



# Themed Learning Communities and Service Learning Leveraged for Student Success

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# Overview

- What TLCs and Service Learning (two High-Impact Practices leveraged for student success) look like at IUPUI
- Assessment Methods
- Assessment Findings
- Implications
- Discussion

Presentation found at <http://irds.iupui.edu>

# Institutional Context

## Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI)

- Recognized for Learning Communities & the First Year Experience (U.S. News)
- For 13 consecutive years, U.S. News has highlighted IUPUI for offering programs that help ensure a positive collegiate experience for new freshman and undergraduates
- Large Urban Public Research University
- Student population of just over 30,000 students
- First-Time cohort just over 3,500 and New External Transfers just over 1,200 each year
- Over 250 degree programs from both Indiana & Purdue Universities, guided by the Principles of Undergraduate Learning
- Majority of First-Year students commute to campus (60%) and about 40% are Federal Pell Recipients

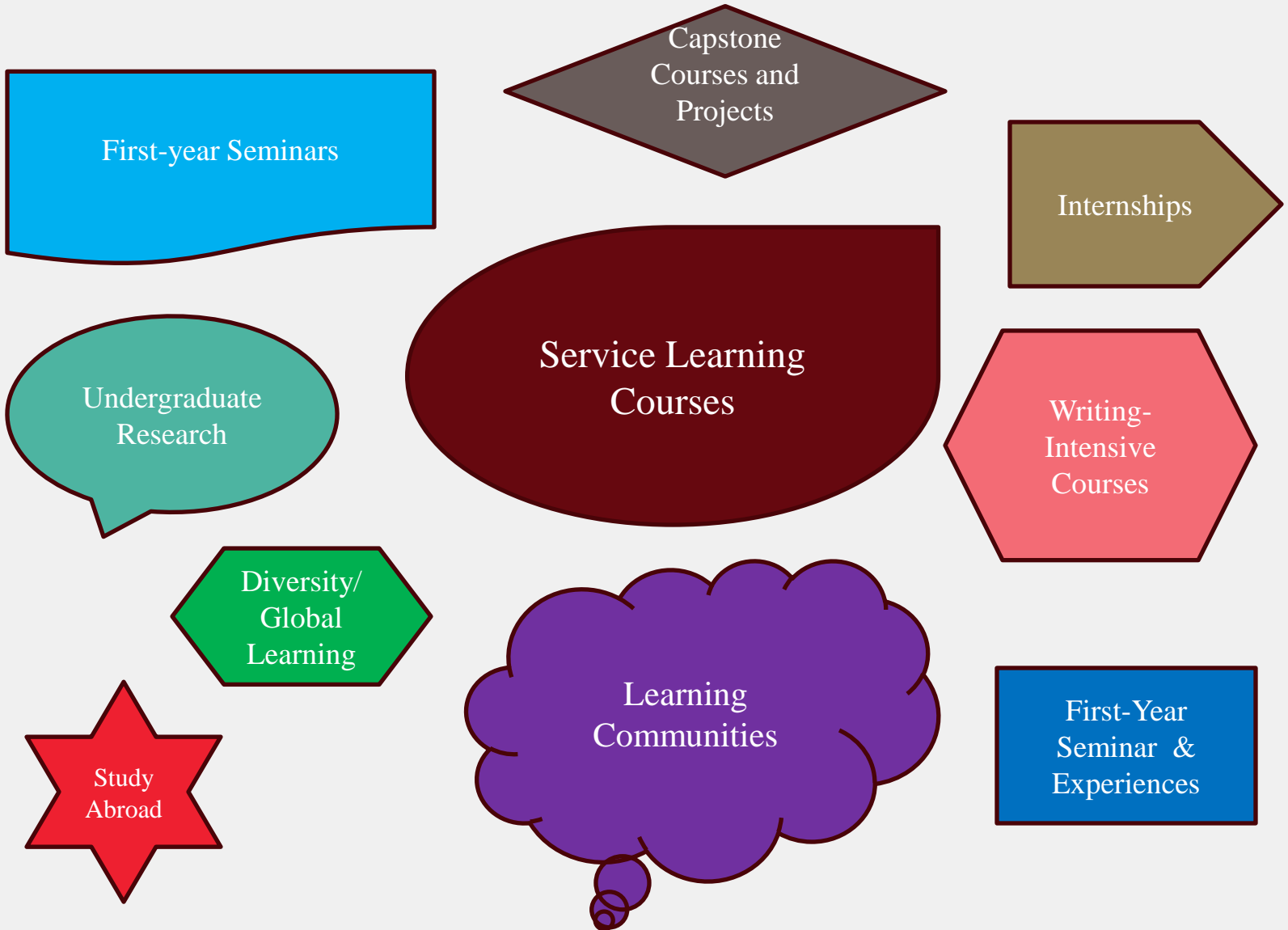
# High-Impact Practices in the First-Year

“when I am asked, what one thing we can do to enhance student engagement and increase student success? I now have an answer:

...make it possible for **every student to participate in at least two high- impact activities** during his or her undergraduate program, one in the first year, and one taken later in relation to the major field. The obvious choices for incoming students are **first-year seminars, learning communities, and service learning.**”

George D. Kuh (2008)

# Examples of High Impact Practices



# Markers of HIPs Done Well

- Expectations set at appropriately high levels
- Significant investment of time and effort
- Interactions with faculty and peers
- Experiences with diversity
- Frequent and constructive feedback
- Periodic and structured opportunities for reflection
- Relevance through real-world applications
- Public demonstration of competence  
(Kuh, 2008; Kuh & O'Donnell, 2013)

# HIP Program Fidelity

- Fidelity is defined by Webster as “the quality or state of being faithful, the accuracy in details, exactness.”
- Program fidelity assessment offers another level of detail about the program as implemented by examining the degree to which interventions are implemented as theoretically planned.
  - Poor Fidelity Examples
    - LC implemented with no integrative learning assignments.
    - SL implemented with no structured reflection.
- It is not possible to test the effectiveness of an intervention if the intervention failed to be implemented as planned (Scott & Sechrest, 1989).

# HIP Benefits and Outcomes

**High Impact practices are positively associated with:**

- Persistence and GPAs
- Deep approaches to learning
- Higher rates of student-faculty interaction
- Increases in critical thinking and writing skills
- Greater appreciation for diversity
- Higher student engagement overall

Bronwell, J & Swaner, L (2010); Hansen & Schmidt (in press; *Journal of The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition*); NSSE, (2007); Kuh (2008)



# Themed Learning Communities (TLCs) at IUPUI

## Essential elements of TLCs:

- Offered in first fall semester for First-Year students
- Cohort of 25 students
- 3 or more linked courses
- Instructional team (faculty member, advisor, peer mentor)
- All TLCs have an embedded First-Year Seminar
- Interdisciplinary theme & connections
- Learning beyond the classroom



# TLCs at IUPUI

- 40 sections serving just under 1,000 students
- Program offerings in Liberal Arts, Engineering & Technology, Science, Nursing, Art, Social Work, Education, Business, Physical Education, Public & Environmental Affairs & University College.

## Theme examples:

“Serving Others through Engineering Design”

“Like a Girl - Gender, Language, and Power”

“Changing Perceptions from the Inside Out”

“Baby I Was Born This Way”

“Dangerous Minds, Dangerous Policies”

“Philanthropy is Not Just for Millionaires”

“Exploring Majors, Careers, the Real World and YOU!”

“Molecules to Medicines”

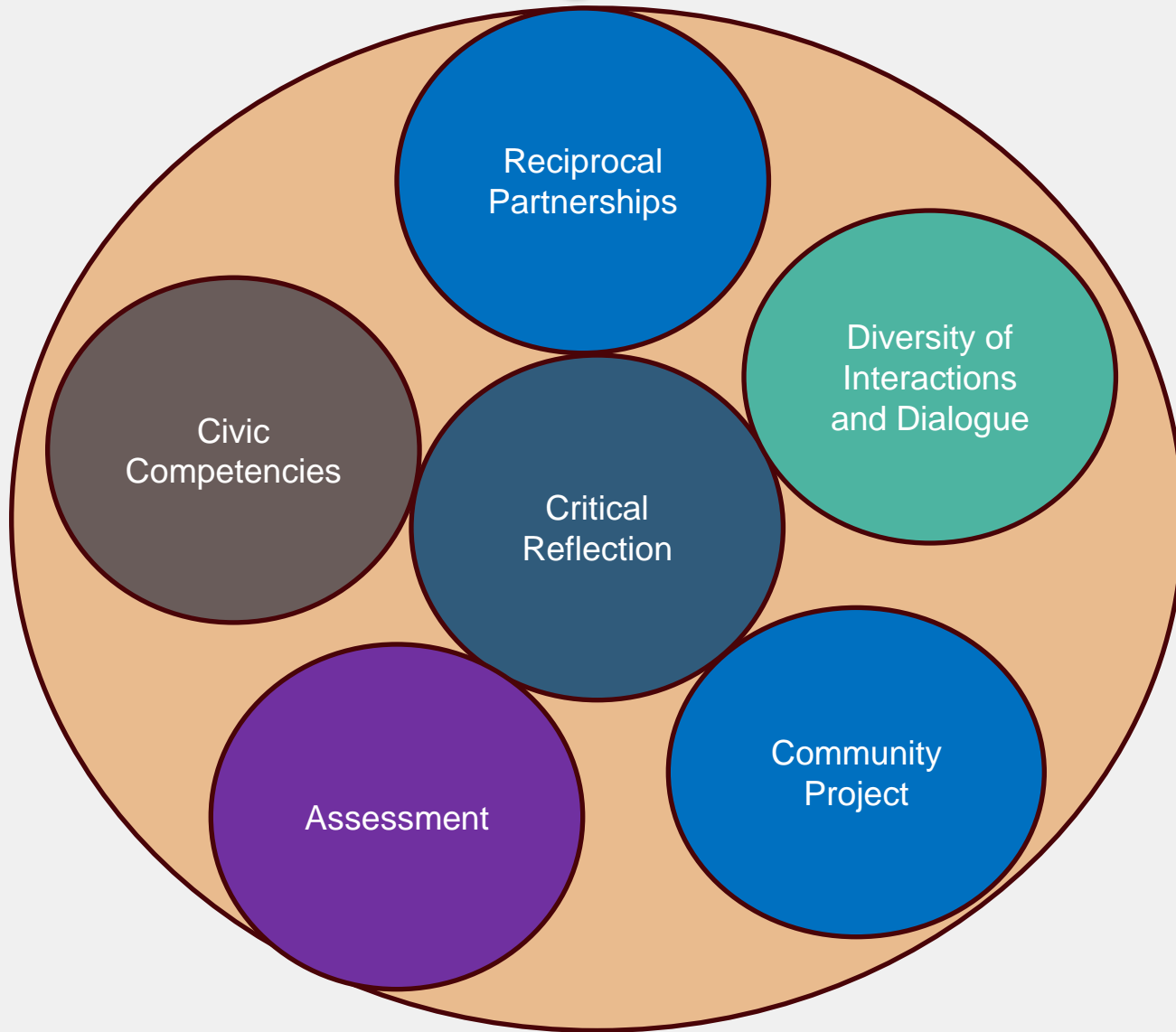


More information available at <http://tlc.iupui.edu/>

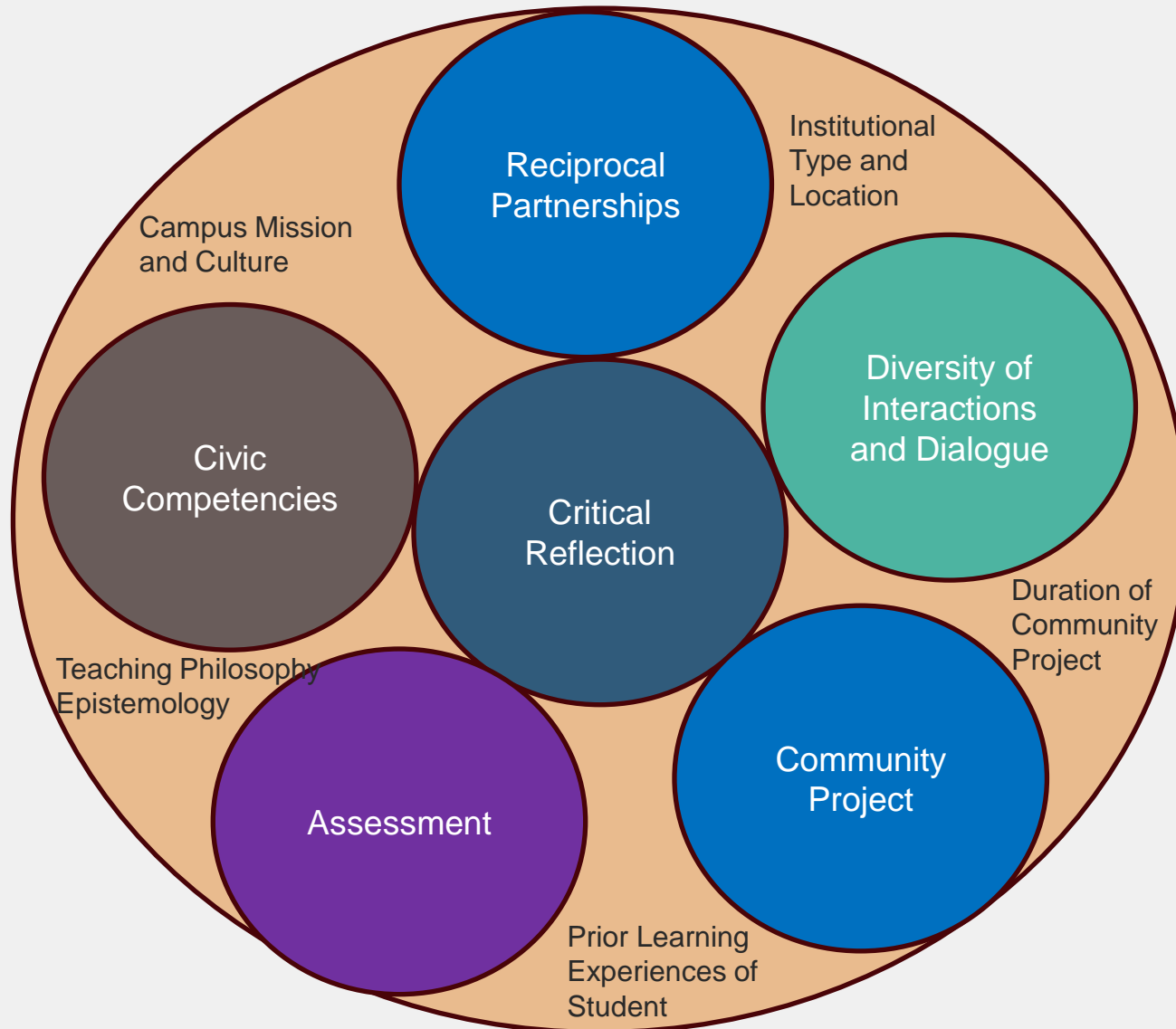
# Service Learning at IUPUI

Service learning is defined as a "course-based, credit bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an **organized service activity** that meets identified community needs, and (b) **reflect on the service activity** in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility" (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009, p. 38).

# Service Learning Course Attributes



# Service Learning Course Attributes



# SL Taxonomy to Guide Practice and End of the Semester Course Census

1=Not at all    2=Low intensity    3=Medium intensity    4=High intensity

- 1) To what extent is your community partner involved in course planning?
- 2) To what extent does the course syllabus describe and connect the community project to course content and assignments?
- 3) To what extent does the course engage students in diverse interactions and dialogue with peers and community members across a range of experiences and perspectives?
- 4) To what extent are civic competencies integrated into student learning?
- 5) To what extent do you require students to critically reflect on their service learning course experiences?
- 6) To what extent is assessment used for improvement of course and community project?

# Service Learning Faculty Development Activities

**Center for Service Learning offers seminars and ad hoc training on the following:**

- Designing a service learning course
- Best practices for finding and sustaining community partnerships
- Navigating logistical issues for an effective service experience
- Facilitating critical reflection
- Assessing civic outcomes
- Visiting scholars throughout the year

# Examples of IUPUI Service Learning Project

- Computer Science students have helped non-profit agencies develop and maintain data-bases.
- Various courses have partnered with a non-profit agency to have students work directly with formerly incarcerated women on developing computer skills and creating resumes.
- Chemistry students have worked with community organizations to test air, soil, and water quality for residents.
- Sociology students have worked with agencies that serve the homeless.



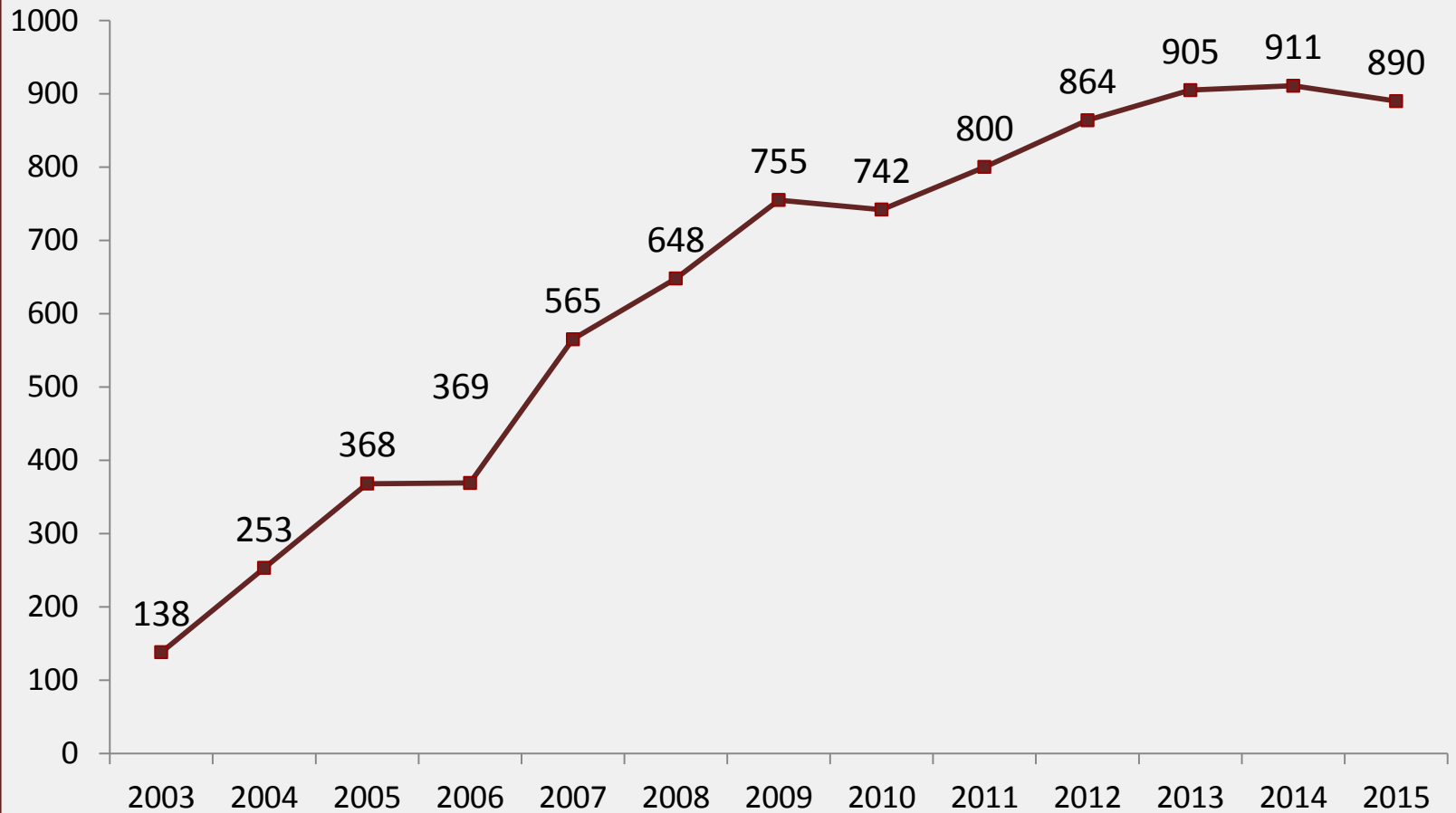
# Learning Communities, First Year Seminars, and Service Learning as High Impact Practices

- This is what we know: First Year Seminars, Learning Communities, and Service Learning are HIPs - and we know HIPs matter.
- We know that HIPs work for (student populations) and we know that more HIPs are better (Finley, 2013).
- We also know that it is possible to have "low impact" HIPs. In other words, having TLCs and Service Learning isn't enough - we must do them well.

# Assessment Methods

- Employ Mixed-Method designs using qualitative and quantitative methods.
- Attempt to understand how TLCs and Service Learning experiences influence students' success levels (e.g., retention rates, GPAs, engagement, civic outcomes).
- Administer end-of-course questionnaires (designed to provide information on students' perceptions of course benefits, learning outcomes, satisfaction levels, why decided to enroll)
- Administer National Survey of Student Engagement
- Conduct focus groups and individual interviews.
- Collect direct measures of student learning (e.g., embedded course assessment as part of Reaccreditation efforts)

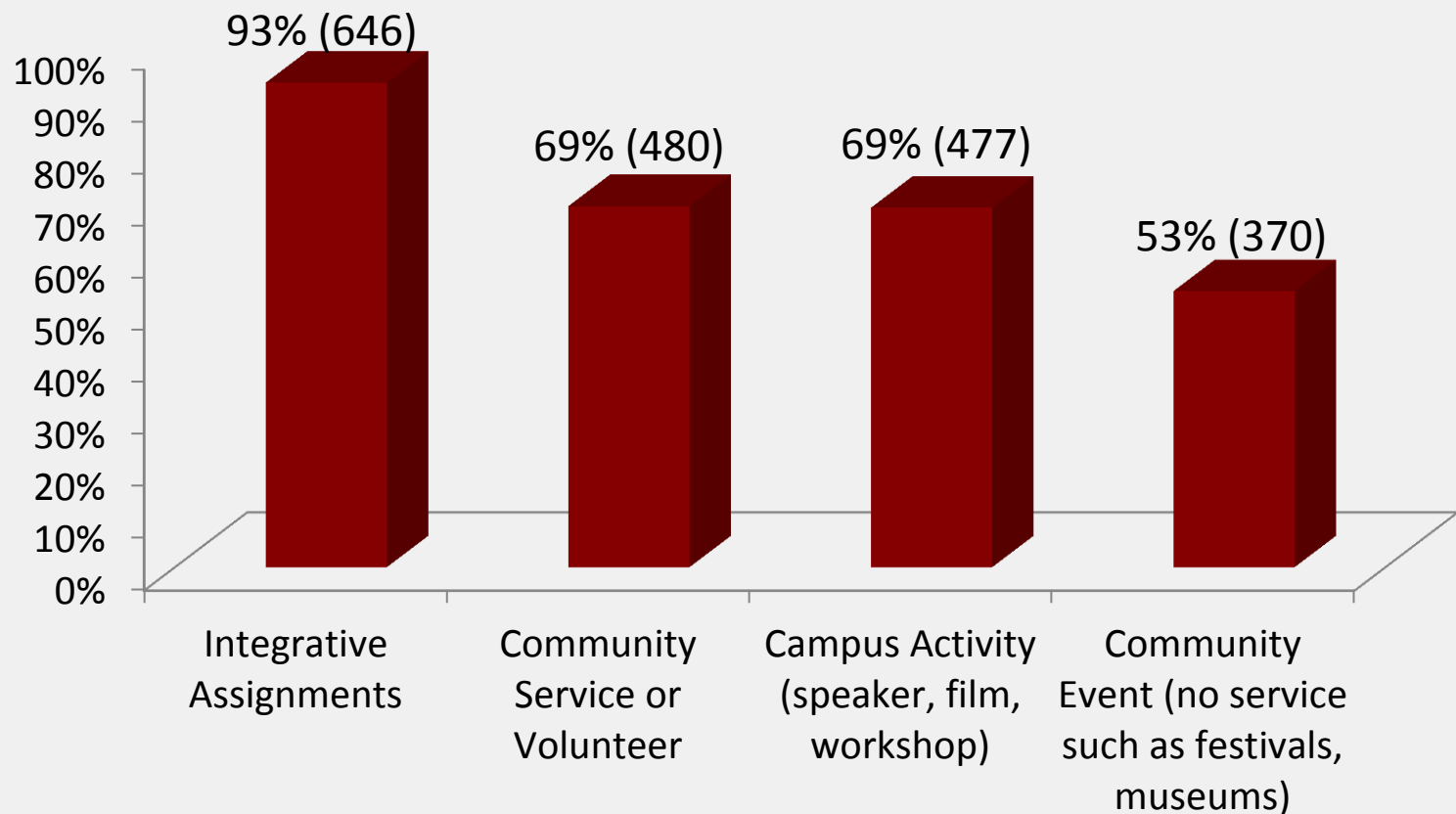
# TLC Growth: First-Year Students



# TLCs Engaging Experiences

Fall 2014 N=757, Some Items Had Missing Cases. Students' self-report on end-of-course questionnaire.

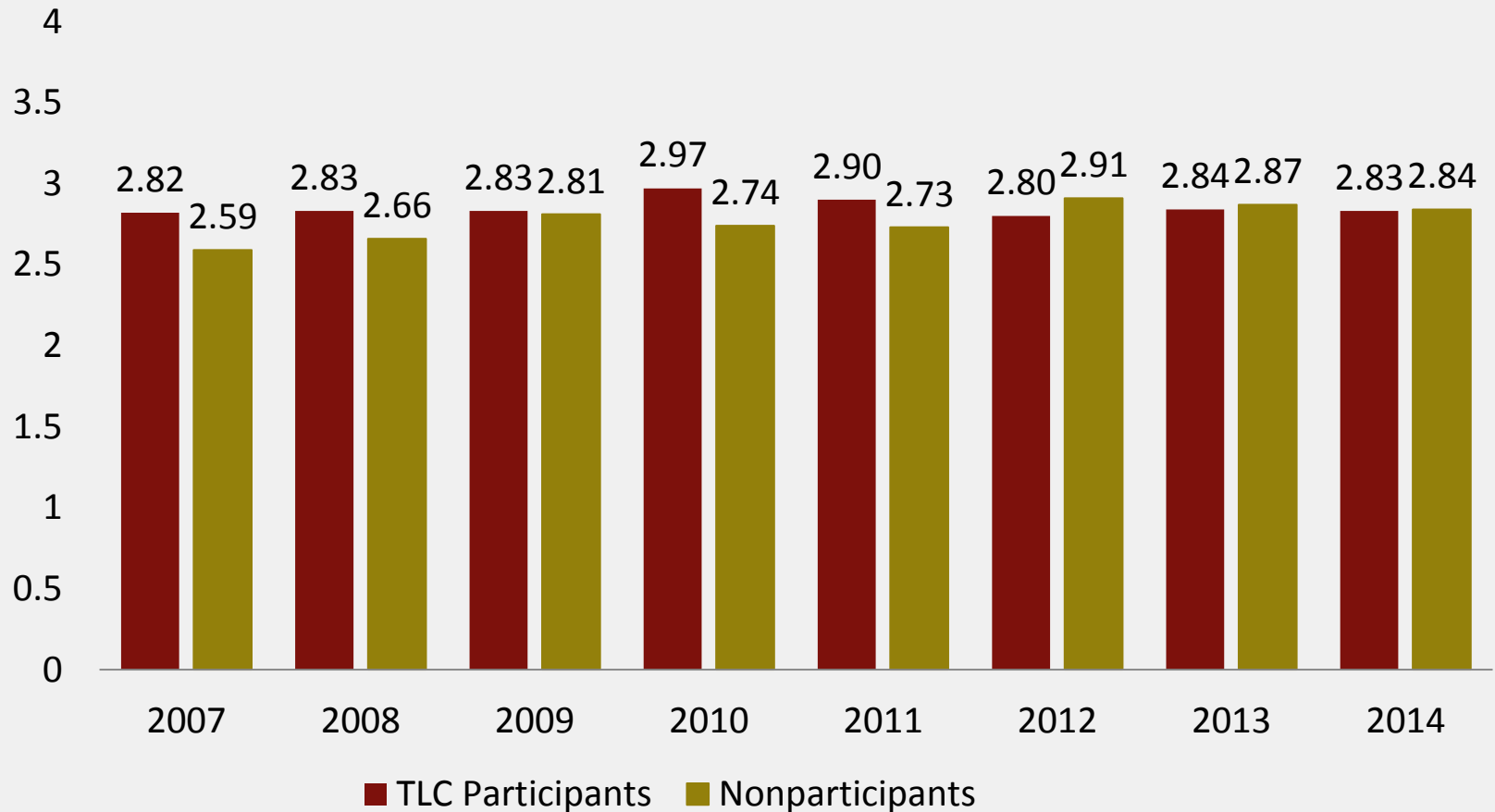
**% TLC Students Participating in...**



# TLCs and First-Year GPAs

## Average Fall GPAs of TLC Participants Compared to Non-Participants

Note: TLC Participants includes students enrolled in a Fall TLC that completed the course.  
Nonparticipants include students enrolled in a first-year seminar that was not part of a TLC .



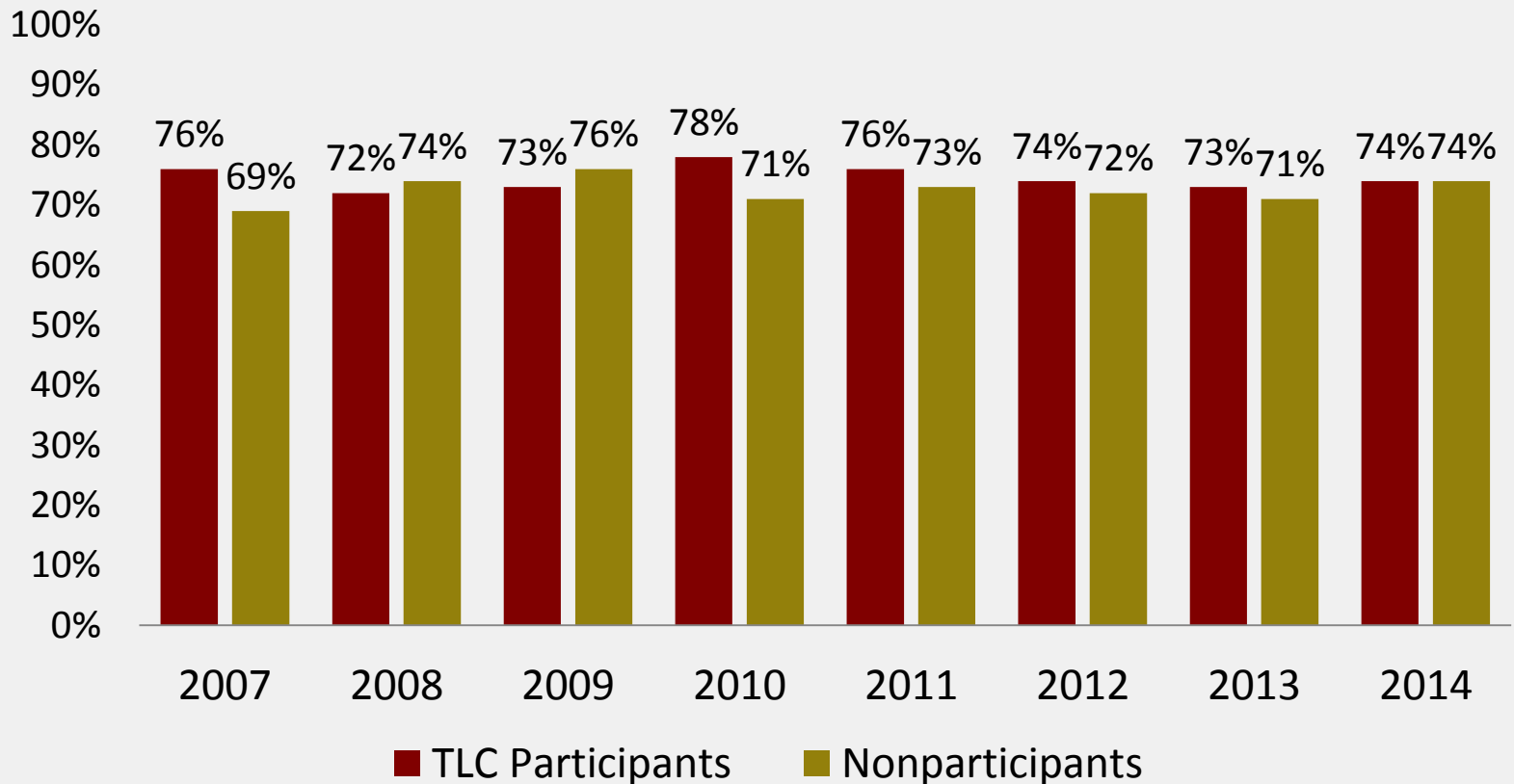
# 2014 TLC Impact on First Year GPA: ANCOVA Results

	N	Avg. Cumulative GPA	Adjusted Cumulative GPA
TLC	859	2.72	<b>2.78</b>
Non-Participants	2212	2.72	<b>2.71</b>
Overall	3070	2.72	

Note 1: Bolded items are significantly different based on ANCOVA Results ( $p < .05$ ). Covariates included the following: H.S. GPA, SAT score, income level (received a Federal Pell Grant or not) and gender. Missing cases excluded.

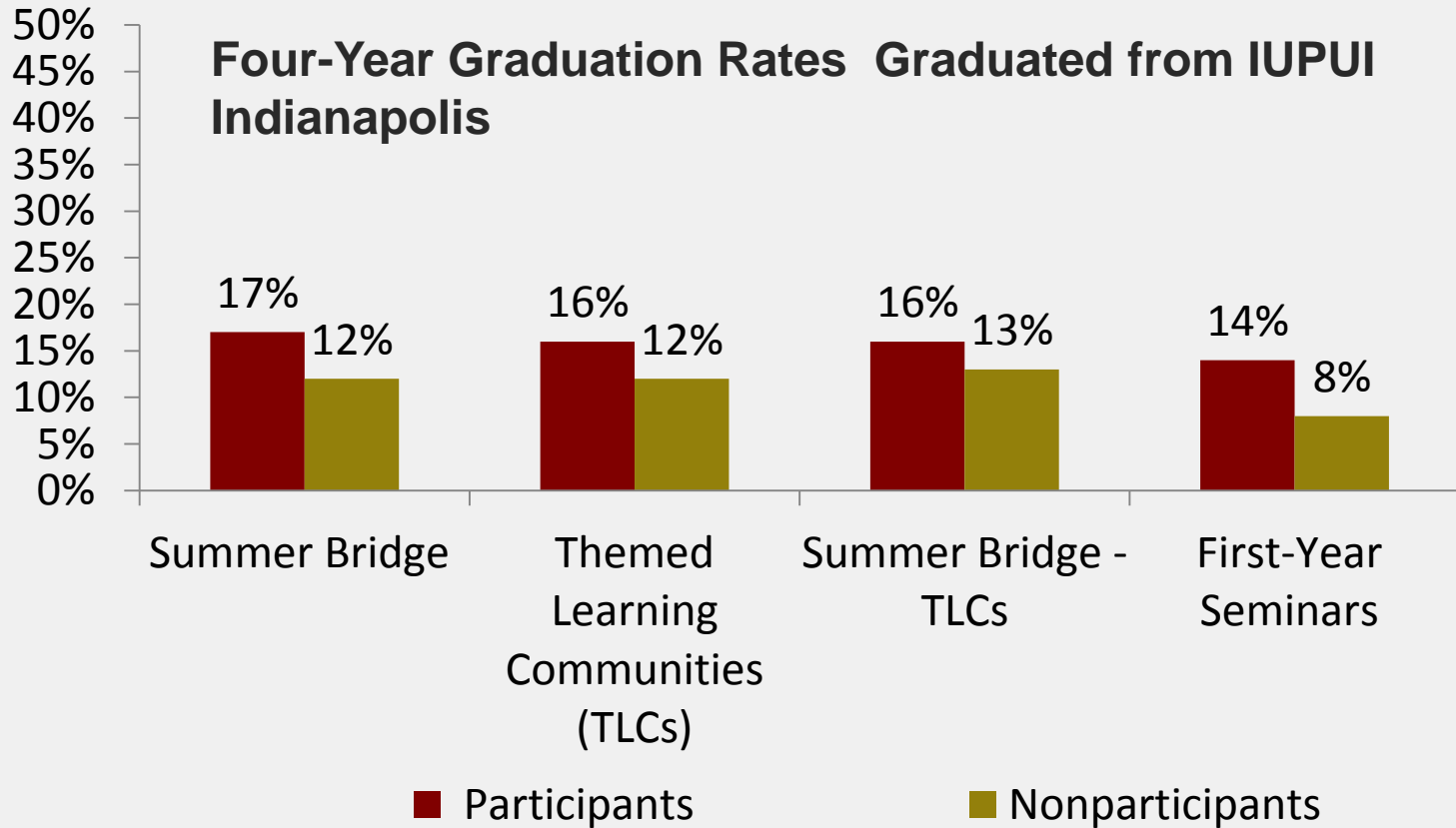
# TLC Participants' One-Year Retention Rates Compared to Nonparticipants

## One-Year Retention Rates



Note: One-year retention rates are significantly higher for TLC participants compared to nonparticipants even when taking academic preparation and demographics into account for the 2007, 2010, and 2011 cohorts (HS GPAs, SAT scores, gender, income level, and admit date). Based on logistic regression results.

# Indianapolis Only 2011 First-Time, Full-Time Cohort University College Students Only





“While improved retention is a welcome consequence of learning-community work, it has never been its aim.

In the push to improve student retention, it is easy to overlook what research tells us: Students persist in their studies if the learning they experience is **meaningful, deeply engaging, and relevant** to their lives” (Lardner & Malnarich, 2008).

# TLC End-of-Course Questionnaire

## **Sense of Belonging and Community $\alpha = .88$**

- “Form one or more friendships that I will maintain after the Semester”
- “Feel a sense of belonging at IUPUI”

## **Integrative Thinking and Learning $\alpha = .91$**

- “Understood connections between different disciplines and courses.”
- “Develop a better understanding of complex real world social problems and issues.”

## **Peer Interactions $\alpha = .73$**

- “Discuss ideas from the TLC courses with peers outside of class”
- “Exchange ideas with a student whose views were different from your own”

## **Communication Skills $\alpha = .81$**

- “Became more effective with communicating my thoughts in writing.”
- “Became more effective with communicating my thought in speaking.”

## **Faculty Interactions (only 1 item)**

- “Discussed course topics, ideas, or concepts with a faculty member outside of class”

# Which Course Components make Significant Impact on Student Satisfaction with Learning Experiences?

## Integrative Thinking and Learning

- Understand connections between different disciplines and courses
- Develop a better understanding of complex real world social problems or issues
- Apply what I learned in one course to another course in my learning community
- Apply knowledge gained in learning community courses to broader community or social issues
- Apply course concepts to my own life experiences

## • Sense of Belonging and Community

- Form one or more friendships that I will maintain after the Semester
- Feel a sense of belonging at IUPUI
- Feel connected with other IUPUI students
- See myself as part of the IUPUI community

## • Peer Interactions

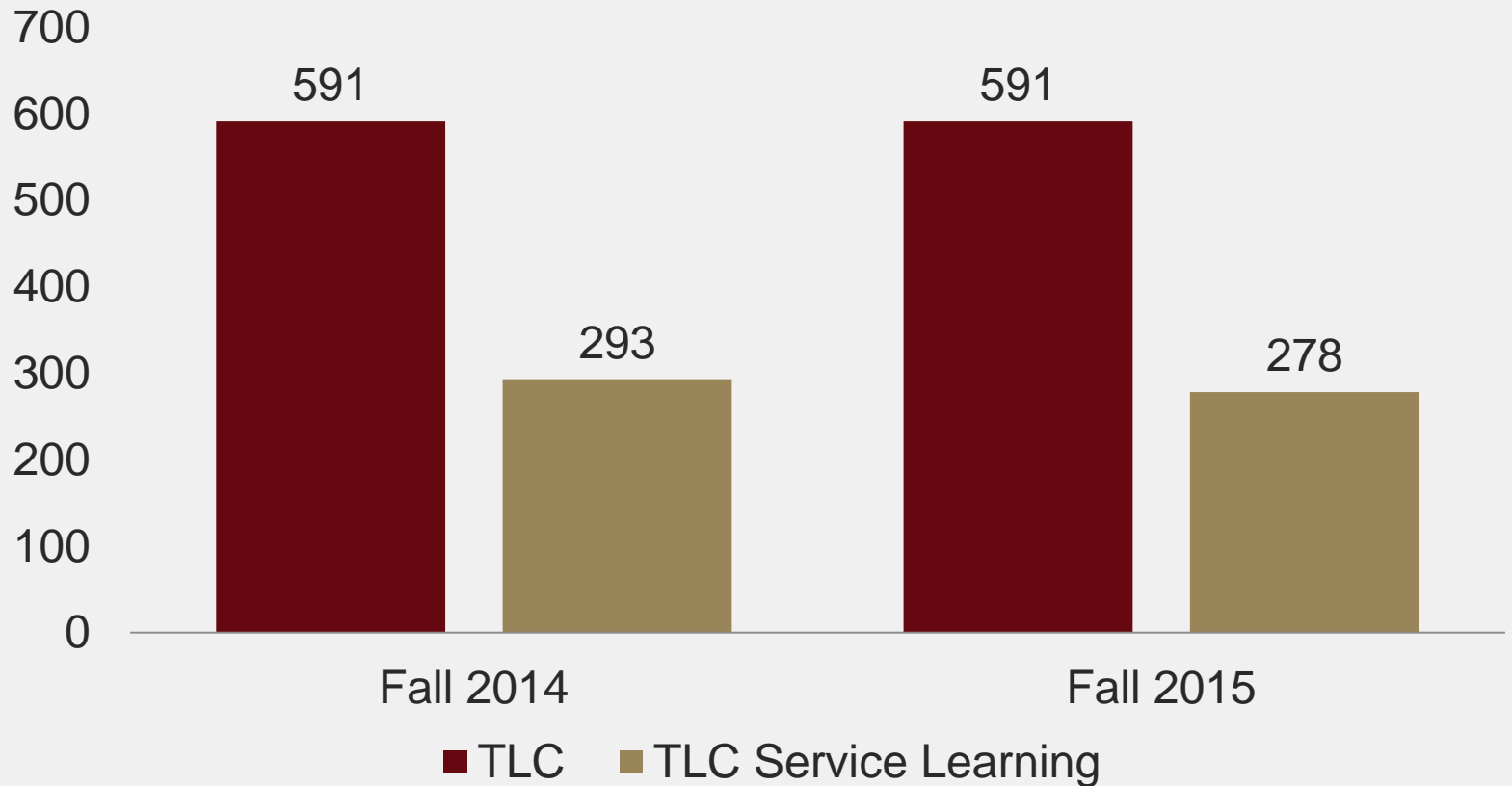
- Discussed ideas from the TLC courses with peers outside of class.
- Exchanged ideas with students whose views are different from my own.

# Which Course Components make Significant Impact on Intention to Persist at IUPUI?

- **Sense of Belonging and Community**
  - Form one or more friendships that I will maintain after the Semester
  - Feel a sense of belonging at IUPUI
  - Feel connected with other IUPUI students
  - See myself as part of the IUPUI community

# TLCs with Service Learning

## Number of Student Participants



## 2014 TLC-Service Learning Impact on First-Year GPA: ANCOVA Results

	N	Avg. Cumulative GPA	Adjusted Cumulative GPA
TLC-Service Learning	286	2.81	<b>2.83</b>
TLC Not Service Learning	584	2.65	<b>2.64</b>
Overall	870	2.70	

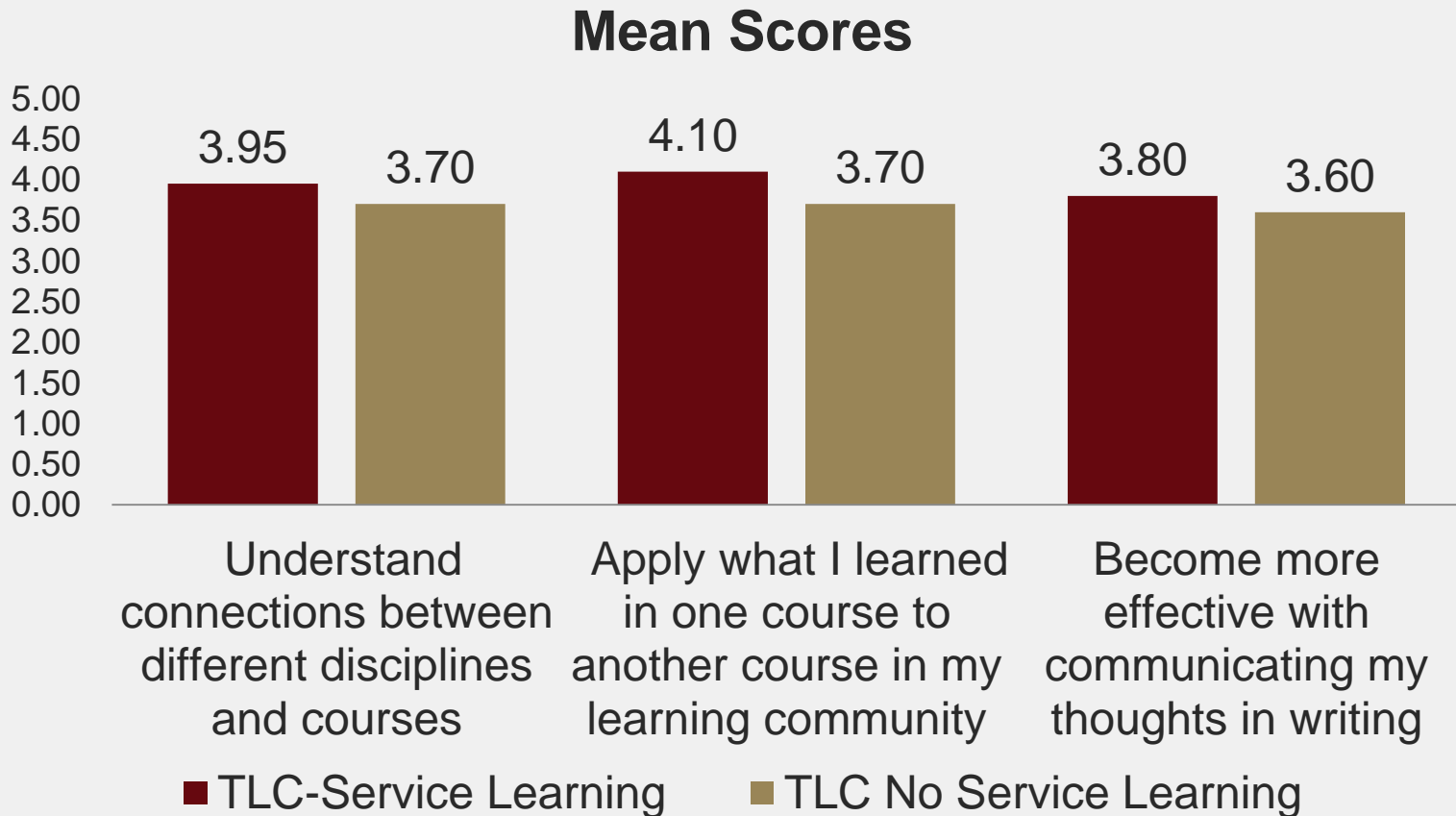
Note 1: Bolded items are significantly different based on ANCOVA Results ( $p < .05$ ). Covariates included the following: H.S. GPA, SAT score, income level (received a Federal Pell Grant or not) and gender. Missing cases excluded.

## 2015 TLC-Service Learning Impact on Fall GPA: ANCOVA Results

	N	Avg. Cumulative GPA	Adjusted Cumulative GPA
TLC-Service Learning	272	2.99	<b>3.00</b>
TLC Not Service Learning	572	2.89	<b>2.89</b>
Overall	844	2.93	

Note 1: Bolded items are significantly different based on ANCOVA Results ( $p < .05$ ). Covariates included the following: H.S. GPA, SAT score, income level (received a Federal Pell Grant or not) and gender. Missing cases excluded.

# TLC-Service Learning: Integrative Learning

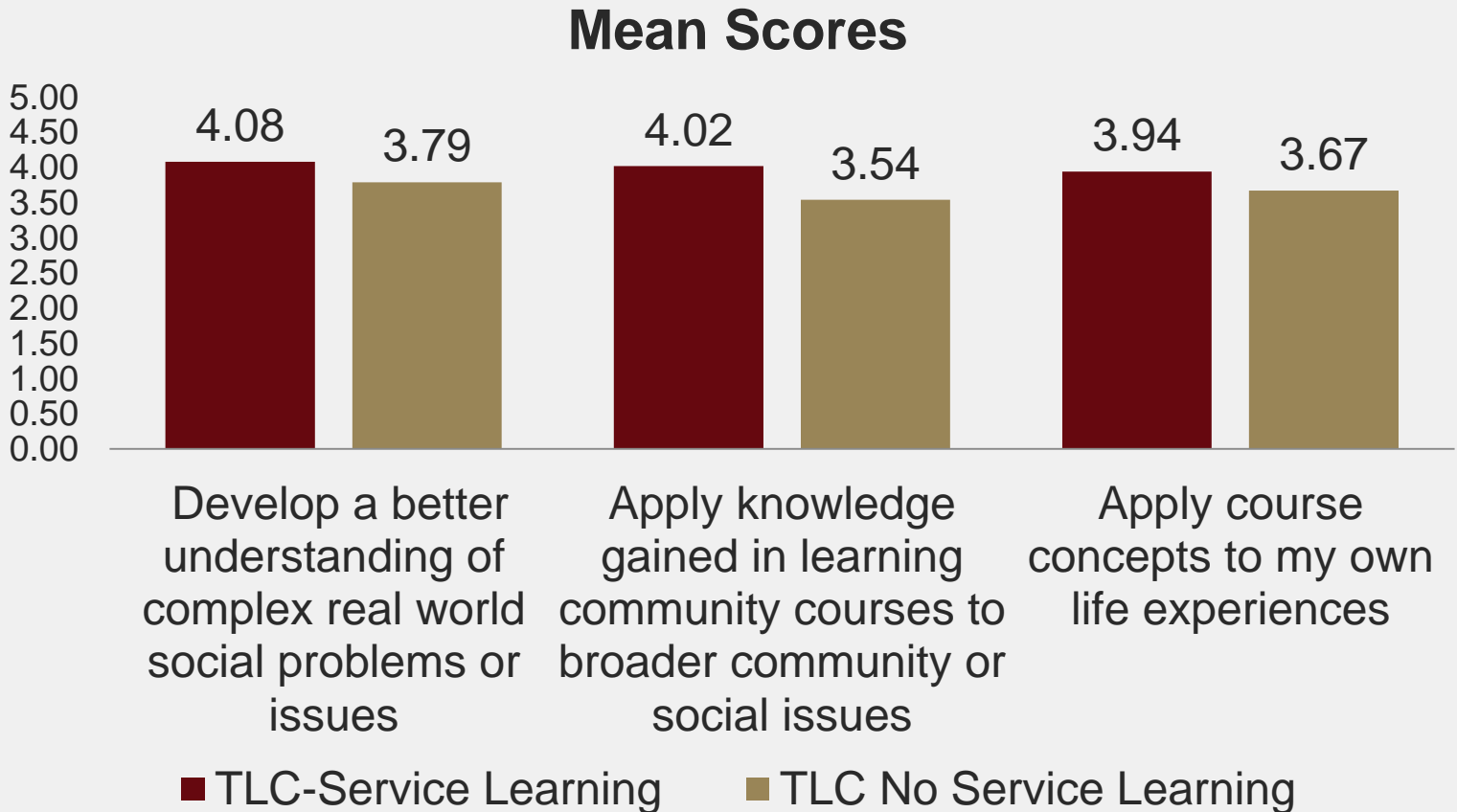


Note 1: All items significantly different based on independent samples t-test results. TLC-SL N=476, TLC No SL N=216

Note 2: Responses based on a 5 point Likert-Type scale where 1 = "Very Little", 2 = "Little", 3 = "Some", 4 = "Much", and 5 = "Very Much"



# TLC-Service Learning: Civic Engagement Outcomes

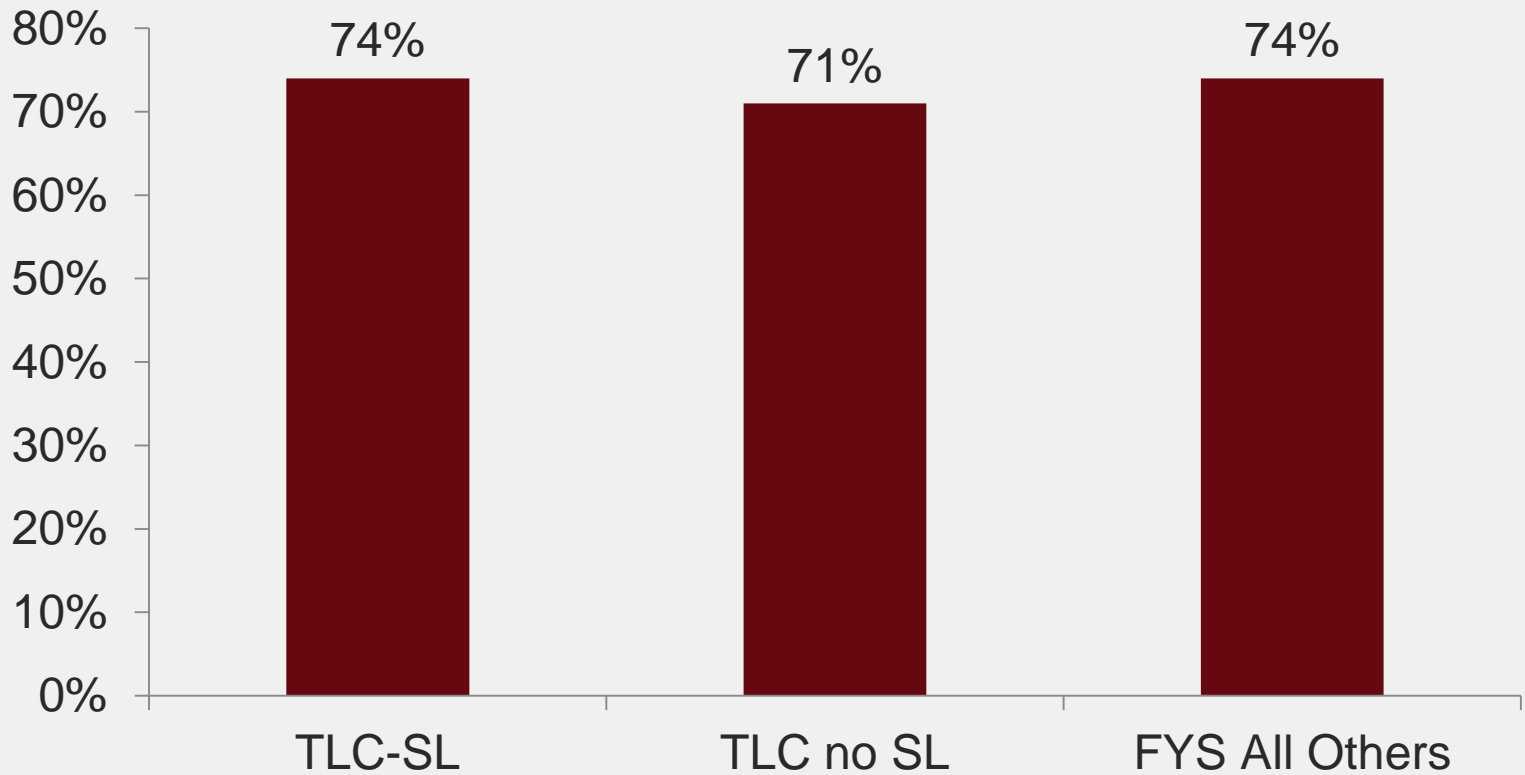


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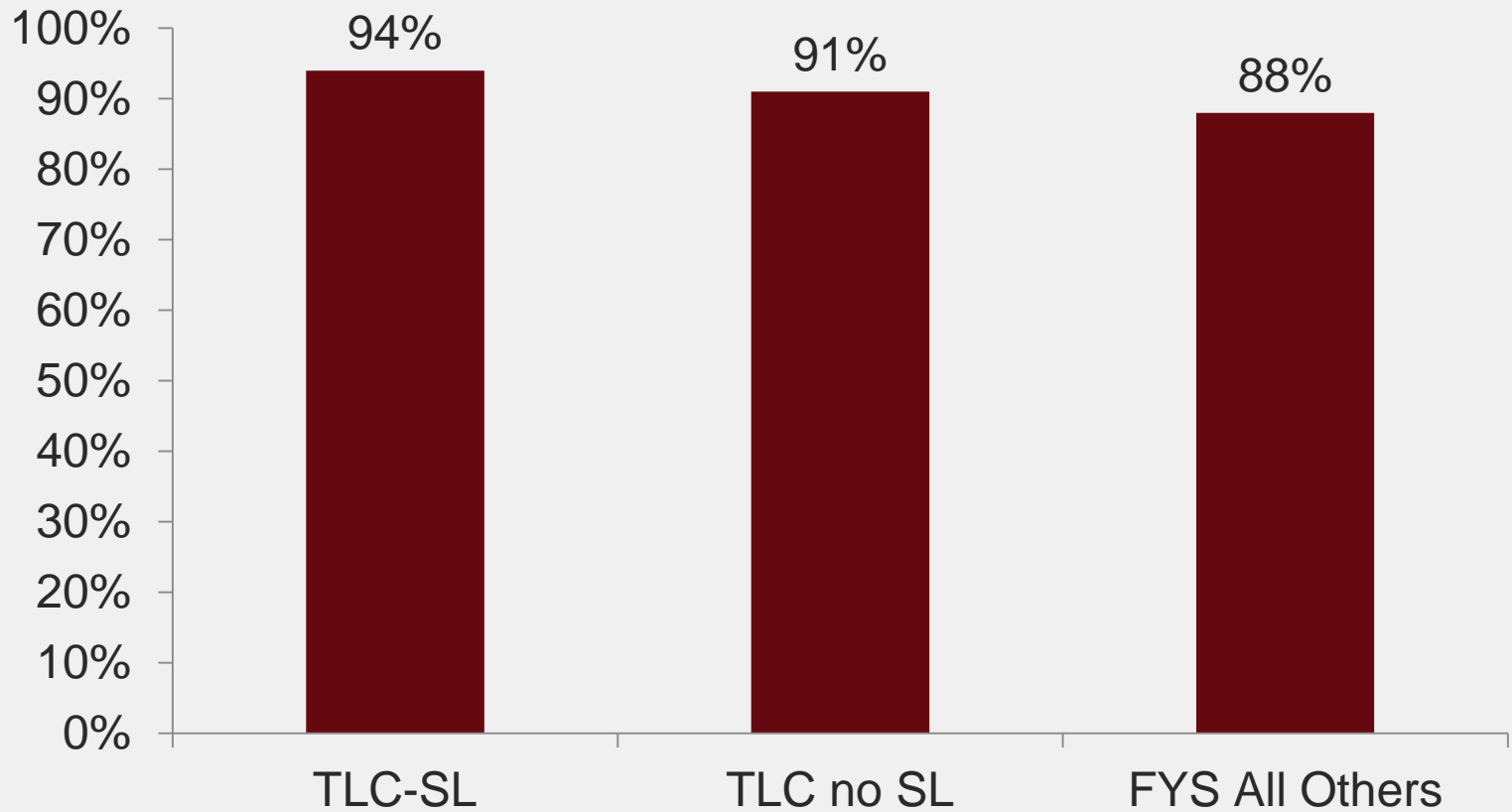
# One-Year Retention Rates

## 2014 Cohort One-Year Retention Rate



# Fall-Spring Retention Rates

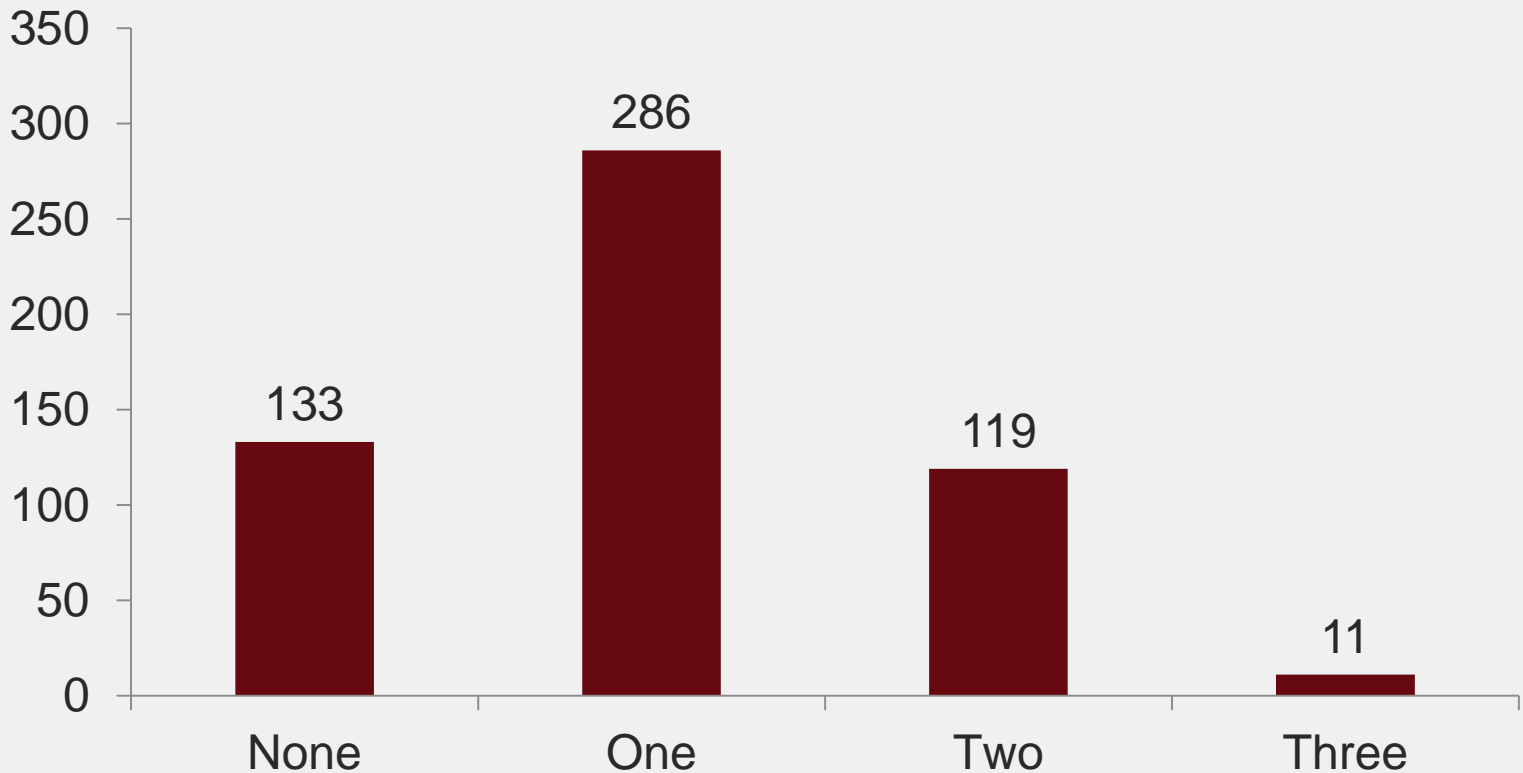
## 2015 Fall-Spring Retention Rates



# NSSE Results: HIP Participation First-Year Students

Learning Community, Undergraduate Research, Service Learning

## Number of HIP Participated In

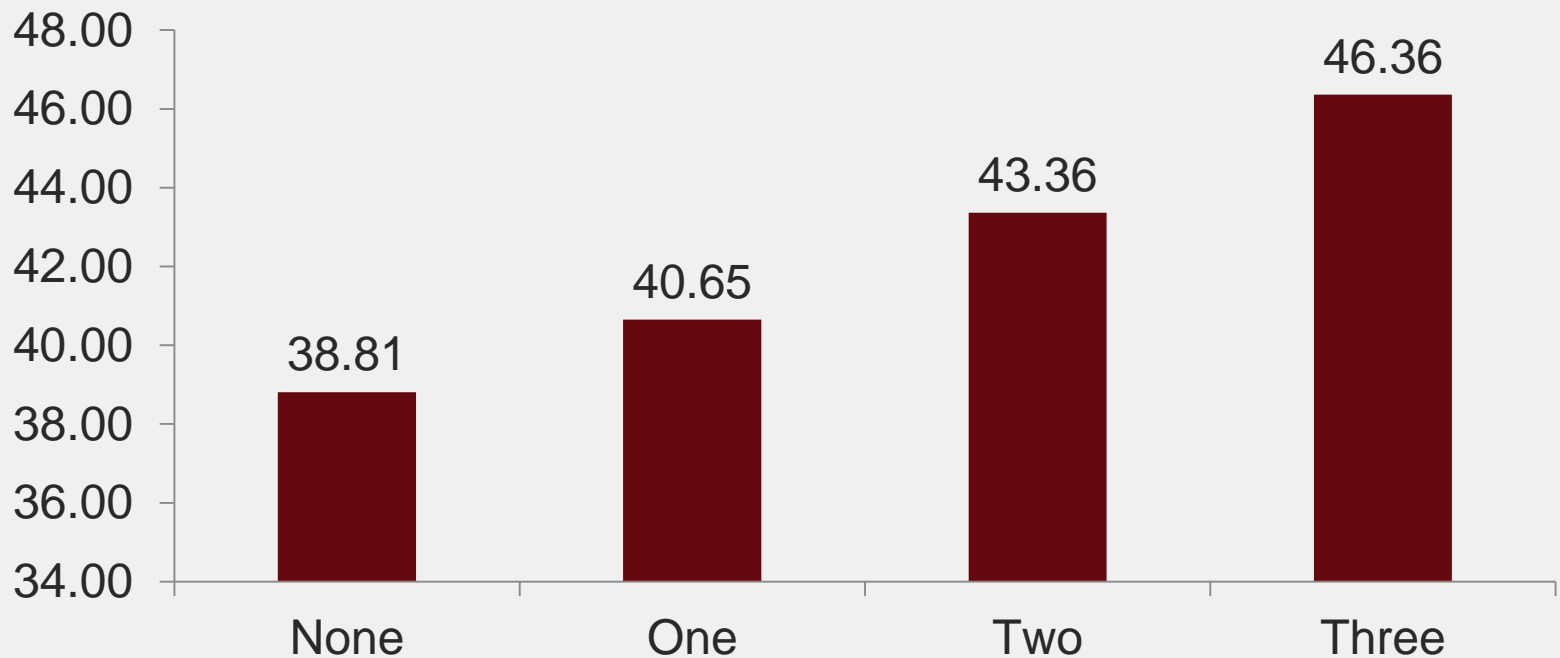


“Two” represents Themed Learning Community-Embedded First Year Seminar and Service Learning. Do not emphasize undergraduate research in FY.

Results shown for N = 11 may not be reliable.

# NSSE Results HIPs – Higher Order Learning FY Students

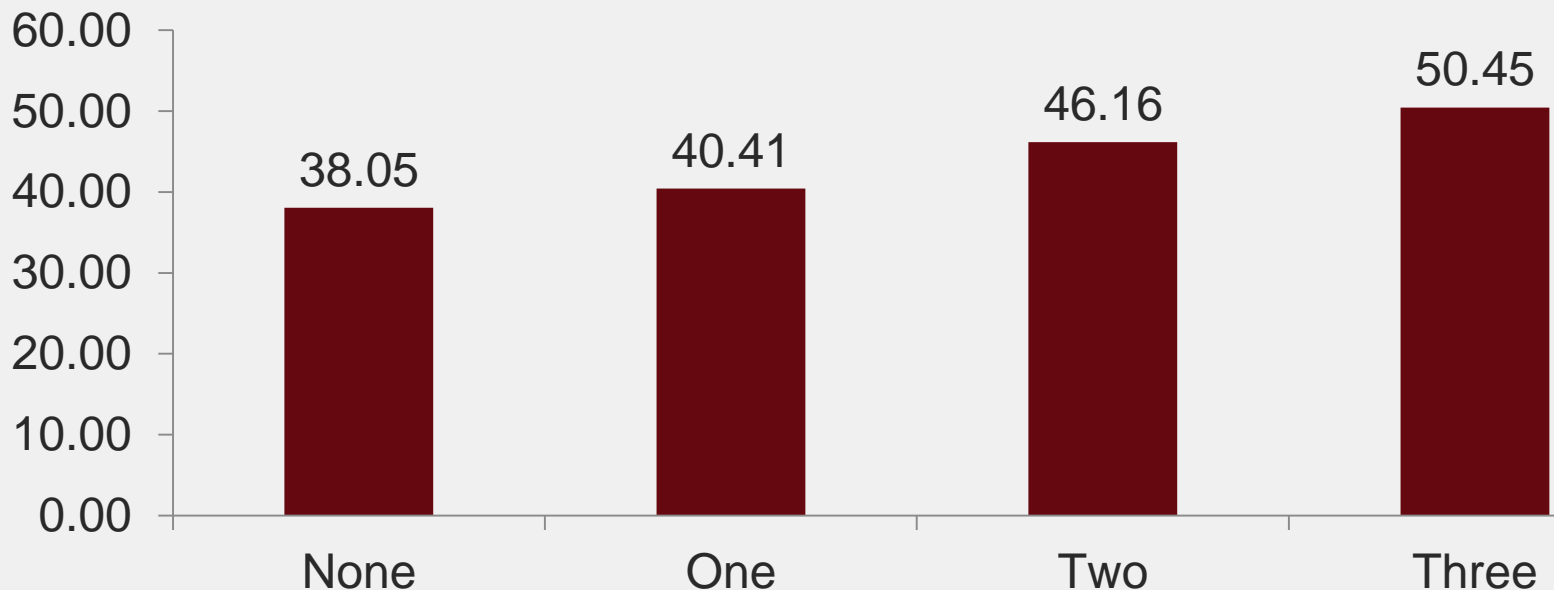
## Means Higher-Order Learning Scores by Number of High Impact Practices First Year



Each EI is scored on a 60-point scale. To produce an indicator score, the response set for each item is converted to a 60-point scale (e.g., Never = 0; Sometimes = 20; Often = 40; Very often = 60), and the rescaled items are averaged. Thus a score of zero means a student responded at the bottom of the scale for every item in the EI, while a score of 60 indicates responses at the top of the scale on every item.

# NSSE Results HIPs – Discussions with Diverse Others FY Students

## Means Discussions with Diverse Others by Number of High Impact Practices First Year



Each EI is scored on a 60-point scale. To produce an indicator score, the response set for each item is converted to a 60-point scale (e.g., Never = 0; Sometimes = 20; Often = 40; Very often = 60), and the rescaled items are averaged. Thus a score of zero means a student responded at the bottom of the scale for every item in the EI, while a score of 60 indicates responses at the top of the scale on every item.

# Underserved Students Participation and Outcomes: TLCs

Student Characteristic	TLC Participants			Nonparticipants		
	N	One-Year Retention (any IU)	FY GPA	N	One-Year Retention (any IU)	FY GPA
African American	94	<b>76%</b>	<b>2.55</b>	213	<b>58%</b>	<b>2.14</b>
Latino(a)/Hispanic	74	74%	2.65	179	74%	2.58
Afr. American, Latino,(a) Two or More Races	209	<b>73%</b>	<b>2.55</b>	494	<b>65%</b>	<b>2.40</b>
First Generation	117	71%	2.61	228	72%	2.56
Received Federal Pell Grant (proxy for low income)	435	<b>72%</b>	<b>2.63</b>	1077	<b>67%</b>	<b>2.49</b>

Bolded items significantly different based on independent samples t-test or chi-square results.

# Underserved Students Participation and Outcomes: TLC Service Learning

Student Characteristic	TLC Service Learning Participants			TLC Participants (No Service Learning)		
	N	One-Year Retention	FY GPA	N	One-Year Retention	FY GPA
African American	26	<b>73%</b>	2.50	70	<b>69%</b>	2.49
Latino(a)/Hispanic	33	70%	2.62	43	73%	2.68
Afr. American, Latino, Two or More Races	70	<b>74%</b>	2.57	148	<b>69%</b>	2.51
First Generation	117	71%	2.61	228	72%	2.56
Received Federal Pell Grant (proxy for low income)	139	71%	<b>2.72</b>	311	70%	<b>2.57</b>

Bolded items significantly different based on independent samples t-test or chi-square results.



# FOCUS GROUP RESULTS

# Methodology

- Employed a stratified random sample by gender and ethnicity.
- Conducted 14 semi-structured focus groups lasting an hour. Students were also asked to complete a short questionnaire.
- IRB approved \$15 incentive (provided on student with university issued IUPUI JagTags)
- Conducted one semester or one year and one semester after the students participated in a TLC.
- All focus groups were transcribed verbatim.
- Used Atlas.ti qualitative software to code and identify emergent themes in an effort to provide rich and detailed insight into the levels of students' unique experiences.



# Participants

**48 total participants**

## **Gender**

- Female: 37
- Male: 10
- Missing: 1

## **Ages**

- Ages 18-19: 28
- Ages 20-21: 20

## **Ethnicity**

- African American: 7
- Asian American: 1
- Latino/Hispanic: 5
- White: 34
- Other: 1

# Major Themes Emerged

## Service Learning in Context of TLC

- Broadened Perspectives
- Enhanced appreciation of diversity and differences
- Interactions with community members had a profound impact on students' mindsets and ways of conceptualizing social issues

# TLC Service Learning

“I went to the day care center and it’s a homeless shelter for families with children...it really just opened my eyes. There are different perspectives. I worked in the play room so I got to play with all the kids there and actually had a lot of fun with it and really enjoyed it. So that’s – it changed my perspective about the homeless ---not just dirty and begging on the streets”

# TLC Service Learning

“We served food we learned that homeless people don’t look homeless at all –we learned to try not to be as judgmental as people like. Our TLC class was a diversity class. Really learned not to judge people...”

# TLC Service Learning

“Did service learning at food bank. I think that going there just opened up your eyes on how many people are in need of different things.”

“Being able to be with a group of peers all wanting to be nurses and trying to figure out how to help other people. I think it gave us a broader idea of nursing...you don't have to just be in a hospital to do nursing it doesn't matter how small the event in order to help someone. Gathered friendships and connections with the food bank and with the people that your working with.”

# TLC Service Learning

“Main point that Dr. \_\_\_\_\_ wanted to get across the main objective for going to these different places was patient contact – since most of us were going into either radiography or nursing or something like that he wanted us to in contact with people that you don’t necessarily see every day....”

“We volunteered for four or five hours working with the patients. I led a sing along – which was really funny because most of them can’t hear anywhere but it was fun for them. It was enjoyable for them.. And then we wrote an essay , a reflection about our experiences....the Biology tie in was how does Alzheimer disease work – covering the nervous system so it worked out really well.”



# TLCs Service Learning

“We went to the Ronald McDonald house and cleaned up. It was fun because I got to create closer ties with the group members and we were able to see the children that were there. They were happy even in their situation. That made me want to volunteer more. It is an opportunity to meet new people and do that makes you feel good inside.”

# The Synergy Of Two High Impact Practices – TLC and Service Learning

## TLCs

- Fosters sense of community belonging
- Involve students with “big questions” that matter beyond the classroom.
- Explore a common topic through the lenses of different disciplines
- Integration of learning experiences
- Engaging pedagogies
- Co-curricular experiences
- Campus engagement

## Service Learning

- Opportunities to analyze and solve problems in the community.
- Critical structured reflection
- Meaningful experiences with diverse peers and community members
- Sense of purpose and broadened perspectives
- Hands-on, real world applications of learning
- Model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome.
- Working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

# Implications for Practice

- Faculty development
- Providing students with opportunities for reflection
- Integrative learning assignments
- Intentionally linking themes with SL experiences
- Using assessment results for program improvements

# Lessons Learned From Local Assessment and National Literature HIPs in First Year

- High Impact Practices have differential impacts.
- Underserved and underrepresented students benefit from HIPs. So reach out and encourage participation.
- Important to design internally valid studies that employ comparison groups.
- Important to clearly describe HIPs (activities, instructional strategies, assignments, intended outcomes).
- Critical that HIPs are done well and with fidelity.
- Lack of studies that investigate direct measures of learning.

# Discussion and Questions!?



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Contact us with questions or requests for  
information!

