>	<b>2.78</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>55%</b>
Conditional Admit	42	<b>2.09</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>1.92</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>56%</b>

Note 1: Missing cases were excluded.

Note 2: Bolded items are statistically significantly and practically different based on ANOVA results or chi-square test results ( $p < .001$ ).

**Table 7. ANCOVA Results: African American TLC Participants First-Year GPA**

	N	First-Year GPA	Adjusted First-Year GPA*
TLC	75	2.32	2.30
Non-Participants	157	2.10	2.11
Overall	232	2.17	

Note 1: Missing cases were excluded.

Note 2: First-Year GPA for African American TLC participants was not statistically significantly different from non-participating African American students based on Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) results ( $p = .113$ ).

\* Covariates included in the model were High School GPA, SAT Score, Admit Date, and Income Level (received a Pell Grant or Not dummy coded where 1 = Received Pell Grant and 0 = Did NOT Receive a Pell Grant), and Gender (dummy coded where 1=Female and 0 = Not Female or Male).

**Table 8. Logistic Regression Predicting One Year Retention for African American Students**

	Variable	B	SE	Odds Ratio	95% CI	Wald Statistic	p
Step 1	Z H.S GPA	0.45	0.20	1.57	[1.07, 2.30]	5.20	.023
	Z SAT Score	0.25	0.19	1.28	[.88, 1.87]	1.64	.200
	Z Admit Date	-0.13	0.17	0.87	[.63, 1.21]	0.66	.416
	Low Income	0.25	0.33	1.28	[.67, 2.47]	0.56	.454
	Female	-0.19	0.33	0.82	[.43, 1.59]	0.33	.563
Step 2	Z H.S GPA	0.44	0.20	1.55	[1.05, 2.27]	4.95	.026
	Z SAT Score	0.23	0.19	1.26	[.86, 1.85]	1.43	.232
	Z Admit Date	-0.15	0.17	0.86	[.62, 1.20]	0.78	.377
	Low Income	0.22	0.34	1.25	[.64, 2.42]	0.42	.515
	Female	-0.26	0.34	0.77	[.40, 1.50]	0.58	.446
	TLC	0.57	0.33	1.78	[.93, 3.40]	3.01	.083

**Note 1:** Low Income is a dummy coded variable for received a Pell Grant or not. TLC s a dummy coded variable for participated in 2010 TLC Program or Not.

**Note 2:** TLC African American participants have 78% better odds of being retained compared to non-participants (based on the odds ratio). This result was marginally significant ( $p < .10$ ). Marginal significance was reported due to small sample size which negatively affects the power of tests to detect significance.

Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .063$  for Step 1: Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .081$  for Step 2

**Note 3:** H.S. GPA SAT Score, and Admit Date (weeks prior to Fall census) were converted to Z-scores to standardize the continuous variables and aid in the interpretation of results.

## TLC ACADEMIC SUCCESS OUTCOMES BY TLC TYPE

Analyses were conducted to explore if student outcomes varied as a function of the type of TLC experience they participated in. Results suggested that there was tremendous variation with regard to student outcomes depending on what type of TLC they enrolled in. For example, students enrolled in the School of Business TLCs had a one-year average retention rate of 67% while the student enrolled in the Engineering TLC had an average one-year retention rate of 86%. Subsequent analyses were performed to determine how students performed when taking into account their academic preparation levels and sex. Results suggested that students who participated in the Engineering, Herron, Physical Education, Nursing, and Science TLCs performed academically (first-year cumulative GPA) significantly better than expected based on their HS GPAs, SAT Scores, and Sex. Table 9 shows the results.

**Table 9. Academic Success Outcomes By TLC Type**

TLC TYPE	N	First-Year GPA	Adjusted First-Year GPA*	One-Year Retention Rate
BUS-X	42	2.52	2.72	67%
EDUC-F	66	2.72	2.82	76%
ENGR	69	2.68	2.43	86%
HER-X	18	2.90	2.83	72%
HPER-L	25	3.02	2.92	88%
NURS-B	68	3.15	3.04	88%
PSY-B	44	2.78	2.75	82%
SCI-I	19	2.91	2.48	84%
SLA-S	133	2.79	2.76	79%
SPEA-V	45	2.39	2.62	71%
SWK-S	20	2.78	2.88	80%
UCOL-U	175	2.70	2.78	76%
Overall	724	2.78		79%

Note 1: Missing cases were excluded.

Note 2: Highlighted sections indicate that students performed notably better than expected based on High School GPA, SAT Score, and Gender.

\*Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: High School GPA (4.0 scale) = 3.3022, Best SAT or ACT score = 1002.60, and Female Flag = .66.

## SUMMER BRIDGE-TLC PARTICIPATION POSITIVELY AFFECTS ACADEMIC SUCCESS OUTCOMES

Results of a hierarchical multiple regression analysis suggested that the combination of Summer Bridge-TLC contributed to more variance in first-year cumulative GPAs compared to other high impact practices (first-year seminars and TLCs) in isolation or without the foundation of the Summer Bridge experience. Results are shown in Table 10.

**Table 10. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Results: High Impact Practices and Cumulative First Year GPA (N=2023)**

	Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	$\beta$
Step 1	HS GPA	1.07	.06	.42***
	SAT Score	.01	.00	.13***
	Female	.11	.04	.06**
Step 2	First Generation	-.11	.04	-.06**
	HS GPA	1.06	.07	.41***
	SAT Score	.01	.00	.13***
	Female	.11	.04	.05**
	First Generation	-.12	.04	-.06**
	Summer Bridge-TLC	.32	.08	.11***
	FYS-TLC	.28	.07	.10***
Summer Bridge	.25	.09	.07**	
	FYS	.12	.06	.06*

$R^2 = .254$  for Step 1;  $\Delta R^2 = .011$  for Step 2 ( $p < .001$ ). \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

Note 1: FYS denotes First-Year Seminar and TLC denotes Themed Learning Community.

Note 2: Variables were dummy coded as Summer Bridge-TLC, FYS-TLC, Summer Bridge, FYS-TLC, FYS, SB (1=Participated and 0=Did Not Participate).

Note 2: Students who Withdrew (W) or were Administratively Withdrawn (AW) from the course were excluded (18 students).

Note 3: The Beta Weights help us understand the relationship between academic performance (first year GPA) and each variable and program type (predictors). Positive values indicate that there is a positive relationship between the program type and GPA. Negative values indicate that there is a negative relationship between the program type and GPA. The Beta Weight or *b* coefficient is how much more the dependent variable increases (or decreases if *b* is negative) when the dummy variable increases one unit (shifting from 0=not present to 1=present). The *b* coefficients, as semi-partial coefficients, reflect the unique (independent) contributions of each variable (or program type) to explaining the total variance in the GPA.

Note 4: Each of the Beta Weights has an associated standard error (SE). The SE tells us the extent these values would vary across different samples and are used to determine whether or not the Beta Weight values differ significantly from zero.

Note 5: Analysis included IUPUI Indianapolis Only First-Time, Full-Time Regularly Admitted Students.

## Fall 2011 TLC Evaluation Results

### TLC PARTICIPANTS

A total of 749 first-time, full-time students participated and completed a fall 2011 Themed Learning Community (TLC). Students who withdrew or were administratively withdrawn were excluded from all analyses (N=19). There were 37 sections offered in 2011 compared to 32 in 2010.

Tables 11 and 12 display the demographics, enrollment characteristics, and academic preparation of students who participated in a TLC compared to the overall IUPUI Indianapolis-only population of first-time, full-time students.

The overall population of students participating in TLCs was slightly different than the overall population of first-time, full-time IUPUI Indianapolis-only students in 2011 (N=2551) with regard to demographic and background characteristics. A higher proportion of females participated in a TLC compared to the overall population of students (63% compared to 59%, respectively) and the TLC students were slightly younger. Additionally, a higher proportion of conditionally admitted students and students who were first-generation college students (13% and 47%, respectively) participated in a TLC compared to the overall population of students (9% and 42%, respectively).

A total of 107 African American and a total of 46 Latino students participated in the TLC program. It appears that the 2011 TLC program attracted appropriate numbers of students from underrepresented minority groups given that the proportions were similar to the general IUPUI FT, FT student population.

TLC students scored significantly lower on the *Scholastic Aptitude Test* (SAT) compared to non-participants (999 compared to 1024, respectively) and had lower High School GPAs compared to non-participants (3.25 compared to 3.30, respectively). Additionally, TLC students enrolled in more credit hours in their first semester (13.90) compared to non-participants (13.78).

**Table 11. Fall 2011 TLC Program Students' Demographics Compared to the Overall IUPUI Population of First-Time, Full-Time Students**

	Total TLC N	% of Total TLC Population	Total IUPUI FT, FT N	% of Total IUPUI Population
Female	473	<b>63%</b>	1495	<b>59%</b>
First-Generation	355	<b>47%</b>	1074	<b>42%</b>
Pell Grant	340	45%	1021	44%
African American	107	14%	294	12%
Asian Americans	10	1%	76	3%
Latino/a	46	6%	161	6%
25 or Older	3	1%	32	1%
Conditional Admit	99	<b>13%</b>	239	<b>9%</b>

Note 1: Bolded items are notably different.

**Table 12. Fall 2011 TLC Program Students' Enrollment Characteristics and Academic Preparation Compared Non-Participating First-Time, Full-Time Students**

	High School GPA	SAT Score	% Honors High School Diploma	Age	Credits Hours Attempted
TLC	<b>3.25</b>	<b>999</b>	52%	<b>18.83</b>	<b>13.90</b>
Nonparticipants	<b>3.30</b>	<b>1024</b>	55%	<b>19.05</b>	<b>13.78</b>
Overall	3.29	1016	54%	18.98	13.82

Note 1: Missing cases were excluded.

Note 2: Bolded items are statistically significant based on an independent samples t-test or chi-square results ( $p < .05$ ).

### TLC PARTICIPATION AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS OUTCOMES

The 2011 TLC students had notably higher fall semester GPAs and fall-spring retention rates compared to nonparticipants. Additionally, TLC students were less likely to earn GPAs below a 2.0. during their first semester compared with nonparticipants. Results are shown in Table 13.

Table 14 shows the results of an ANCOVA analysis. Results suggest that TLC students had significantly higher first semester GPAs compared to nonparticipants, even when High School GPA, SAT Score, Admit Date, and Income Level, and Sex as covariates (adjusted GPAs 2.95 and 2.65, respectively).

**Table 13. Fall 2011 TLC Program Students' Academic Success Outcomes Compared to Non-Participating First-Time, Full-Time Students**

	Fall GPA	% Below 2.0 Fall GPA	Fall-Spring Retention Rate*
TLC	<b>2.90</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>93%</b>
Nonparticipants	<b>2.67</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>87%</b>
Overall	2.74	20%	89%

Note 1: Missing cases were excluded.

Note 2: Bolded items are statistically significant based on an independent samples t-test or chi-square test results ( $p < .001$ ).

\* Retention rate based on IUPUI Indianapolis only (includes all degree seeking – Bachelors, Associates, and Certificates).

**Table 14. ANCOVA Results: TLC Participation and Fall GPA**

	<b>N</b>	<b>Fall GPA</b>	<b>Adjusted Fall GPA*</b>
TLC	729	<b>2.90</b>	<b>2.95</b>
Non-Participants	1617	<b>2.67</b>	<b>2.65</b>
Overall	2346	2.66	

Note 1: Missing cases were excluded.

Note 2: Bolded items are statistically significant based on Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) results ( $p < .0001$ ).

Note 3: Partial Eta Squared = .023 indicating a small effect size.

\* Covariates included in the model were High School GPA, SAT Score, Admit Date, and Income Level (received a Pell Grant or Not dummy coded where 1 = Received Pell Grant and 0 = Did NOT Receive a Pell Grant), and Gender (dummy coded where 1=Female and 0 = Not Female or Male).

### **TLC STUDENT GROUPS/UNDERREPRESENTED MINORITY PARTICIPATION AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS OUTCOMES**

Analyses were also conducted to examine the effects of 2011 TLC participation on academic success outcomes for various subgroups of students. Results suggested that experiencing the TLC environment during the first semester seemed to benefit students from diverse backgrounds and students from underrepresented minority groups as was the case in 2010. For example, African American TLC participants had higher fall semester GPAs (2.51) compared to African American nonparticipants (2.14). Additionally, Latino/a students that participated in a TLC had higher fall semester GPAs (2.51) compared to nonparticipating Latino/a students (2.14) Results are shown in Table 15.



**Table 15. TLC Student Groups/Underrepresented Minority Participation and Academic Success Outcomes**

	TLC PARTICIPANTS				NONPARTICIPANTS		
	N	Fall GPA	% Fall GPA Below 2.0.	Fall-Spring Retention Rate	Fall GPA	% Fall GPA Below 2.0.	Fall-Spring Retention Rate
Female	473	2.78	18%	93%	2.98	18%	89%
First-Generation	355	<b>2.87</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>2.61</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>85%</b>
Pell Grant	340	<b>2.74</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>2.51</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>86%</b>
African American	107	<b>2.51</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>92%</b>	<b>2.14</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>83%</b>
Asian American	10	2.81	10%	100%	2.93	15%	97%
Latino/a	46	<b>3.11</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>98%</b>	<b>2.57</b>	<b>26%</b>	<b>89%</b>
25 or Older	3	<b>3.67</b>	<b>0%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>2.60</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>83%</b>
Conditional Admit	99	2.16	40%	86%	2.12	39%	83%

Note 1: Missing cases were excluded.

Note 2: Bolded items are statistically significantly and practically different based on ANOVA results or chi-square test results ( $p < .001$ ).

### TLC ACADEMIC SUCCESS OUTCOMES BY TLC TYPE

Analyses were conducted to explore if student outcomes varied as a function of the type of 2011 TLC experience they participated in. Results again suggested that there was tremendous variation with regard to student outcomes depending on what type of TLC they enrolled in. For example, students enrolled in the School of Environmental and Public Affairs (SPEA) TLCs had a fall GPA of 2.48 while students enrolled in the Science TLCs had a fall GPA of 3.29. Subsequent analyses were performed to determine how students performed when taking into account their academic preparation levels and gender. Results suggested that students who participated in the Engineering, Nursing, Science, and School of Liberal Arts TLCs performed significantly better academically (fall cumulative GPA) than expected based on their HS GPAs, SAT Scores, and Sex. Table 16 shows the results.

**Table16. Academic Success Outcomes By TLC Type**

TLC TYPE	N	Fall GPA	Adjusted Fall GPA*	Fall-Spring Retention Rate
BUS-X	45	2.61	2.91	89%
EDUC-F	64	3.15	3.16	97%
ENGR	63	2.66	2.36	89%
HER-X	19	2.71	2.83	95%
HPER-L	44	3.12	3.19	98%
NURS-B	66	3.20	3.02	95%
PSY-B	41	2.59	2.58	83%
SCI-I	18	3.29	2.74	100%
SLA-S	120	3.04	2.99	97%
SPEA-V	31	2.28	2.48	87%
SWK-S	19	3.00	2.99	89%
TECH	12	2.57	2.89	100%
UCOL-U	206	2.88	2.97	92%
Overall	749	2.90		93%

Note 1: Missing cases were excluded.

Note 2: Highlighted sections indicate that students performed better than expected based on High School GPA, SAT Score, and Gender.

\* Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: High School GPA = 3.3016, Best SAT Score = 1017.13, Female Flag = .60.

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## TLC Questionnaire Results

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A series of analyses were conducted to explore TLC students' self-reported learning outcomes and perceptions of their learning experiences. A 22-item end-of-course questionnaire was designed to assess students' perceptions of their TLC learning experiences as related to their communication skills (writing and speaking); integrative thinking and learning; peer interactions; faculty interactions; participation in service learning, community events, and campus activities; and overall satisfaction (see Appendix A). Shown in Appendix B are the scales and coefficient alpha reliabilities.

Students ratings of the extent to which the TLC experience helped them in different areas are shown in Table 17. It appears that students had the most positive experiences in the following areas: their peer interactions, understanding connections between different disciplines and courses, and applying knowledge gained to complex real world issues. Questionnaire data from the 2010 and 2011 were combined in an effort to understand consistency of the results.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted in order to determine which TLC learning experiences made the most significant and substantial impact on students' overall TLC learning experience. Results suggested that students' perceptions of the extent to which their TLC experience helped them develop their integrative and thinking abilities and positive peer interactions predicted their overall satisfaction levels. It is noteworthy that students' perceptions of the extent to which their TLC experience helped them develop positive faculty interactions and their skills to communicate effectively in speaking and writing did not have significant effects on their overall satisfaction levels. It is not the case that these factors are not important aspects of the TLC experience. In fact, quality of faculty interactions and improving communication skills may be related to other important outcomes such as learning, academic performance, and retention. However, the anonymity of the questionnaires precluded linking students' questionnaire responses to any other academic outcomes.

It is noteworthy that 76% reported that they were "Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied" with their TLC experience during the most recent cohort year (2011). The vast majority of 2011 cohort students also reported that they participated in a community service or volunteer activity. (71%) and 73% reported that they participated in a campus activity or event outside of class. More than half reported that they participated in an activity or event in the Indianapolis community (52%). Sixty-eight percent reported that they understood connections between different disciplines and courses ("Much" or "Very Much") and 62% reported that they developed a better understanding of complex real world social problems and issues ("Much" or "Very Much").

Figure 2 displays students' quality of TLC learning experiences from 2007 to 2011. Questionnaire results suggested that perceptions of their overall satisfaction with experiences and quality of peer interactions have remained fairly consistent over the last 5 years. Students' ability to understand connections between different disciplines and courses showed fairly steady improvements from 2007-2009 and reached the highest mean value in 2011(3.94).

Figure 3 shows TLC students' levels of participation in community service, campus events, and Indianapolis community events in over the last 5 years. Students self-reported participation rates in community service has increased over the past 5 years, while participation in campus events and Indianapolis events has declined.

**Table 17. 2010 and 2011 End-of-Course Questionnaire Results Rank Ordered by Mean**

Question	N	Mean*	Standard Deviation
Formed one or more friendships that I will maintain after the semester.	1290	4.17	1.02
Understood connections between different disciplines and courses.	1296	3.75	.91
Exchanged ideas with a student whose views are different from my own.	1294	3.74	1.02
Actively discussed complex issues and ideas.	1283	3.67	1.03
Developed a better understanding of complex real world social problems and issues.	1289	3.63	1.05
Became more effective with communicating my thoughts in writing.	1296	3.63	1.03
Became more effective with communicating my thought in speaking.	1294	3.59	1.02
Applied what I learned in one course to another course in my learning community.	1297	3.58	1.01
Discussed ideas from the TLC with peers outside of class.	1282	3.52	1.17
Became more effective in analyzing and understanding readings in essays, articles, and textbooks.	1290	3.48	1.05
Applied knowledge gained in learning community courses in service to the broader community and social issues.	1288	3.45	1.09
Made connections with faculty outside of class.	1289	3.19	1.19
Discussed connections between any TLC courses with faculty.	1287	3.14	1.18

\*Mean based on question posed "Please indicate how much your experience in the Themed Learning Community helped you in the following areas" and a scale where 1 = Very Little, 2 = Little, 3=Some, 4 = Much, and 5 = Very Much.

**Table 18. Multiple Regression Results: Integrative Learning and Peer Interactions Have Significant Effect on TLC Student Overall Learning Experience Satisfaction (N=1232)**

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE b</i>	$\beta$
Learning Integration	.49	.05	.42***
Peer Interactions	.22	.03	.20***
Communication Skills	.06	.04	.05
Faculty Interactions	-.01	.03	-.01

$R^2 = .362$  \*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$

**Figure 2. Quality of TLC Learning Experiences 2007 to 2011**

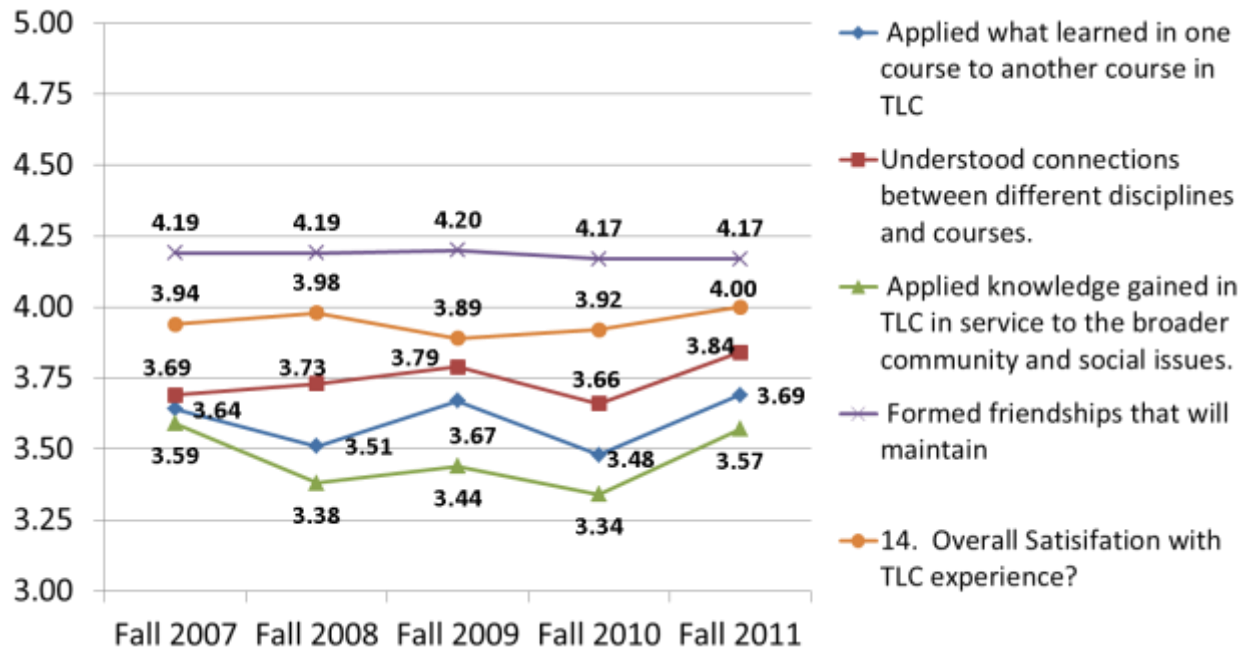
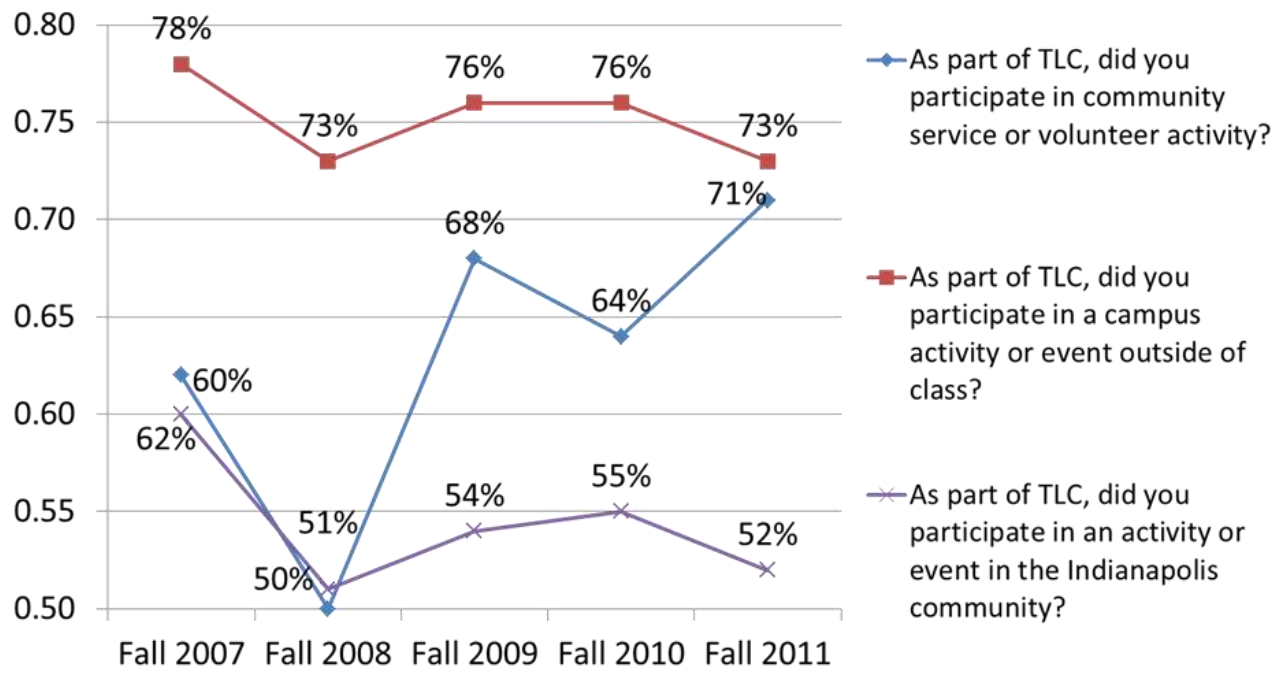


Figure 3. Participation in Community Service and Campus Events Over Time



## TLC Impacts on Graduation Rates

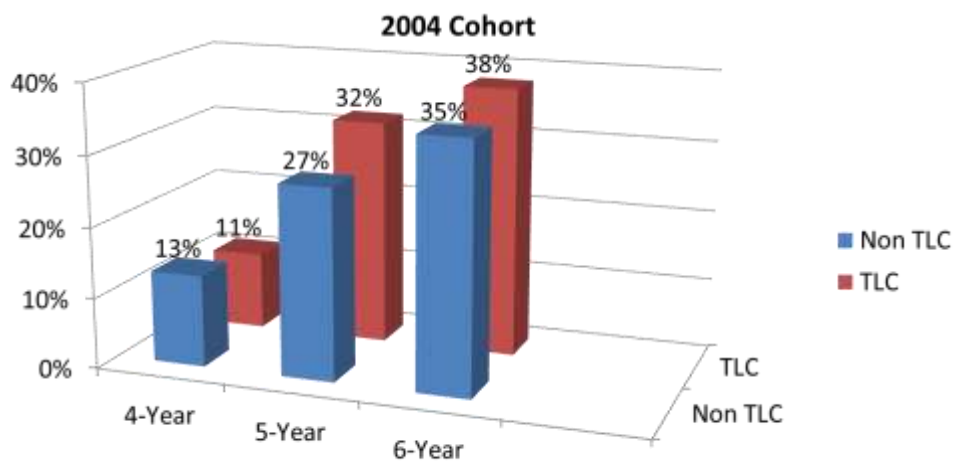
The effect of fall TLC participation on longer term outcomes such as 4, 5, and 6-year graduation rates varied by cohort year. While the fall 2005 TLC cohort participants did not attain degrees at higher rates compared to nonparticipants, the 2004 TLC cohort had higher average 5 and 6-year graduation rates (32% and 38%, respectively) and were notably higher compared to nonparticipants ( 27% and 35%, respectively). Graduation rates for the 2004, 2005, and 2006 cohorts are shown in Table 19 and Figure 4 displays the graduation rates for the 2004 cohort in bar graph form.

**Table 19. TLC Impacts on Graduation Rates**

	Initial Totals	4 years		5 years		6 years	
		% retained	% graduated	% retained	% graduated	% retained	% graduated
<b>Fall 2004 Cohort</b>							
TLC Partic	253	48%	11%	46%	<b>32%</b>	46%	<b>38%</b>
TLC Non-Partic	1833	46%	13%	44%	<b>27%</b>	43%	<b>35%</b>
Total	2086	46%	12%	44%	28%	44%	35%
<b>Fall 2005 Cohort</b>							
TLC Partic	368	44%	9%	41%	26%		
TLC Non-Partic	1826	43%	13%	42%	27%		
Total	2194	43%	12%	42%	27%		
<b>Fall 2006 Cohort</b>							
TLC Partic	368	51%	15%				
TLC Non-Partic	1901	51%	15%				
Total	2269	51%	15%				

Note: Graduation figures include bachelors and associate degrees awarded through August of the appropriate year, and certificates awarded through December of the appropriate year. Retained includes students awarded a degree or certificate or students who have re-enrolled.

**Figure 4. 2004 TLC Cohort Graduation Rates Compared to Nonparticipants**



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## Research Limitations

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A noteworthy limitation of these investigations is that students self-select into TLCs and selection bias may have affected the internal validity of this study. Thus, the ability to make causal inferences based on the information is limited. It is possible that the positive effects of TLCs on academic performance and persistence rates are due to the fact that students who decide to enroll may have differed in substantial ways from students who decided not to enroll and these differences (not TLCs) may have caused the positive outcomes. Although important variables were treated as covariates in the statistical models, it is difficult to adjust for all possible self-selection factors using traditional statistical techniques and when experimental designs using random assignment are not employed.

Student learning outcomes were assessed indirectly using GPAs and a self-report measure. The findings would be more meaningful if measures of direct student learning outcomes were included in this investigation.

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## TLC Recognitions and Rewards

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IUPUI was ranked 5th by U.S. News and World Report in "Up-and-Coming National Universities" in 2012. It is noteworthy that IUPUI was also cited as a top pick by high school guidance counselors, and recognized yet again for programs in service learning, first-year experiences, and learning communities. There is little doubt that the positive outcomes associated with the TLC program has helped to cast a bright shining light on IUPUI making it worthy of national recognition and these awards.



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## Conclusions and Implications

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The results of this comprehensive TLC program evaluation have a number of important implications for TLC practice and theory. Overall results suggest that TLC interventions can have positive impacts on academic success outcomes (academic performance and persistence). Second, the results imply that pedagogical strategies that facilitate Integrative Learning and Peer Interactions may be most effective in enhancing students' overall satisfaction with their learning experiences. Third, TLC instructional teams have developed pedagogical strategies that facilitate positive connections, interactions, equip students with skills necessary to effectively adjust to college, and help students make connections between courses. Fourth, the collective impact of TLC courses may be greater than standalone courses and the combination of Summer Bridge-TLC has positive effects on academic outcomes, implying that the Summer Bridge may provide students with a sense of readiness for other high impact practices during the first year. Fifth, the positive learning and collaborative environments created by the TLC instructional teams seem to have positive effects on the academic success outcomes for students with diverse backgrounds and with identified "risk factors."

In terms of future research, it is important to continue to develop assessment techniques and methods to investigate impacts of TLC interventions. Although finding that student perceptions of the extent to which TLCs help them with their integrative learning and thinking made the most substantial impact on their satisfaction levels suggests that the TLCs are having a positive influence on students' learning integration and application abilities, this finding is based on an indirect assessment of student learning. In order to determine meaningful impacts on direct student learning outcomes it is imperative that we begin a comprehensive study of integrative learning in TLCs using actual student work as authentic evidence of integrative learning. Additionally, focus groups or individual interviews with previous TLC students will help enhance understanding how their experiences contribute to their learning. Another line of inquiry is to continue to study pedagogical strategies that strengthen the positive effects of TLCs. Finally, future investigations should be conducted to understand the notable variation in student success outcomes (GPAs and retention rates) and students' self-reported learning outcomes between sections and types of TLCs offered.



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# Appendix A: TLC Questionnaire


## 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 one response per item. Please read each statement carefully then select one of these five alternatives: Very Little; Little; Some; Much; Very Much**



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

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 least 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?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Copyright 2003, The Trustees of Indiana University. Some items adapted from Levine, J. & Degnan, J. (2001) "Fall 2001 Learning Communities Student Questionnaire" administered by Temple University Faculty members.

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## Appendix B: TLC Questionnaire Scales and Reliability Coefficients

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- **Integrative Thinking and Learning  $\alpha = .87$** 
  - Understood connections between different disciplines and courses.
  - Developed a better understanding of complex real world social problems and issues.
  - Actively discussed complex issues and ideas.
  - Applied what I learned in one course to another course in my learning community.
  - Applied knowledge gained in learning community courses in service to the broader community and social issues.
  
- **Peer Interactions  $\alpha = .74$** 
  - Discussed ideas from the TLC with peers outside of class.
  - Formed one or more friendships that I will maintain after the semester.
  - Exchanged ideas with a student whose views are different from my own.
  
- **Faculty Interactions  $\alpha = .80$** 
  - Made connections with faculty outside of class.
  - Discussed connections between any TLC courses with faculty.
  
- **Communication Skills  $\alpha = .74$** 
  - Became more effective with communicating my thoughts in writing.
  - Became more effective with communicating my thought in speaking.