

THEMING YOUR GEN ED COURSE: MOTIVATIONS + BENEFITS

Focusing Gen Ed courses within a thematic area provides students the opportunity to examine an issue through multiple perspectives and disciplines. *University of Illinois, Gen Ed*

THIS PLACE MATTERS: ENGL 1102 / COMPOSITION II

Theme Overview

- Researching the value and significance of historic places, both built and natural
- Writing about why a place matters, from various Areas of Significance (AOS)
- AOS: Architectural, Cultural, Historical, Civil Rights, Religious, Ecological, Engineering/Construction
- *Artifacts: List of Places and PPT/Areas of Significance*

WHY THEME? A PROFESSOR'S PERSPECTIVE

- Aligns course with your interests, knowledge + experience
- Being interested in what you are teaching enhances your teaching
 - Theme > Passion > elevates your energy and impact
- Makes your Gen Ed course unique (among hundreds)
- Builds on your knowledge outside of your field
- Shows students how disciplines intersect
- Instruction goes beyond the required curriculum
 - shows students that your Gen Ed course is not general



WHY THEME? A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

- Learn about a new subject (ENGL 1102: historic preservation, conservation)
- Learn new skills (learning how to analyze historical significance of a place)
- Provides structure and framework for entire semester
- Supports them in choosing a topic (a place in my course)

CREATING A THEME THAT WORKS

- Not too narrow, not too broad
 - Example in 1102: not history, but historic preservation
- Name your theme, be creative!
- Align with your passion and experience
- Be sure you want to keep theme long-term
- Should have a good foundation of knowledge about your theme
 - my theme builds on my career experience in historic preservation, but it also could align with your thesis or dissertation



Historic commercial building, Buena Vista, Colorado

POSSIBLE THEMES FOR GEN ED HUMANITIES

Starting points, will need be more focused

- Music (and society, social movements, etc.)
- Technology
- Health + Wellness
- Science
- Film and tv
- Labor
- Equal Rights/Human Rights/Social Movements
- Sustainability/Conservation/Ecology

FINAL TIPS

- **Talk with colleagues first to test theme ideas, get feedback**
 - This gave me confidence that my theme could work
- **Build new lessons into your course related to theme**
 - I only have a few, but this is needed ... most students do not know about historic preservation or place analysis, areas of significance
- **Consider learning objectives related to theme and explain to students**
 - Ensures that students don't see your theme as random, or just something you enjoy discussing – *connect to skills*
 - ENGL 1102: 1) Learn how to evaluate place through multiple lenses 2) research using primary sources 3) build an argument about why a place should be preserved

AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

- List a few possible themes for your course
- For each one, list a few reasons why you think it would work well
- Open discussion and questions



**THANK
YOU**

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