Introduction

Themed Learning Communities (TLCs) consist of two to four courses in which students co-enroll. TLCs allow students the opportunity to engage deeply with a common theme (ex. Business ethics) by connecting material from the TLC courses through integrative assignments, readings, and activities.

Typically limited to 25 students, the small size of TLC courses allow for collaborative and active learning. In addition, TLC students develop intellectual and social relationships with fellow TLC classmates, faculty, and Peer Leaders.

Peer Leaders support the social and academic transition of TLC students. Peer Leaders attend at least one TLC course each week, host study sessions, organize social activities, and follow-up with students regarding academic and social challenges and successes.

This annual report provides an overview of the TLC program for FY14 (Fall 2013 and Spring 2014), noting the success and progression of the TLC program this past year.

For more information on the TLC program contact the Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning (OSEEL) at (815) 753-8154, email TLC@niu.edu, or visit the website at www.tlc.niu.edu.

Vision: Offer incoming freshmen a unique opportunity to engage deeply with the course theme, connect learning across the linked courses in collaborative and active ways, develop relationships with peers and faculty, and ease the transition to college.

Mission: Increase retention of incoming freshmen students through engagement in integrative learning communities and increase development of leadership skills in upperclassmen who act as TLC Peer Leaders. These communities increase the development of critical thinking and creativity, the bond between faculty and student, and the social transition onto campus, helping students achieve student career success.

Learning Outcomes: The TLCs align directly with the eight student learning outcomes of the Baccalaureate Review as we seek to enhance the cognitive, social, and academic skills of our students to prepare them to be life-long learners and responsible citizens in society.
Business & Society
This TLC provided a good introduction to careers in business as well as pitfalls that students eventually face in the work world. Courses included: COMS 100 & UBUS 101

Calculus I and Physics I for Engineers
This TLC allowed student to explore the concepts of calculus while learning to apply them in physics. Courses included: PHYS 253, PHYS 253 lab, & MATH 229

Competing Global Perspectives
This TLC challenged Honors students to gain a global understanding of essential resources in a complex and interdependent world. This TLC introduced participants to global perspectives rooted in art, history, politics, and international study and cultural opportunities. Courses included: ARTH 282H, POLS 285H & UNIV 101H

Conflict and Creativity: The Impact of War on Art
Through discussion and analysis, Visual and Performing Arts students contemplated their attitudes toward war and its artistic outcomes. Courses included: ENGL 103 & COMS 100

Developing Champions: In the Classroom, In Competition, and In Life
This TLC incorporated exploration of leadership for Intercollegiate Athletes by reviewing collected works of great leaders and exploring leadership styles and principles. Courses included: COMS 100, EPFE 201 & UNIV 101

Everyone Can Be a Changemaker
This TLC helped students understand global social problems and empowered them to develop solutions. Courses included: UBUS 101 & ENGL 103

Exploring Health Majors
Students in this TLC got to know fellow Health and Human Sciences majors and discover all of the opportunities that CHHS offers. Courses included: COMS 100, CHEM 110, CHEM 111 & UNIV 101

Health Psychology
This TLC allowed Health and Human Sciences honors students to engage in topics related to health psychology. Courses included: COMS 100, PSYC 102 & UNIV 105

Inspiring Today’s Students to become Tomorrow’s Leaders
This TLC partnered the CHANCE program and the College of Education to prepare future teachers to live, work, and teach in an increasingly global society. Courses included: EPFE 201, UEDU 101, UNIV 101 & LTRE 100

Major Exploration
The Major Exploration TLC was an exciting opportunity for Undecided-Any College (AAC) students to explore specific majors throughout the various colleges at NIU that might lead to the career of their choice. Courses included: COMS 100, SOCI 170, & UNIV 101

Making a Difference: Service in Society (Fall/Spring)
This TLC allowed students with a passion for service to apply their interests to areas of civic engagement. Courses included: CLCE 100 & ENGL 103

Making Your Case for Law School
This TLC prepared pre-law students through examination of the legal profession and law school admissions. Courses included: PHIL 231, COMS 100 & UNIV 101

Pre-Medicine for Pre-Professional Health Students
This TLC led students to build a solid foundation in Pre-Medicine courses while engaging in relationships with other Pre-Med peers and faculty. Courses included: BIOS 208, BIOS 210, CHEM 210, CHEM 210R, & CHEM 212

Psychology: Explorations of Perception
This TLC challenged students from all majors to think critically about what they believe and to discover principles of human behavior that contribute to perception. Courses included: PSYC 102, ENGL 103 & UNIV 101

Psychology: Growing a Mindset of Success
This TLC led students to study and reflect on Dr. Carol Dweck’s concept of the growth of mindset to develop success. Courses included: PSYC 102, ENGL 103, & UNIV 101

Teachers as Ambassadors for Social Change
This TLC prepared future educators to work and teach in an increasingly diverse society. Through work with elementary level students as well as rigorous study, student were able to see the challenges and benefits of entering the education field. Courses included: EPFE 201, ENGL 103 & UEDU 101.

Technology and Social Networking: CHANCE
This TLC allowed CHANCE PROMISE Scholars to build community while exploring the relationship between technology and society. Courses included: TECH 294 & UNIV 101

Technology and Social Networking: PROMISE Scholars Freshmen
This TLC allowed PROMISE Scholars to build community while exploring the relationship between technology and society. Courses included: TECH 294 & UNIV 101

Student Enrollment
Themed Learning Communities have grown significantly since their beginnings at NIU in Fall 2010. The following chart tracks the number of TLC participants per year from Fall 2010 - Fall 2013:
TLC Facts

16 Peer Leaders interacted with TLC students
18 TLCs were offered
37 Instructors taught TLC classes, including faculty, instructors, and staff
350 Students enrolled
1500 Class sessions

TLC Instructors

Madelyn Anderson
Instructor
Department of Communication
Major Exploration

Katie Andraski
Instructor
Department of English
Everyone can be a Changemaker

Tracy Ash
Counselor
CHANCE Program
Technology and Social Networking: CHANCE

Joe Bittorf
Instructor
Department of Industrial & Systems Engineering
Technology and Social Networking: CHANCE

Nancy Castle
Professor and Director
Center for NGO Leadership & Development
Making a Difference: Service in Society

Megan Chiavini
Counselor
CHANCE Program
Inspiring Today’s Student to Become Tomorrow’s Leader

Alan Clemens
Instructor
Leadership, Educational Psychology & Foundations
Developing Champions/ Inspiring Today’s Student to Become Tomorrow’s Leader

Annie Clift
Instructor
Department of Business Administration
Business & Society

Steven Daskal
Associate Professor
Department of Philosophy
Making Your Case for Law School

Michael Eads
Assistant Professor
Department of Physics
Calculus & Physics for Engineers

Steve Estes
Director
CLAS Academic Advising
Making Your Case for Law School

Angie Flannery
Academic Advisor
College of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Psychology: Growing a Mindset for Success

Elizabeth Gaillard
Associate Professor
Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry
Pre-Medicine

Kim Gatz
Instructor
Department of Communication
Developing Champions

Dan Grubb
Associate Professor
Department of Mathematical Sciences
Calculus & Physics for Engineers

Abhijit Gupta
Professor
Department of Mechanical Engineering
Technology and Social Networking: CEET

Antwan Hampton
Instructor
Department of Communication
Exploring Health Majors

Karen Hovde
Instructor
Department of English
Developing Champions

Mark Kotarba
Instructor
Department of English
Psychology: Explorations of Perception/ Psychology: Growing a Mindset for Success

Phil Krasula
Visiting Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology
Psychology: Explorations of Perception/ Psychology: Growing a Mindset for Success

Stephanie Kummerer
Instructor
Department of Communication
Developing Champions

Mary Landeros
Instructor
Department of Sociology
Major Exploration

Colette Maher
Academic Advisor
Academic-Advising Center
Major Exploration

Bill McCoy
Director, BELIEF Program
College of Business
Business & Society

Beth McGowan
Health and Human Sciences
Librarian
University Libraries
Health Psychology

Sarah Militz-Friels
Professional Services/ Instructor
College of Education
Inspiring Today’s Student to Become Tomorrow’s Leader

Christine Mooney
Assistant Professor
Department of Management
Everyone can be a Changemaker

Shweta Moorthy
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Competing Global Perspectives

Tim Pierce
Instructor
Department of Communication
Business & Society/Health Psychology

Margaret Ranstead
Graduate Teaching Assistant
Department of Psychology
Health Psychology

Patricia Rickett
Instructor
Department of English
Making Your Case for Law School

Denise Rode
Director
First & Second Year Experience
Competing Global Perspectives

Helena Sivits
Instructor
Department of Communication
Conflict & Creativity

Joel Stafstrom
Associate Professor
Department of Biological Sciences
Pre-Medicine

Nicole Stroobants
Academic Advisor
College of Health & Human Sciences
Exploring Health Majors

Leanne VandeCreek
Social Sciences Librarian
University Libraries
Developing Champions

Ann Van Dijk
Associate Professor
School of Art & Design
Competing Global Perspectives

Petr Vanysek
Associate Professor
Department of Chemistry & Biochemistry
Exploring Health Majors

16 Peer Leaders interacted with TLC students
18 TLCs were offered
37 Instructors taught TLC classes, including faculty, instructors, and staff
350 Students enrolled
1500 Class sessions
Each TLC has a Peer Leader to assist TLC students with course work and acclimating to the University setting. Peer Leaders attend at least one TLC course each week, attend a staff meeting with OSEEL and their fellow Peer Leaders, and host at least one study session and/or community building activity each week.

In addition to assisting first-year students as they transition to NIU, Peer Leaders benefit from working with the TLC program as they develop leadership, interpersonal, and communication skills; attend professional development workshops, network and build relationships with faculty, staff, peers, and TLC students.

### TLC Peer Leaders

**Thomas Bunge**  
Psychology major  
Psychology: Growing a Mindset for Success

**Jacob Clark**  
Business major  
Business & Society

**Qweandria Dunn**  
Psychology major  
Psychology: Explorations of Perception

**Justin Durancik**  
Biological Sciences major  
Exploring Health Majors

**DeAnna Hamler**  
Special Education major  
Inspiring Today's Students to Become Tomorrow's Teacher

**Amanda Insalaco**  
Community Leadership & Civic Engagement major  
Making a Difference: Service in Society

**Bailey Johnson**  
Art major  
Conflict & Creativity: The Impact of War on Art

**Darius Johnson**  
Biomedical Engineering major  
Technology & Social Networking: CHANCE

**Jeffrey Kamholz**  
Marketing major  
Everyone can be a Changemaker

**Juliana Leprich**  
Media Studies major  
Competing Global Perspectives

**Nathan Lupstein**  
Political Science and Philosophy major  
Making your Case for Law School

**Matthias Miller**  
Psychology  
Health Psychology

**Anthony Roberts**  
Biomedical Engineering major  
Calculus & Physics for Engineers

**Jesslyn Truesdale**  
Sociology & Community Leadership & Civic Engagement major  
Major Exploration

**Garrett Wise**  
Physics major  
Technology & Social Networking: CEET

**Evan Wittke**  
Biological Sciences major  
Pre-Medicine

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**Peer Leader Impact**

Peer Leaders are expected to perform many duties in order to best impact and engage incoming freshmen.

Peer Leaders spent the majority of their time:

- Attended TLC classes (**375 hours**)
- Attended OSEEL Peer Leader Meetings (**167 hours**) to develop stronger leadership skills
- Held study sessions (**114 hours**) for freshmen in need of individual assistance in learning life-long study methods such as creating study guides.

**Field Trips (2%)**

**Training (11%)**

**Study Sessions**

**Events (5%)**

**Attended TLC Class**

**Student Check-Ups (6%)**

**OSEEL Staff Meetings (19%)**

**Misc. (4%)**
Academic Success

This year, we collected follow-up data to our bootstrapping study published in 2014. TLC students who self-select to participate in the program tend to have higher ACT composite scores and high school GPAs. A bootstrapping study was performed on fall 2012 TLC and non-TLC cohorts who matched ACT composite and HS Percentile scores to account for this student self-selection bias. There were 819 samples total.

MAP-Works

The TLC program utilizes the MAP-works early intervention tool to provide additional support to TLC students. MAP-Works is a survey based tool that helps students transit academically and socially to NIU. TLC faculty, instructors, and staff strongly encourage TLC students to complete the MAP-Works Fall Transition Survey and Fall Check-up Survey. MAP-Works is administered by the Office of Student Academic Success (OSAS)

Through the utilization of MAP-Works, TLC administrators were able to track how students were doing and recognize who needed further assistance throughout the fall semester. Data reported showed that TLC students tended to have a lower risk level than Non-TLC students.
Field Trips

Experiential learning opportunities help our students connect what they are learning in the classroom to the real world through campus, community and regional events, speakers, study sessions, and more. These out-of-class experiences take advantage of NIU’s location by drawing on the local community, Chicago, the Chicago suburbs, and numerous other regional treasures.

This year, 8 TLCs ventured off campus to connect classroom learning to the real world:

**Conflict and Creativity: The Impact of War on Art:** Toured the prestigious National Veteran’s Art Museum (NVAM) in Chicago, Illinois. The NVAM is dedicated to preserving art inspired by combat and made by veterans. The NVAM was established in 1981. Students received a tour of the museum. They saw many pieces of art that showcased how wars such as World War II and the Vietnam War impacted artists’ messages and works. Students had a chance to try on a full soldier’s uniform to understand the weight troops carried.

**Business & Society:** Students traveled to the State Capitol in Madison, Wisconsin to meet with a senior senator and to learn about the significance of politics in business outcomes and goals.

**Major Exploration:** Students completed business etiquette training to supplement learning about nonverbal communication in COMS 100. Students were trained in impression management at a business etiquette dinner held by NIU Career Services to gain skills applicable in a variety of professional settings while considering their major and career choices.

**Making your Case for Law School:** Students toured the DeKalb County Court House to gain a better understanding of day-to-day judicial activities at the county level, as well as explore career opportunities in that setting.

**Exploring Health Majors:** Students visited Kishwaukee Hospital in DeKalb, Illinois to learn about the use of medical imaging equipment and meet with professionals in their field of interest. Kishwaukee Hospital is part of the KishHealth System which aims to provide patient-focused affordable health services.

**Making a Difference: Service in Society:** Students visited a non-profit organization in Rockford, Illinois to learn about the role of a major non-profit in addressing social challenges like homelessness and food scarcity.

**Pre-Professional Health:** Students visited a nutritionist at Hyvee in DeKalb, Illinois to learn about how nutrition impacts health and medicine.

**Everyone can be a Changemaker:** Students volunteered at Feed ‘Em Soup in DeKalb, Illinois as part of a semester-long project and to understand how a social enterprise operates.
TLC Faculty Development

The TLC Faculty Institute was a two-day training institute that provided support to TLC teams as they prepared to teach their Fall 2013 TLCs. 45 TLC instructors and staff received instruction from the keynote speaker as well as the Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning.

Throughout the TLC Faculty Institute, TLC teams collaborated to develop their theme, created at least two integrative assignments, planned for experiential learning opportunities, and determined communication strategies.

To help faculty prepare for Fall 2012 TLCs, keynote speaker Professor Carlos Huerta from Texas A&M University presented on the concept of integrative learning and why it is important. The keynote speaker also assisted in the facilitation of subsequent workshops and team building time.

**Impact**

94 percent of faculty surveyed agreed that they felt supported by the university to develop a TLC as a result of the institute

89 percent of faculty surveyed felt their participation in the institute had the potential to benefit their students

82 percent of faculty surveyed felt their participation in the institute helped them feel more connected to their TLC team

**“These 2 days were very conducive to meeting new people, making connections, learning from each other”**

-TLC Instructor

**“This is my second year and am excited, confident, and better prepared due to this workshop!”**

-TLC Instructor
TLC Outreach

TLC Staff and Campus Partners worked together to ensure the most freshmen possible were being enrolled in TLC’s throughout summer 2012 orientation by the following methods:

- **Summer orientation sessions**: met with College of Liberal Arts and Sciences advising to ensure students the right fit in TLC classes
- **TLC Bridge**: updated posters entailing how many seats were left in each TLC
- **Campus Mailing**: TLC information packets in orientation materials mailed to each freshmen
- **Facebook posts** about enrollment, courses available, and planned activities for the fall
- **NIU Today articles**
- **Chalked** TLC blurbs throughout campus
- **TLC advertisements** on backs of NIU buses
- **Northern Lights Ambassadors** deliver presentations in classrooms that promote student engagement programs like TLCs

Campus Partnerships

- **Academic Advising Center Advisors**
- **Admissions**: Sent out mailings to admitted students
- **College of Business Academic Advising**
- **College of Education Academic Advising**
- **College of Engineering & Engineering Technology**: Francine St. Clair (Special thanks)
- **College of Health & Human Sciences Academic Advising**
- **College of Liberal Arts & Sciences Academic Advising**: Steve Leon Estes (Special thanks)
- **College of Visual & Performing Arts Academic Advising**
- **First- and Second-Year Experience**: Incorporation of UNIV 101
- **Holmes Student Center**: Marketing space
- **Housing and Dining**: Sent mailing to admitted students about Living Learning Communities
- **Office of Student Academic Success**: Provided MAP-Works data
- **Orientation**: Northern Neighborhood
- **Registrar**: Bundling classes, provided GPA and retention data

Pre-Enrollment

Pre-Enrollment gives incoming students the opportunity to enroll in a TLC even before orientation. Pre-Enrollment began in spring 2013 for the fall 2013 semester. Pre-enrollment information was included in admissions mailing packets, and OSEEL staff ran a pre-enrollment table during placement testing days for admitted students.

OSEEL received **150 pre-enrollment forms**, of which **59 students** were able to successfully enroll. Although some students were not eligible for the TLC they selected, **89 percent** of students who submitted a pre-enrollment form enrolled in the spring 2014 semester.
Gen-Ed Courses

Every TLC is required to have at least one general education course included in the bundle of classes.

General Education Courses in Fall 2013 TLCs include:

- **ARTH 282**: Introduction to the Visual Arts
- **CHEM 110**: Chemistry
- **COMS 100**: Fundamentals of Oral Communication
- **ENGL 103**: Rhetoric and Composition I
- **EPFE 201**: Education as an Agent for Change
- **MATH 229**: Calculus I
- **PHIL 231**: Contemporary Moral Issues
- **PHYS 253**: Fundamentals of Physics I: Mechanics
- **POL 285**: Introduction to International Relations
- **PSYC 102**: Introduction to Psychology
- **SOCI 170**: Introduction to Sociology

Conferences and Publications


