

Ohio University, OH

Curricular Themes

Participation Start: 09-01-2016

Participation End: 08-31-2024

Date Completed: 04-19-2017

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This Results Report reflects the activity of Ohio University in the Action Project Collaboration Network. It is not an official document of the Higher Learning Commission.

Declaration

Q:

Briefly describe the project in less than 100 words. Be sure to identify the key organizational areas (departments, programs, divisions, units, etc.) and key organizational processes that this action project will affect, change, and/or improve.

A: Curricular Themes provide a vehicle for revitalizing student understanding and enthusiasm for Ohio University's breadth of knowledge requirements while improving the coherence of the curriculum. Students will be better able to appreciate the value of the breadth requirement because they will be building a more sophisticated understanding of the issues and challenges addressed by the theme. The course offerings associated with a theme can be used by a student as a registration guide, which should yield a superior approach to selecting courses that fulfill existing breadth of knowledge requirements.

Q:

Describe your institution's reasons for initiating this action project now and how long it should take to complete it. Why are this project and its goals high among your institution's current priorities? Also, explain how this project relates to any strategic initiatives or challenges described in the institution's recent or soon-to-be submitted Systems Portfolio.

A: Ohio University desires to be innovative and contemporary in its curricular offerings. The curricular themes initiative in the College of Arts and Sciences seeks to provide students with a broad but integrated range of opportunities for building the critical skills and knowledge they need for successful careers, engaged citizenship, and fulfilling lives. Arts and Sciences faculty are building interdisciplinary and team-taught courses involving collaborative discussions about course design and pedagogical strategies. Arts and Sciences has expanded professional development opportunities for faculty including teaching and advising workshops, a faculty mentoring event, and faculty learning communities.

Q:

List the project goals, milestones, and deliverables along with corresponding metrics, due dates, and other measures for assessing the progress toward each goal. Be sure to include when you anticipate submitting the project for formal reviews.

A: Curricular Themes are intended to encourage curricular innovation. As faculty from different departments, programs and colleges come together to develop a theme, they share ideas for multidisciplinary approaches

to course content, collaboration, team teaching and the integration of extracurricular activities into a coherent educational experience. Moreover, they also have the opportunity to think about how the existing courses that will continue to fulfill the majority of a student's distribution requirements may relate in meaningful ways. Any member of the university community, irrespective of college, is encouraged to participate in the development of the themes. We want to take advantage of all the University's resources to create the best educational experience for students possible.

The curricular themes project is in pilot stage, beginning in 2013-14. New courses are just now being developed and made available to students. Faculty development opportunities are beginning this academic year as well. It is expected that the 2014-15 year will be the first year in which a sufficient number of theme-based courses are offered and assessed. The target completion of spring semester 2015 will allow the program to continue to develop in 2013-14, and operate as a full pilot in 2014-15, with assessment of its effectiveness following.

Q:

Describe how various members of the learning community will participate in this action project. Show the breadth of involvement by individuals and groups over the project's duration.

- A:** Faculty members from every department within the College of Arts and Sciences have participated in the development of theme courses and curricula. Some faculty members from other colleges with themerelevant expertise and interests also have participated in the themes initiative. The following themes are in various stages of development. Several themes are fairly well-developed and will be ready for implementation in Fall 2014. Multiple departments and programs are involved in each of the themes, promoting interdisciplinary faculty collaboration and learning opportunities for students.
- Conflict and Cooperation
 - Making and Breaking the Law
 - Sustainability
 - Food Studies
 - Wealth and Poverty
 - Love and Hate: Gender, Race, and Sexuality
 - Knowing the Future
 - So, You Want to Change the World: Ideals and Engagement
 - From Fire to iPhone: The Technological Human
 - Becoming Human
 - A Sense of Place

Q:

Describe how the institution will monitor project progress/success during, and at the completion of this project. Be sure to specifically state the measures that will be evaluated and when.

A: There is no “one size fits all” model for the themes. Each theme will have its own structure and organization. Students could start with a freshman/sophomore level course designed to introduce a theme and its complexity. This course would be designed and taught by a team of faculty who provide multidisciplinary perspectives. Students would be given opportunities to develop fundamental academic skills such as critical thinking, writing, oral communication, quantitative literacy and information literacy within the context of the theme.

Mastery of content knowledge or a particular skill would not be the goal of the course, but rather, consciousness-raising about the complexity of the theme, promoting intellectual curiosity about the course content, setting standards for intellectual engagement and preparing students for theme-related courses embedded within departmental curricula. Assessments of these objectives are being developed.

Following the completion of the introductory theme course, students would enroll in disciplinary courses related to the theme. These courses would elaborate on theme-relevant content knowledge and skills. Ideally, these theme-relevant courses would be spread across the natural sciences, social sciences, the arts and humanities. Analysis of enrollment patterns of a cohort of students would be one way to monitor the desired effect of curricular themes.

A culminating experience could be provided by a junior/senior level multidisciplinary course, where students further elaborate their theme-related content knowledge and skills. This course could be designed as a seminar, or team-oriented project course, or theme related capstone. The goal of the course would be moving students past an appreciation of the problems related to the theme to critical analysis and problem solutions. Course activities would support these goals. Additional opportunities to develop core skills (team building, critical thinking, writing, oral communication, quantitative literacy and information literacy) would be part of the course.

Outcomes assessments of this culminating experience are being developed.

An outcome of the curricular theme experience will be that students will be better able to articulate how the

breadth requirement contributed to their educational experience in concrete terms. Analysis of subsequent

enrollment patterns of a cohort of students beginning the curricular themes experience will reveal the extent

to which students chose to pursue the expanded curricular offerings. Interviews and/or surveys, along with course-embedded assessments, will help inform whether the curricular themes project has met its goal.

Q:

Describe the challenges that may be encountered in successfully completing the project or for institutionalizing the learning from the project’s goals.

A: A particular strength of the themes initiative is its flexibility in the different curricular models and options that faculty leaders and group members are utilizing to promote student learning and engagement. This flexibility also presents some challenges in assessing the curricular themes initiative as a whole and institutionalizing the learning from the project’s goals. Themes leaders are engaged in discussion of how to balance the unique qualities and approaches of particular themes with coordination of efforts across the themes groups.

Team teaching offers an important avenue to create and deliver interdisciplinary themes courses. Faculty members involved in the themes initiative are sharing ideas and pedagogical strategies for successful team-teaching and student learning. Beyond pedagogical issues, important questions for sustaining and growing the themes initiative include: How will team teaching be funded, rewarded, and recognized?

A stable resource base is needed for continuing development and institutionalization of the themes, including resources for curricular development and teaching, co-curricular activities, and administrative support.

Additional challenges include identifying and implementing effective strategies to identify students who are interested in participating in theme, in tracking student involvement in themes courses and activities, and in assessing student learning and satisfaction in themes courses and co-curricular activities.

As noted above, the curricular themes initiative currently involves all departments and programs in Arts & Sciences, with increasing involvement of additional colleges and academic and non-academic units. An important challenge is to continue to broaden themes involvement and leadership more fully across the university.

Q:

Provide any additional information that the institution wishes reviewers to understand regarding this Action Project.

A: This project was migrated from the previous set of Action Project questions.

Concluding Report

Q:

What is the primary reason for closing this project?

A: The identified goals of this revised action project have been met, including:

1) A proposal was developed for a Themes in Action experimental course, with individual course sections framed around key questions and issues of the curricular themes initiative, and the experimental course proposal was submitted to the College of Arts & Sciences Curriculum Committee.

2) Overarching learning objectives for the Themes in Action classes were collaboratively developed, and pedagogical approaches and assessment strategies were shared.

3) Themes in Action classes were offered each semester over the time period allowed by the university for experimental classes. During this period, Themes in Action instructors met each semester to discuss course design, pedagogical methods, course assessments and student learning.

4) Learning outcomes and student feedback on the Themes in Action classes were evaluated.

5) Themes in Action instructors overwhelmingly agreed on the value of offering this class, and Themes in Action has been proposed as a permanent course offering at the university.

Q:

What aspects of this project would you categorize as successful?

A: In addition to meeting the identified goals for this revised action project, noted above, further benefits of the Themes in Action courses have been described by the Themes in Action instructors and the students who have taken these classes. For example, a broadly-based benefit identified for these courses is that they “take up where freshmen learning communities leave off,” offering students opportunities to attend events and participate in activities together, to discuss the activities in relation to theme questions and issues in group settings, and to provide feedback to one another (whether in person or

through electronic discussion boards and other communication avenues). These opportunities are especially important given the residential nature of the Athens campus.

Q:

What aspects of this project would you categorize as less than successful?

A: The challenges -- as well as the opportunities -- of implementing this revised action project mirror the challenges and opportunities of the Curricular Themes initiative in which the Themes in Action courses are situated. Since its inception approximately four years ago, the Curricular Themes initiative has garnered increased student and faculty engagement, with more opportunities for interdisciplinary efforts and more opportunities for community engagement beyond the university. At the same time, a continuing challenge has been to implement effective communication avenues to help new and continuing students learn what the Curricular Themes are and how to get involved with them. With regard to this revised action project specifically, we have been working to help get the word out to students about the new Themes in Action courses, including flyers listing the Themes courses sent each semester to academic advisors at the university, prior to the start of the advising period. Additional communication avenues are being pursued to help get the word out about Themes more effectively to students, faculty, and staff at the university, including information disseminated at new student orientations, announcements about themes courses and events published in university and college electronic newsletters, including student-focused newsletters, an “Ohio University ThemeIt App” (see <https://www.ohio.edu/cas/themeITapp/index.cfm>), the formation of student clubs around Themes, with outreach efforts to other students, and more.

As a final note, we thank the HLC reviewers for previous comments on this revised action project. A reviewer had noted that:

“The only concern raised by this project is the following statement: ‘Each instructor is responsible for designing the specific course objectives, readings, class activities, and assignments for their section; evaluating students’ participation in course-related events and activities and completion of assignments; and assigning course credit. At the instructor’s discretion, class meetings may take place in a seated, online, or blended format. An initial list of scheduled events and activities are distributed by the instructor to their students at the start of the semester, with subsequent events/activities announced as these are scheduled over the course of the semester.’

It is good that there are a couple objectives that are shared across all theme courses, but each theme should have its own specific and measurable course objectives. These objectives should be assessed independent of who is teaching the course. It is also concerning that faculty have the discretion to change the sections delivery format. Students should know how a section is delivered, prior to enrollment.”

In response to this concern, we wish to clarify:

1) In addition to the shared learning objectives described in the action project report, the classes **do** include additional learning outcomes specific to the relevant theme (per the sentence above: “Each instructor is responsible for designing the specific course objectives...”). For example, the Themes in Action: Wealth & Poverty class also includes learning objectives related to describing and analyzing patterns of inequality in our society, locally and around the world; and discussing how knowledge related to wealth, poverty and inequality can be transformed into social action. Thus far, the same instructors have been offering the Theme in Action classes in the experimental format. These classes are now being proposed as permanent course offerings, with learning outcomes specified for each course, regardless of instructor.

2) Students **do** know how the course sections are delivered, prior to enrollment. Here is a sample entry from the registrar’s site for CAS 1300X Sustainability in Action (this information is shown when students are reviewing course options and selecting their courses):

Sustainability in Action introduces students to the Sustainability Studies Theme and offers students an opportunity for self-directed participation in extracurricular activities focused on sustainable solutions. Over the course of the semester, students will participate in seven campus/community events and activities such as public lectures, film screenings, and workshops and events offered through the OU Office of Sustainability. Sustainability in Action is a one-credit online course; no classroom attendance is required.

Link 1: [Ohio University ThemeIT App](https://www.ohio.edu/cas/themeITapp/index.cfm)
<https://www.ohio.edu/cas/themeITapp/index.cfm>

Concluding Review

Q:

Do you have any final thoughts or feedback for this institution in regards to this project? Enter N/A if not applicable.

A: The University has made substantial progress and revised the project to meet need. Although the University believes the impact of the project has not yet been fully developed, these projects take time due to the number of stakeholders involved. Good work on staying the course.

Project: Curricular Themes

Version 1.0 - Project

Q:

What is the current status of your project?

A: Completed

Q:

Please indicate the original project start date, original project end date, and anticipated completion date if project is not completed. Please list dates on separate lines.

A: Answer: Original Project Start Date: Academic year 2014-15
Original Project Completion Date: August 24, 2015
Completion Date: September 30, 2016

Q:

Briefly describe the current status of the project. Explain how this project relates to any strategic initiatives or challenges described in the institution's most recent or soon-to-be submitted systems portfolio, if applicable.

A: HLC feedback on this action project indicated that, given the breadth of the curricular themes initiative and the different stages of development across the eight current themes^[1], it may be helpful to develop a more discrete, stand alone action project within this initiative. As part of the discussion of this feedback, the curricular themes faculty leaders identified an unmet need to promote student engagement and learning from the co-curricular university activities and community opportunities that are offered each semester by the curricular themes groups or otherwise relate to these areas of inquiry. Prior to this action project, options for integrating optional co-curricular and community activities with a purposeful approach to promoting student learning may or may not have been incorporated within an existing course (often, such opportunities may be offered as extra credit, but may not be integrated within a course). Further, many of the students who participate in these events and activities may or may not be enrolled in a theme-related course or have space available in their schedules to add an additional 3-credit hour course that would offer opportunities for discussion and reflection upon these events and activities and their relation to broader topics and questions within the academic community. From this discussion, theme leaders decided to develop a new, 1-credit course to be offered initially on an experimental basis, entitled "Themes in Action." Specific information about this course in relation to the action project goals and the project accomplishments are detailed below.

The curricular themes initiative is intended to encourage curricular innovation and student success. As faculty from different departments, programs and colleges come together to develop a theme, they share ideas for interdisciplinary approaches to course content, collaboration, team teaching and the integration of extracurricular activities into a coherent educational experience. Moreover, they also have the opportunity to think about how the existing courses that will continue to fulfill the majority of a student's distribution requirements may relate in meaningful ways. Any member of the university community, irrespective of college, is encouraged to participate in the development of the themes. We want to take advantage of all the University's resources to create the best educational experience for students possible.

Ohio University desires to be innovative and contemporary in its curricular offerings. The curricular themes initiative seeks to provide students with a broad but integrated range of opportunities for building the critical skills and knowledge they need for successful careers, engaged citizenship, and fulfilling lives. Ohio University faculty are building interdisciplinary and team-taught courses involving collaborative discussions about course design and pedagogical strategies.

In addition to their interdisciplinary and collaborative qualities as curricular theme classes, the Themes in Action (CAS 1300X) classes also provide a unique curricular offering for students at Ohio University. These courses provide students with an introduction to a selected curricular theme through hands-on participation in university and/or community events related to the theme, and include discussion and reflective assignments on these events.

[1] The eight current curricular themes are:

- Between Love and Hate
- Fire to iPhone: The Technological Human
- Food Studies
- Knowing the Future
- Making and Breaking the Law
- Sustainability Studies
- War and Peace
- Wealth and Poverty

Q:

List the project goals as stated in the original project declaration along with the metrics/measures for assessing the progress for each goal.

A: A central goal of the curricular themes initiative is to provide a vehicle for revitalizing student understanding and enthusiasm for Ohio University's breadth of knowledge

requirements while improving the coherence of the curriculum. Students will be better able to appreciate the value of the breadth requirement because they will be building a more sophisticated understanding of the issues and challenges addressed by the theme. The course offerings associated with a theme can be used by a student as a registration guide, which should yield a superior approach to selecting courses that fulfill existing breadth of knowledge requirements. Curricular offerings developed for the themes include student internships, externships, research opportunities, and other forms of experiential learning and interaction. In addition to course offerings, internships, externships, and service learning opportunities, the Themes in Action classes are organized explicitly around themes-related events offered each semester to the university and local community, including speaker series, panels, workshops, film screenings, guest lectures; community engagement opportunities, and more.

Experimental course format. Of particular interest in offering “Themes in Action” in an experimental course format is the opportunity for instructors to take varying approaches in developing their themed sections (e.g., online versus seated class meetings; different types of assignments; different approaches to evaluating students’ engagement and performance in the class), while utilizing the same set of overarching student learning objectives. The group of instructors who have offered Themes in Action classes have been meeting each semester to discuss and evaluate the different approaches they have utilized in designing and implementing their theme sections.

Specifically, project goals to the Themes in Action courses were identified as:

- a) Develop a proposal for a Themes in Action experimental course, to be framed around key questions and issues of the curricular themes initiative, and submit the experimental course proposal to the College of Arts & Sciences Curriculum Committee;
- b) Create Themes in Action syllabi, collaboratively developing shared learning objectives across the Themes in Action course sections, in addition to section-specific learning objectives, and identifying university co-curricular and community activities available for students in the relevant Themes in Action course sections;
- c) Offer experimental Themes in Action classes each semester, for the time period allowed by the university (approved experimental courses can be offered up to two years; after two years, the courses are to be proposed as permanent course offerings or discontinued). During this period, Themes in Action instructors will meet each semester to discuss course design, pedagogical methods, course assessments and student learning;
- d) Assess learning outcomes and evaluate student feedback on the Themes in Action classes;
- e) Decide whether to propose Themes in Action as a permanent course offering at the university.

Q:

Describe what has been accomplished with this project over the past year, specifically referring to quantifiable results that show progress. You may need to include a discussion clarifying how the original goals and anticipated outcomes may have shifted during the year.

- A:** a) **Project goal:** Develop a proposal for a Themes in Action experimental course, with individual course sections to be framed around key questions and issues of the curricular

themes initiative, and submit the experimental course proposal to the College of Arts & Sciences Curriculum Committee.

Project accomplishments: During late spring and early summer, 2015, leaders of five of the curricular themes (Food Studies; Making & Breaking the Law; Sustainability Studies; War & Peace; Wealth & Poverty) discussed HLC feedback on the original curricular themes action project and developed an experimental course proposal for the 1-credit hour Themes in Action course. The proposal was approved by the College of Arts & Sciences Curriculum Committee.

Below is the CAS 1300X Themes in Action course description contained in the experimental course proposal, along with specific descriptions for each of the themed CAS 1300X sections.

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CAS 1300X: Themes in Action Course Description

This new 1-credit hour course focuses on key questions and topics related to a selected curricular theme. The five participating theme groups, to date, are: Food Studies; Making and Breaking the Law; Sustainability Studies; War and Peace; Wealth and Poverty. Throughout the course, students engage in a series of campus and/or community events and activities associated with the designated theme (e.g., lectures, film series, field trips, workshops, community service opportunities), and discuss/reflect on these events and activities in their respective Themes in Action class section.

Each instructor is responsible for designing the specific course objectives, readings, class activities, and assignments for their section; evaluating students' participation in course-related events and activities and completion of assignments; and assigning course credit. At the instructor's discretion, class meetings may take place in a seated, online, or blended format. An initial list of scheduled events and activities are distributed by the instructor to their students at the start of the semester, with subsequent events/activities announced as these are scheduled over the course of the semester.

CAS 1300X Themes in Action course sections

- CAS 1300X 100 Themes in Action: **War and Peace**

This course explores the contemporary issues of international security and peace. Students

study and critically think about topics such as terrorism, cybersecurity, weapons of mass destruction, intelligence, conflict resolution and peacebuilding. In each class session, through conversations with professors and other experts, students also have the opportunity to explore careers related to international security and to take an active part in conversations surrounding matters of human security and national security.

- CAS 1300X 101 Themes in Action: **Wealth and Poverty**

This course offers students an introduction to issues related to wealth, poverty and inequality. The course is designed to provide students with opportunities to actively participate in learning environments beyond the traditional classroom and to help them develop empathy for the poor and disadvantaged as they learn. Students are expected to attend, participate in, and contribute to a series of academic events and activities inside and outside the campus, hosted or (co)sponsored by the Wealth and Poverty Theme. The Theme provides an interdisciplinary exploration that addresses the growing challenges of inequality and poverty in our society, locally and around the world. This course encourages students to ask: Why is there inequality in this world? What is the cost of growing inequality? What should be done about growing inequality? How could we fight poverty together in our community?

- CAS 1300X 102 Themes in Action : **“Edible Athens”/ Know Your Local Food System**

Edible Athens offers students an introduction to the Athens’ food scene on and off campus. It asks students to think about their individual food choices and to understand how what they choose to put on their plate is connected in many ways to the immediate Athens and university communities and to the wider world. Over the course of the semester, students choose to attend, and post on-line their reflections upon, seven food-related activities and events. Lectures, farmers markets visits, composting tours, food pantry service opportunities and 30 mile meal preparation (and consumption!) are examples of the menu of events from which students can choose. Students will also read Ben Hewitt’s 2010 chronicle of Hardwick, Vermont, *The Town That Food Saved*.

- CAS 1300X 103 Themes in Action: **Making and Breaking the Law**

What are the challenges of law and justice in the 21st century? The Center for Law, Justice & Culture is offering this special one-credit course to introduce students to law in relation to society, culture, politics and power. The course consists of self-directed participation in a

series of extracurricular activities across the semester. Students read a common text and attend a series of CLJC events including public lectures, film screenings, professional development panels, and workshops. Students write critical reflection papers on seven events and submit them online. The events deal with central questions about law, justice, social change, human rights, globalization, and technology in the contemporary world. The course is designed for freshmen to senior students from all majors. It provides a strong foundation for further courses in the Making and Breaking the Law theme, and it trains students to think critically about the role of law in our everyday lives.

- CAS 1300X 104 Themes in Action: **Sustainability**

This course introduces students to the Sustainability Studies Theme and offers students an opportunity to explore sustainable solutions. Over the course of the semester, students 1) participate in seven campus and community events and activities, such as helping to build a brick pizza oven at the Ecohouse, participating in the recycled Halloween costume exchange, 2) learn about sustainable gift giving, 3) engage in a variety of hands-on applied workshops and 4) attend sustainability-related films, lectures, and community events such as the Paw Paw Festival.

b) **Project goal:** Collaboratively develop overarching learning objectives for the Themes in Action classes and share pedagogical approaches and assessment strategies.

Project accomplishments: Two overarching learning objectives were identified for the Themes in Action sections:

1. identify key questions, topics and concerns related to the selected curricular theme; and
2. articulate conceptual and substantive connections between theme-related questions and topics and the information gained through university and/or community activities.

Themes leaders also shared ideas for the pedagogical approaches they planned to utilize in their experimental course sections (e.g., seated, blended, or online course formats); collaborative opportunities for the students (e.g., discussion boards in Blackboard for online course sections); the types of university co-curricular and community activities to be identified as options for students to select from; the types of assignments to be made; and how the assignments would be assessed. An example Themes in Action syllabus is appended.

c) **Project goal:** Offer experimental Themes in Action classes each semester , for the time period allowed by the university (approved experimental courses can be offered up to two years; after two years, the courses are to be proposed as permanent course offerings or discontinued). During this period, Themes in Action instructors will meet each semester to discuss course design, pedagogical methods, course assessments and student learning.

Project accomplishments:

All five Themes in Action classes described above (#5a) have been offered in each of the three semesters to date, beginning spring, 2015, and the Themes in Action instructors have met as a group each semester. As noted, a central aim of these regular discussions has been for Theme in Action instructors to share ideas and information to promote ongoing improvements in the classes.

d) **Project goal:** Assess learning outcomes and evaluate student feedback on the Themes in Action classes.

Project accomplishments: The regular discussions of Themes in Action instructors included student learning assessment and evaluation of student feedback.

Below is a representative example of student learning assessment provided by a Themes in Action instructor:

I used a rubric which measures the degree to which students connected their reflections and analysis to the concepts outlined in the prompts, found in the readings and in other activities. In addition, I assessed the degree to which the student work showed critical thinking, and the degree to which students successfully communicated their ideas with regard to rhetorical structure, appropriate register, grammar and word choice. The work of 21 students was assessed; 19 met the criteria outlined in the learning outcomes.

Student feedback obtained from end of semester evaluations of the Themes in Action classes has been very positive. Numeric scores for course evaluation items consistently average greater than 4 points on a 5-point scale. Students' comments explain these favorable ratings, including (for example):

A unique class that allows students to experience various activities in the Athens community.

All of the activities were great, and would definitely help anyone who didn't know about our

local food system to learn about and appreciate it. I regret only doing the 6 activities required for completion; I might still do the other activities just for fun and to gain a better appreciation of our local food system. Also, the text has helped me gain a greater understanding of our system here.

The course is engaging, and brings in many fantastic speakers that you get the opportunity to meet.

The course allowed you to explore your own interests within the topic by providing various types of lectures that you could attend.

The writing assignments for each of the events let me organize my thoughts and present them in a structured manner that flowed much better than my notes.

Students have also offered helpful suggestions for improving the classes. A suggestion that emerged across class section concerns the need for more opportunities for class discussion, particularly for Themes in Action classes that are offered online (other Themes in Action sections have been offered as hybrid courses, with both online and face-to-face components). For example, a student in an early offering of the Themes in Action course commented:

The subject matter of the course is one that pleads to be discussed with a group. Since this course is online, there is no time in which students get together to bounce their ideas off one another. This course needs discussion time.

As a result of this type of student feedback, Themes in Action instructors developed more discussion and community-building opportunities for their classes (e.g., discussion boards in Blackboard and more opportunities for students to participate as a group in the university and community activities that are linked with the Themes in Action classes).

a) **Project goal:** Decide whether to propose Themes in Action as a permanent course offering at the university.

Project accomplishments: Themes in Action instructors overwhelmingly agreed on the value of offering this class, for reasons outlined above, and the class will be proposed as a permanent course offering at the university.

Q:

Describe how various members of the learning community have participated in this action project. Show the breadth of involvement by individuals and groups over the project's duration, particularly during the past year.

A:

Broadly, the curricular themes initiative involves all departments and programs in Arts & Sciences, with increasing involvement of additional colleges and academic and non-academic units (e.g., Bobcat Student Orientation, Residence Life, Office of Global Opportunities, Center for Campus and Community Engagement, and more). Each theme has a designated faculty leader or co-leaders, and these individuals meet together monthly as a Themes Steering Committee. Most of the themes groups also now have curriculum committees and/or core faculty committees that meet regularly. In addition, student clubs have formed around some of the themes (e.g., Food Studies; Making and Breaking the Law). University-wide events also have been offered to promote and share information about the themes initiative. For example, an event that was held to recognize the one-year anniversary of the inception of the themes initiative was attended by more than 120 university colleagues.

The Themes in Action classes build upon themes-related events and activities that are offered each semester to the university and local community, including speaker series, panels, workshops, film screenings, and more. In addition, the Themes in Action classes have provided a very useful avenue to help coordinate efforts and share ideas across the participating themes groups, including new interdisciplinary collaborations around pedagogy and student learning assessment.

Q:

Describe the effect that this project has had on the institution, students, and others in the learning community. What has the institution learned that can be identified as a good practice to use in other aspects of its quality work or from which other institutions might benefit?

A: As noted above, this revised action project is situated within the broader curricular themes initiative at Ohio University. The Themes in Action course is an innovative curricular development framed around co-curricular & community activities to promote student engagement and reflection on twenty-first century questions.

In addition to meeting the identified goals for this revised action project, additional benefits of the Themes in Action courses have been described by the Themes in Action instructors and students who have taken these classes. For example, the theme leader for Food Studies stated:

The Themes in Action: Edible Athens class allows students to explore on their own time the intersection between the community and the academic discipline of food studies. My class offers many community activities for student to choose from, and this is an accessible way for students to learn things that they would not otherwise be exposed to. The class constantly nudges students to think about role of food in their lives and in the world, and

allows them to have this experience and do it with friends, making it a social occasion. The class shows how making a meal can be elevated and directed to a greater purpose, and that is supporting local food production.

More broadly, Themes in Action instructors have noted that the course “takes up where freshmen learning communities leave off,” offering students opportunities to attend events and participate in activities together, to discuss the activities in relation to theme questions and issues in group settings, and to provide feedback to one another (whether in person or through electronic discussion boards and other communication avenues). These opportunities are especially important given the residential nature of the Athens campus.

Q:

Describe the anticipated challenges that may be encountered in successfully completing the project or for institutionalizing the learning from the project’s goals.

A:

The opportunities and challenges of institutionalizing this revised action project mirror the opportunities and challenges of the Curricular Themes initiative in which the Themes in Action courses are situated. Since its inception three years ago, the Curricular Themes initiative has garnered increased student and faculty engagement, with more opportunities for interdisciplinary efforts and more opportunities for community engagement beyond the university. At the same time, a continuing challenge has been to implement effective communication avenues to help new and continuing students learn what the Curricular Themes are and how to get involved with them. For example, a recent survey of students in Arts & Sciences found that approximately one-third of the respondents reported that they had heard about Themes. Multiple communication avenues are being pursued to help get the word out more effectively to students, faculty, and staff at the university, including information disseminated at new student orientations, announcements about themes courses and events published in university and college electronic newsletters, including student-focused newsletters, an “Ohio University ThemeIt App” (see <https://www.ohio.edu/cas/themeItApp/index.cfm>), the formation of student clubs around Themes, including outreach efforts to other students, and more.

Link 1: [Ohio University ThemeIt App](https://www.ohio.edu/cas/themeItApp/index.cfm)
<https://www.ohio.edu/cas/themeItApp/index.cfm>

Q:

In light of the project goals, current circumstances, institutional learning from this project, and anticipated barriers to success, list the next steps to be taken over the course of the next 12 - 24 months in order to complete or institutionalize the results of this action project. Provide a timeline for completing each next step.

A:

N/A. Recommendation for this action project to be retired.

Q:

Provide any additional information, inquiries, or concerns that the institution wishes reviewers to understand regarding this Action Project. Enter N/A if not applicable.

A: While this revised action project was developed in response to the HLC recommendation to develop a more discrete, stand alone action project within the Themes initiative, we wish to note that an evaluation of the broader Curricular Themes initiative has also been undertaken. This evaluation was conducted beginning Spring, 2016, by Dr. Leslie Johnson and her team from the Voinovich School at Ohio University, at the request of the College of Arts & Sciences. A draft report was forwarded to the college in August, 2016, and the final report is expected shortly.

Version 1.0 - Update

Q:

I certify that this project is ready for review.

A: I agree.

Version 1.0 - Review

Q:

Please comment on anything that is omitted or incomplete in the project status, dates and summary field. Enter N/A if not applicable.

A: N/A

Q:

Check for accuracy and completeness against the original Project Declaration. Are the right metrics or measures included for each goal? If not, what revisions to the metrics/measures would you suggest that the institution consider?

A: This update/close-out is accurate based on changes that were made to make the project more manageable. All metrics and measures were appropriate and completed.

Q:

Has the institution acted in meaningful ways to pursue project success, making progress as anticipated in the original project declaration? If meaningful progress or project success has not been achieved, has the institution made appropriate revisions

to the goals or anticipated outcomes for this project? • Are descriptions of resources, organization, concrete results, and reaching milestones included? • Make a statement of global judgment. (i.e. “The institution is making [excellent/good/satisfactory/acceptable/slow/ casual/no] progress in this action project.”).

A: OU made satisfactory progress on this action project. All metrics were accomplished and the project has been closed.

Q:

Are the appropriate people involved sufficiently for the nature and scope of the project?

- **Is there sufficient breadth of involvement?**
- **Are the right people involved? • Emphasize the roles of those who can enhance the impact, success, or effectiveness of the project.**
- **Tactfully call attention to any people that appear to have been omitted or bypassed.**

A: This was a faculty led curriculum project, with sufficient breadth of involvement. No stakeholder groups appear to have been omitted or bypassed.

Q:

Does the institution show evidence of learning from what it did well?

- **Acknowledge any practice that could be replicated internally in future projects.**
- **Encourage the sharing of best practices with other institutions.**

A: This project was a good example of interdisciplinary curriculum development and delivery. This model could be used in other areas of the institution as well.

Q:

Does the institution have a realistic understanding of what it needs to address in order to achieve progress and, ultimately, project success? Does it assess its internal and external environments, recognizing the potential forces that could hinder success? Is anything overlooked?

A: This project is complete. The only concern raised by this project is the following statement:

"Each instructor is responsible for designing the specific course objectives, readings, class activities, and assignments for their section; evaluating students' participation in course-related events and activities and completion of assignments; and assigning course credit. At the instructor's discretion, class meetings may take place in a seated, online, or blended format. An initial list of scheduled events and activities are distributed by the

instructor to their students at the start of the semester, with subsequent events/activities announced as these are scheduled over the course of the semester."

It is good that there are a couple objectives that are shared across all theme courses, but each theme should have its own specific and measurable course objectives. These objectives should be assessed independent of who is teaching the course. It is also concerning that faculty have the discretion to change the sections delivery format. Students should know how a section is delivered, prior to enrollment.

Q:

Does the institution understand the current status of its project and know how it intends to pursue project success?

A: This project has been closed.

Q:

Overall, does the institution demonstrate a good faith effort in its pursuit of continuous quality improvement through this action project? Is there anything of concern that should be brought to the attention of AQIP via your mentor?

A: OU demonstrated a good faith effort in pursuit of CQI through this action project. This project has been closed, and there are no concerns, except for the one raised previously.

Comment

- 1: The only concern raised by this project is the following statement:
"Each instructor is responsible for designing the specific course objectives, readings, class activities, and assignments for their section; evaluating students' participation in course-related events and activities and completion of assignments; and assigning course credit. At the instructor's discretion, class meetings may take place in a seated, online, or blended format. An initial list of scheduled events and activities are distributed by the instructor to their students at the start of the semester, with subsequent events/activities announced as these are scheduled over the course of the semester."

Feedback provided:

It is good that there are a couple objectives that are shared across all theme courses, but each theme should have its own specific and measurable course objectives. These objectives should be assessed independent of who is teaching the course. It is also concerning that faculty have the discretion to change the sections delivery format. Students should know how a section is delivered, prior to enrollment.

In response to this concern:

1) In addition to the shared learning objectives described in the action project report, the classes do include additional learning outcomes specific to the relevant theme (per the sentence above: "Each instructor is responsible for designing the specific course objectives..."). For example, the Themes in Action: Wealth & Poverty class also includes learning objectives related to describing and analyzing patterns of inequality in our society, locally and around the world; and discussing how knowledge related to wealth, poverty and inequality can be transformed into social action. Thus far, the same instructors have been offering the Theme in Action classes in the experimental format. These classes are now being proposed as permanent course offerings, with learning outcomes specified for each course, regardless of instructor.

2) Students do know how the course sections are delivered, prior to enrollment. Here is a sample entry from the registrar's site for CAS 1300X Sustainability in Action (this information is shown when students are reviewing course options and selecting their courses):

Sustainability in Action introduces students to the Sustainability Studies Theme and offers students an opportunity for self-directed participation in extracurricular activities focused on sustainable solutions. Over the course of the semester, students will participate in seven campus/community events and activities such as public lectures, film screenings, and workshops and events offered through the OU Office of Sustainability. Sustainability in Action is a one-credit online course; no classroom attendance is required.

Joni Wadley, 2016-12-19