Themed Learning Communities (TLCs)

Qualitative Report (Fall 2011)

Research, Planning, and Evaluation
University College
Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis (IUPUI)

Daniel J. Trujillo, M.S.,
Qualitative Research Analyst
djtrujil@iupui.edu

Michele J. Hansen, Ph.D.,
Executive Director
mjhansen@iupui.edu

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to enhance understanding of students' perceptions of their 2011 Themed Learning Community (TLC) experiences. A total of 749 students participated in 37 separate 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. This report examines notable findings of students' open-ended responses while also considering the qualitative findings of previous TLC program years (2009 & 2010). For electronic copies of this and other previous assessment reports please feel free to visit: (http://research.uc.iupui.edu/)

MAJOR FINDINGS

Students described several ways in which the TLC contributed to their learning. These included but were not limited to: meeting new friends and developing connections; receiving college transition assistance; being enrolled in linked-courses; finding peer support networks, participating in major and career exploratory activities, and developing critical thinking skills. This is consistent with findings of student data from previous program years (2010 & 2009) with a few noteworthy exceptions. For example, an increased awareness and knowledge of diversity issues was described by a notable number of students as a way that TLCs contributed to their learning in 2011 but not in 2010 or 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 attributes were consistently within the top four most discussed areas by participants in all three program years, 2009 – 2011. However, it is noteworthy that three areas emerged as most liked program aspects in 2011 but not in 2010: developing a sense of community, having connections between linked classes, and participating in group activities and discussions.

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 time commitments and restraints (e.g., "long-" and "early-classes") and a perceived lack of organization and course structure (e.g., confusion with assignments or syllabus) as being what they liked the least about their TLC experiences. These least liked program aspects were also reported by TLC student participants in 2010 and 2009 with similar frequency. In contrast, students reported a lack of connections with the theme or linked courses as a least liked program aspect in 2010 but not in 2011.

Students also 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 thought it would provide college transition assistance. This was the (#1) most common response provided by 2011 students but was the (#3) most common answer given in 2010 and was the fifth most (#5) most frequent response in 2009. Similar to previous program years, but with varying frequency, some students indicated reasons

for enrolling in a TLC as being that they were referred or recommended to the program or that they were required (or that they thought they were required) to participate.

TLC participants also provided a variety of suggestions for improvement. These included but are not limited to: improving a specific course or component, increasing program organization and communication, providing more instructional team support, and incorporating more group activities and discussions.

POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS

Analysis of the 201 TLC qualitative data reveals several *possible 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 transition into college, find a peer support network, and develop critical thinking skills. It is noteworthy that 2011 TLC students reported an increase in their awareness and knowledge of diversity when 2010 and 2009 students did not. It is also interesting that students in the 2011 cohort identified three areas (developing a sense of community, having connections between linked classes, and participating in group activities and discussions) as being most liked program aspects when 2010 students did not. Program effectiveness may be increased by examining these areas further. What factors lead students and instructional teams to develop a positive sense of community within their TLCs? What educational activities promote an increase in students' awareness and knowledge of diversity?

TLC students also described what they perceived to be least valuable program components. Participants in all three program years (2009 – 2011) identified some of the same least valuable aspects. These included the reported areas of time commitments and restraints and a perceived lack of program organization and course structure. Instructional team leader will benefit from being aware of these concerns when planning their TLC program section for the upcoming 2012 -2013 program year. It is also noteworthy that while students in the 2009 and 2010 TLC cohorts indicated a lack of connections with the theme or linked courses – 2011 students did not.

Students also self-reported their reasons for enrolling in a specific TLC. The potential to receive college transition assistance was the (#1) most common response provided by 2011 TLC students; a notable increase from previous program years. However, 2011 students also indicated with some frequency that they enrolled in a TLC because it was required or that they thought it was required. Some students also reported that they did not choose to participate in a TLC but were "placed". Students and instructional teams will benefit from gaining more clarity on this subject.

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. A detailed account of students' self-reported perceptions of the TLC program are provided on the following pages and include numerous examples of actual student comments (Tables 1-5). It may be helpful to share this information with TLC stakeholders and instructional teams as appropriate. Ideally, through gaining a greater understanding of students' TLC experiences we will be able to further understand effective teaching and learning.

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Introduction

Themed Learning Communities (TLCs) are a group of linked courses. 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 2011 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 for 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 for 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 2011 semester. During this time period a total of 749 First-Time Full-Time (FTFT) IUPUI students participated in 37 separate TLC sections. The number of student questionnaire responses varied depending on the question asked:

Questions:	**Fall 2011**
18.) Please describe how your TLC experience contributed to your learning:	577
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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 2011   2813

Total Codes Assigned: 3815

**Average Number of Codes Assigned
per Student Comment:**   1.36

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 2011 TLC cohort. Next, a *Comparison Highlights* section is included in an effort to gain a better understanding of how fall 2011 students responded similarly or differently to questions than fall 2010 and 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.

2011 GENERAL RESULT HIGHLIGHTS (SPECIFIC CODES IN "QUOTATIONS")

Q18.) Please describe how your TLC experience contributed to your learning:

- "Meeting New Friends and Developing Connections" was the #1 most common coded response provided (16%) by student participants when they were asked to describe how their TLC experiences contributed to their learning.

- 12% 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 "Linked Courses" were helpful and 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" (9%), "Major and Career Discovery" (7%), and the ability to develop "Critical Thinking Skills" (7%), among many others.

Q19.) 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 (33%) when student participants were asked to describe what they liked most about their Themed Learning Community experience.

- 15% 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.

- 13% of students reported "Developing a Sense of Community" as desirable program aspect. Similarly, 10% of students indicated having "Positive Instructional Team Support (Faculty, Staff, and Mentors)" as what they liked most about their TLC program experience.

Q20.) Please describe what you like <u>least</u> about your Themed Learning Community experience:

- 15% 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.

- 13% 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.

- 12% of students described perceived "Time Commitments & Restraints" as being what they liked least about their TLC experience. Students (10%) also indicated a "Lack of Organization and Course Structure" as a least desirable program aspect.

Q21.) 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 they thought the program would help with "College Transition Assistance". This was the #1 most common coded response provided.

- 18% of students reported that they enrolled in a TLC because they were "Recommended or Referred" into the program. 15% of student participants indicated that they enrolled in a TLC because it was "Required (or they thought it was required)".

- 14% of students reported that they enrolled in a TLC to "Meet New Friends and Develop Connections".

Q22.) What specific suggestions do you have for improving the Themed Learning Communities?

- 31% of students indicated "N/A, None, Nothing" when asked to provide suggestions for improving the TLC program; the #1 most frequent response given.

- 10% of students responded with the suggestion to "Improve or Cancel Specific Courses". Within this suggestion the areas of "FYS-UCOL Course" and "PDP" were specified most often.

- 10% of students provided the suggestion to "Improve Program Organization & Communication". Students specified the areas of "Confusion with Assignments" and "Class Scheduling".

COMPARISON HIGHLIGHTS: 2009 – 2011 TLC COHORTS

Q18.) Please describe how your TLC experience contributed to your learning:

- "Meeting New People and Forming Friendships" was the #1 most common response given by students in both the 2011 (16%) and 2010 (13%) TLC cohorts when they were asked to describe how their TLC experience contributed to their learning. It was the #2 most common response in 2009 (13%).

- Students often reported that "College Transition Assistance" was an aspect of their TLC experience that contributed to their learning. It was the #2 most common response provided by students in both 2011 (12%) and 2010 (11%) and the #1 most frequent response in 2009 (15%).

Q19.) Please describe what you liked <u>most</u> about your Themed Learning Community experience:

- "Meeting New People & Forming Friendships" was the #1 most frequently coded response provided by students in 2011 (33%), 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 2011 (15%), 2010 (21%), and 2009 (16%) when they were asked to describe what they liked most.

Q20.) Please describe what you like <u>least</u> about your Themed Learning Community experience:

- "Specific Linked Course or Component" was the #1 most common response provided by students in both the 2011 (15%) and 2010 (12%) cohorts when they were asked to describe what they liked least about their TLC experiences. It was the #2 most frequent answer given in 2009 (10%).

- "Time Commitments and Constraints" (2011, 12%; 2010; 11%) and "Lack of Organization and Course Structure" (2011, 10%; 2010: 11%) have been commonly reported by TLC students as the #3 and #4 least liked program aspects.

Q21.) Please describe the reason(s) why you enrolled in a TLC. Why, specifically, did you choose this TLC?

- "College Transition Assistance" was the #1 most frequent response provided by students in the 2011 (19%) cohort when they were asked to describe the reason(s) for enrolling in a TLC. It was the #3 most frequent answer given in 2010 (18%) and #5 most common answer in 2009 (12%)

- "Required to Participate in a TLC (or thought was required)" was the #2 most frequently coded reason given by students in the 2011 cohort (15%) when they were asked to identify why they enrolled in the program. It was the #1 most common reason given by the 2010 cohort (19%) and the #4 most common reason provided in 2009 (16%).

- 14% of students in the 2011 TLC cohort indicated that they enrolled in the program because they were "Recommended or Referred"; the #3 most common reason provided. It was the #4 most frequently coded reason given in 2010 (15%) and the #2 most common answer in 2009 (17%). .

Q22.) 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 2011 (31%), 2010 (26%), and the 2009 (24%) TLC cohorts.

- "Improve Program Organization &Communication" was the #3 most common suggestion for improvement given by 2011 TLC students (10%). It was the #2 most common suggestion given by the 2010 cohort (13%) and the #9 most common suggestion provided in 2009 (5%).

Table 1: How the TLC Experience Contributed to Learning (Student Reported), Fall 2011

Please describe how your TLC experience contributed to your learning: (N = 577)

Contributed to Learning Through…	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Meeting New Friends & Developing Connections	94	16%	• "Meeting people". • "Gained friendships". • "It helped me build friendships!". • "It helped me meet friends, which led me to do better in class". • "It helped make connections with peers". • "It made me connect with people I would not have talked to". • "I had the opportunity to meet different people with different ideas". • "It was a great way to make friends who had similar interests and goals".
College Transition Assistance	72	12%	• "Helped me transition to college". • "It helped me adapt to college life". • "It has helped me move from HS to college". • "The TLC helped me adjust to my classes". • "It got me ready for college thinking and learning". • "I felt like TLC was being gradually exposed to college rather than thrown in all at once". • "It helped me maintain and cope with being a freshman a lot better. I was able to learn how to study and what it takes to be successful".
Helpful – Linked Courses	55	10%	• "Coordinated curriculum was nice". • "It helped by linking the 3 classes together". • "By connecting the class it was easier to work". • "Could apply things I learned in one class to another". • "Having the classes connected help me to see the bigger picture". • "The two education classes built on each other, making it easier". • "I was able to connect with other classes, which helped me learn better".
Developed Peer Support Network	52	9%	• "I met people to study with". • "I've gained a support system". • "I met and made stronger relationships for group studying". • "It allowed me to find people who are in my major and find "study buddies". • "It helped me by having the same group of friends in my classes so it's easier to ask questions and to talk to each other".
Major & Career Discovery (Connections)	42	7%	• "I learned a lot about different careers". • "Helped me change majors". • "I gained a better understanding the different majors out there". • "Helped me think which way I wanted to go with my career". • "Helped me explore careers in the health field". • "It made me think a lot about my major, along with learning other basic skills I need".
Developed Critical Thinking Skills	40	7%	• "Critical thinking". • "Helped critical thinking". • "It helped me to analyze". • "I used the critical thinking wheel for a better understanding • "It allowed me to think much deeper about everything". • "It helped me see the other side of arguments".

Please describe how your TLC experience contributed to your learning:

Contributed to Learning…	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Increased / Made Learning Easier	34	6%	• "Made learning easier". • "I was able to learn new things". • "It helped me understand + grow". • "It helped me build upon what I know". • "It taught me valuable learning and studying skills". • "Learned more than what I knew". • "I feel like it helped me learn easier than it would have".
Became More Comfortable / Confident	32	6%	• "It made me more comfortable". • "It helped me to relax and not freak-out about college". • "It was more open and comfortable learning". • "My TLC experience made me very comfortable at school". • "It helped me feel more comfortable with the campus + college life". • "It gave me confidence because my friends from TLC believed in me". • "I was more confident when I started school and it helped me speak up in class".
Increased Diversity Awareness & Knowledge	32	6%	• "It has made me more aware of diversity". • "I was able to learn about another culture". • "It opened my mind to multiculturalism". • "It helped me be more well-rounded and culturally diverse". • "It helped me learn that people can be very diverse". • "It helped me better accept others for their differences". • "Learned a lot about my own culture and race".
Same Students in Classes	32	6%	• "Helped me to be with the same people". • "Had the same people for class so you get comfortable". • "It was easier because we already knew the people in our classes". • "It allowed me to talk with other people who have the same classes as me". • "Believe having classmates in the same classes made learning comfortable". • "Liked being in the same classes w/ people b/c it allowed me to make friends easier".
Learned About IUPUI & Campus Resources	29	5%	• "Helped me know resources on campus". • "It helped me better understand the campus". • "I've learned different organizations among IUPUI for help". • "TLC taught me great deal of how to utilize the campus". • "It showed me where things are throughout campus". • "It was helpful in showing me all of the resources available to me through IUPUI".
Nothing (Negative Comment)	28	5%	• "I don't feel that it did". • "I feel it didn't help all that much". • "Didn't really do much for me". • "It honestly didn't contribute to my learning very much". • "About as basic as just having normal classes". • "I do not feel that this helped me; it added A TON of stress".

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 2011

Please describe what you liked the <u>most</u> about your Themed Learning Community experience: (N = 598)

Most Liked Aspect	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Meeting New People & Forming Friendships	<u>204</u>	<u>33%</u>	• "Meeting people". • "Making friends". • "All the people I have met". • "I like the relationships I made". • "Made friends with same interests". • "I loved meeting new people and becoming great friends". • "Forming relationships with the other students". • "Having friends in new environment". • "That I made friends, one who will end up being my roommate". • "I loved making friendships that are going to last throughout my college years". • "I enjoyed getting to know my peers better. I made three really good friends in my TLC class- something that probably would have been hard in a lecture of 300 or more".
Same Students in Classes	<u>91</u>	<u>15%</u>	• "Having same students in my classes". • "Felt more calm seeing the same people". • "All of the students in the same classes". • "Sharing classes w/ people from bridge". • "Liked that all the people in the 3 classes were the same people". • "Having speech class with people I knew, it made it 100 times easier. • "I liked that I was with the same group of people the entire semester". • "It made me more friends instead of having classes with random people". • "Having the same classes helped me be more comfortable in my learning environment".
Developed a Sense of Community	<u>76</u>	<u>13%</u>	• "Camaraderie". • "Close knit learning community". • "The unity among everybody". • "Meeting new people, having a sense of community". • "The people that were in it, becoming closely knit". • "The classmates and advisors gave a tight knit feel to the group". • "The sense of camaraderie + knowing everyone personally". • "Liked the sense of camaraderie and the complex issues we discussed". • "I liked how close as a class we got and all the things we did together".
Positive Instructional Team Support (Faculty, Staff, Mentors)	<u>59</u>	<u>10%</u>	• "The teachers" • "The professors and advisors". • "The advisors (---) and (---) helped me a lot" • "Having a mentor and advisor" • "My instructors were more than helpful" • "The leadership team and instructors did a really great job" • "The close relationship with mentors" • "I loved the teacher & advisors!" • "How awesome the professors were".

<u>**(Continued)**</u>

Continued – Table 2:

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

Most Liked Aspect	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Specific Course	33	6%	• "W131 was very helpful" • "Psychology". • "Anthropology". • "My political science course". • "I liked the speech and sociology classes". • "I liked sociology and communication". • "The PSY B104 and religion class". • "I enjoyed F110 + F200 they taught me great skills".
Connections Between Linked Classes	29	5%	• "How the classes were connected". • "The linking of various subjects to each other". • "I liked having common assignments". • "I liked the way my classes were connected and based on our major". • "The fact that everything mixes together material wise". • "How all the classes were connected so it was easier to understand all the material and apply it in every class". • "I liked how the classes were tied together and the teachers from the other classes knew our other assignments". • "I loved how related the classes were. Each class took into consideration what the other class was doing".
Group Activities & Discussions	29	5%	• "I enjoyed all of our activities". • "The broadness of topics we discussed". • "The activities inside and outside of class". • "I liked the games the most". • "The discussions amongst my group". • "Having the opportunity to discuss African American history". • "How we had class discussions and got to say what was on our mind".
Service Learning & Community Service	29	5%	• "Community service". • "Service Learning" • "Volunteering". • "Community service project". • "I liked the volunteer service project". • "Being able to volunteer with others". • "I liked the community service (learning) opportunity".
College Transition Assistance	27	5%	• "It helped me adjust". • "Helped with transition to college". • "It helped me better understand how college works". • "I liked how it taught me how to handle college". • "The guides of what college students deal with". • "College is a new and sometimes "scary" experience, and getting to know the people in my TLC made the transition more comfortable".

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 2011

Please describe what you liked least about your Themed Learning Community experience: (N = 551)

Least Liked Aspect	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Specific Linked Course or Component	84	15%	• "My (---) class". • "I don't like the (---) class". • "The homework that wasn't graded". • "The grading process was also uncertain and frustrating".
*First-year Seminar (48)			• "UCOL was too much work and it was all not necessary". • "I didn't understand what the point of the actual TLC class was". • "The amount of work in the least relevant class – FYS". • "FYS!!! It was unorganized and had too much work. For a supposed "easy A", it wasn't easy".
*English Course (25)			• "English class". • "My W131 class did not teach me as much as I wanted to learn". • "English W-131 was terrible. The objective of what we did in that class unknown to me".
N/A, None, Nothing	72	13%	• "N/A". • "None". • "Nothing". • "No complaints". • "I didn't really dislike anything about this program".
Time Commitments & Restraints	67	12%	• "All of the extra time we need". • "Time my classes were". • "The days were very long!". • "Spread out times. Wish we could go M-W or T-Th all day in a row".
Long Class Times (27)			• "The amount of time we were in class". • "Having to stay in class for 2 hours and 50 minutes". • "I thought the class was a little too long".
Early Start Time (17)			• "9:00 A.M. class". • "Having class Monday at 9:00". • "I disliked how early the class was".
Lack of Organization and Course Structure	55	10%	• "Unorganized". • "Lack of organization". • "It was stressful and jumped around with no ties". • "Unorganized, bad planning, not well thought out, professors didn't consult each other about much, students were always out of the loop".
*Class Scheduling Difficulties (15)			• "Schedule could not be adjusted". • "If one class was dropped it would throw off the schedule". • "Not getting to choose more times for class". • "The having one class on the other side of campus and 15 min to get there".
*Confusion with Assignments or Syllabus (12)			• "The syllabus wasn't followed". • "Confused with assignments". • "It was sometimes hard to determine what the different professors wanted if the assignments were for multiple courses".

(Continued)

Continued – Table 3

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

Least Liked Aspect	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
Lack of Instructional Team Support	40	7%	• "Angry professors". • "Some teachers were unorganized and rude". • "Teachers attitude". • "Professor wasn't very nice/helpful when asked questions". • "That (----) was the teacher, she was really disorganized and mean and yelled a lot". • "(----) sometimes seemed to talk down to us when we asked questions". • "Advisor wasn't much help, suggestions were vague; didn't get much guidance".
Not Meaningful, Helpful, Productive (Busy Work)	36	7%	• "Busy work". • "It was pointless". • "Some of the work was pointless". • "That it didn't help me and it was a waste of time". • "Sometimes it felt like I was wasting time". • "Much of the course work was 'busy work' and had little real value". • "I felt that much that I was doing I had already done in high school".
Negative Learning Environment	31	6%	• "Immature classmates". • "It felt like a kindergarten class". • "When everybody started yelling". • "If a few people do wrong the whole class gets blamed". • "The disregard to student conduct". • "I didn't enjoy the negativity of my peers".
Reading and Writing Components ***Journals (5)**	31	6%	• "Writing so many papers". • "The writing assignments". • "I did not like some of the readings assigned". • "We had to read lots of articles". • "Journals". • "I did not like the journals". • "The writing in the journals". •
PDP – Personal Development Plan	24	5%	• "PDP". • "Confusing PDP". • "I least liked the PDP project". • "ePDP, only because it is so confusing to use". • "I least liked the ePDP we were to complete for the course". • "The PDP. It did not help me realize anything at all. It was a waste of time".
General Positive Comment	24	5%	• "It was all helpful". • "I liked everything". • "I really enjoyed everything!". • "I liked the whole experience. There was nothing I disliked". • "I like pretty much everything about 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 4: Student Reported Reasons for Enrolling in a TLC, Fall 2011

Please describe the reason(s) why you enrolled in a TLC. Why, specifically, did you choose this TLC? (N = 584)

Reasons for enrolling in a TLC	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
College Transition Assistance	113	19%	• "To help transition". • "To better prepare myself for college". • "I thought it would help me adjust to college life". • "I was a better way to transition and explore college". • "To get a better grip on my first semester of college". • "It was a step up from high school but not too quick". • "I thought it would help me transition better to a new setting". • "To get use to the college way of life with help of others". • "To transition easily to college away from home" • "I had been out of school for a year and needed to get back into the swing of things".
Required to Participate in TLC (or thought was required)	85	15%	• "It's required". • "It was required" • "It was mandatory". • "I didn't know it was a choice". • "I had to for 21st century scholars". • "It was required as an incoming freshmen". • "I enrolled because I thought it was required". • "I was required to be in a TLC for my scholarship". • "I was required to, and I didn't have a choice".
Referred or Recommended… *** By Academic Advisor (24)** ***By Orientation Leader (18)**	84	14%	• "It was suggested that I should and that it would help". • "I enrolled in a TLC because it was highly recommended". • "I chose it because I heard it is a good program". • "Because they said it would help boost my grades". • "My advisor said it would be good". • "Because it was suggested by advisors". • "My academic advisor said freshmen get better grades in TLCs". • "The advisor told me to because I wasn't a great student in high school". • "The O-team recommended it". • "It was recommended at orientation". • "It sounded like a good idea when I was told about it at orientation". • "At orientation, I was asked to be a part of the TLC, and I accepted, because I thought it would be a good home base".
Meet New Friends & Develop Connections	80	14%	• "Meet new people". • "To gain Friends". • "To become closer to peers". • "I wanted to build relationships". • "I wanted to feel a connection with other first year students". • "To meet people and have friends in some classes". • "I thought it would help me to connect with other students". • "Because I knew I should get to know the other students in my major".

(Continued)

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 or Career Choice	78	13%	• "It had to deal with my degree choice". • "I chose it for social work which is my major". • "It had classes that dealt with my 'major' at the time". • "Because it has important classes that goes well with my degree". • "I choose this one because I was a liberal arts major and I like media". • "Goes with my major and seemed like a good idea". • "I'm interested in a major in a health-related field". • "I am going into nursing so that is why I'm in this TLC. And it made school easier".
Interested in Community "Theme"	49	8%	• "Because I love motorsports". • "I wanted to learn more about my culture". • "I am interested in psychology". • "I liked the topic of social inequality". • "I chose it because I am very interested in Conflict Resolution". • "I wanted to meet new people. Chose it due to the education theme". • "I chose this TLC because I'm interested in business". • "I enrolled in a TLC as a requirement for my major. This specific TLC appealed to me as a means of learning to communicate effectively".
Potential to be Beneficial	48	8%	• "Just to help me out". • "Help me academically". • "It seemed like a great opportunity". • "It sounded like it would help me". • "To help improve my success at IUPUI" • "Students in TLC's have higher grades". • "Because I thought it would help me to learn more effectively". • "Because I thought it would help with school".
Did Not Choose TLC ("Placed")	44	8%	• "I was placed in TLC". • "They chose this TLC for me". • "It was something I was placed into". • "I was automatically put in it". • "I didn't enroll in it that I know of; they just put me in it". • "I do not recall actually enrolling. More like drafted. Oh well." • "I didn't choose this TLC. I didn't know you could choose."
Desirable Course Schedule	36	6%	• "Convenient scheduling". • "It was easiest to schedule". • "I needed to get into a math class". • "To have a more organized schedule". • "It was on a pre-written class schedule". • "Made it easier to know what classes I needed to take. Familiarity with the campus". • "Ease of signing up for classes and liked the idea of having class with the same people".

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 TLCs (Fall, 2011)

What specific suggestions do you have for improving the Themed Learning Communities? (N = 503)

Suggestions for Improvement	N	%	Examples of Actual Student Comments
N/A, None, Nothing	154	31%	• "N/A". • "None". • "Nothing". • "No, suggestions". • "None that I can think of".
Improve or Cancel Specific Courses or Components ***FYS-UCOL Course (17)** ***PDP (14)**	48	10%	• "Exclude W-131 from TLC". • "Improve the English class". • "Better assignments + better class structure". • "Take out (----)". • "Make ucol fun". • "Shorter u-col". • "The UCOL class needs some adjusting". • "Organize the UCOL class and have it more interesting and fun!". • "No PDP, or optional". • "Better technology on ePDP". • "Also, the PDPs need to be reviewed & edited/graded once they're due. This would ensure that people complete them & do their best".
Improve Program Organization & Communication ***Confusion with Assignments (12)** ***Class Scheduling (9)**	48	10%	• "Organize!". • "Better communication". • "It needs to be better organized". • "Be a little more organized". • "Follow the syllabus". • "Explain how to do the assignments more". • "Announcements should be clearly posted for assignments". • "I would make sure the assignments on the syllabus are explained more clearly". • "Spread out the classes more". • "Schedule time for a lunch, the classes are straight back to back". • "Make it so the classes are all on Mon. and Wed. or Tues. and Thurs".
More Instructional Team Support & Communication	42	8%	• "Have a more involved teacher". • "Make sure all the profs understand we're freshmen". • "Maybe the teaching staff could be a little bit more personable". • "Pick professors willing to work with people a little, and have a longer fuse". • "Need to have experienced professors who can communicate effectively with students".
General Positive Comment	35	7%	• "It's great! Don't change a thing". • "It was overall pretty good". • "It is good the way it is. It's all about the people". • "Keep on doing what you're doing". • "I honestly can't think of one, my TLC did a great job, and I wouldn't change anything".

(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
More Group Activities & Discussions	<u>32</u>	<u>6%</u>	• "More activities". • "Better discussions". • "Do more interacting activities". • "Have weekly group discussions". • "More group projects + discussions". • "More fun + involved activities". • "More activities more fun by leaving class more and going different places".
Improve Course Linkages	<u>31</u>	<u>6%</u>	• "More connection between classes". • "Connect what we're learning in each class". • "Incorporate a project between all classes". • "Do more activities that connect to each class". • "More in-class discussion and purposeful interaction between course topics". • "A little more connection and interaction between the courses would be cool".
More Meaningful, Helpful, Productive (Less Busy Work)	<u>23</u>	<u>5%</u>	• "Less busy work". • "Take it more serious". • "More challenging". • "Higher expectations". • "No useless classes. Get to the real stuff quicker". • "We need to be more serious about it, in order to make progress"
Less Time Commitments & Restraints	<u>23</u>	<u>5%</u>	• "Less hours". • "Make it later in the day". • "Shorten the three hour class". • "I would like it to be later in the day". • "Possibly shortening class to two hours".

<u>**Notes:**</u>   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.

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Report created by Daniel J. Trujillo, M.S., Qualitative Research Analyst and
Michele J. Hansen, Ph.D., UC Executive Director of Research, Planning and Evaluation

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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?
_____
_____