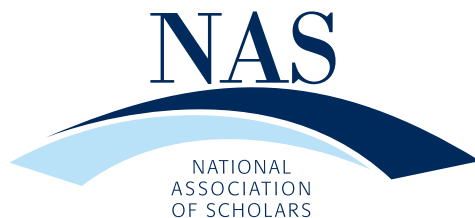


BEACH BOOKS: 2013-2014

What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside Class?



October 2014



A report by the National Association of Scholars' Center for the Study of the Curriculum

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Want Students to Read Outside Class?

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The National Association of Scholars is an independent membership association of academics and others working to foster intellectual freedom and to sustain the tradition of reasoned scholarship and civil debate in America's colleges and universities. The NAS advocates for excellence by encouraging commitment to high intellectual standards, individual merit, institutional integrity, good governance, and sound public policy.

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We publish a quarterly journal, *Academic Questions*, which examines the intellectual controversies and the institutional challenges of contemporary higher education.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Assigning a summer reading to entering freshmen is a growing trend at hundreds of American colleges and universities. Colleges typically pick one book and ask students to read it outside their courses. Many invite the author to help kick off the year by speaking on campus at convocation. The book is often chosen by a committee or by vote. Colleges usually devote several pages of their websites to their common reading programs and promote the reading through social media and school-sponsored events throughout the year. Some associate the book choice with a theme for the academic year, such as “Technology in our lives.”

Most colleges see the key purpose of a common reading program as an opportunity to build community on campus. Many also declare that common reading is important because it sets academic expectations, begins conversations, inspires social activism, and encourages critical thinking.

Of the institutions in our study, 51 ranked among the top 100 National Universities and 28 ranked among the top 100 National Liberal Arts Colleges listed by *U.S. News & World Report*. Some elite colleges, and five of the eight Ivy League institutions, offer common reading.

While there are several databases of common reading assignments, the annual Beach Books reports by the National Association of Scholars are the most comprehensive and are the only ones to categorize the books according to their main subjects and track trends in genres, publication dates, and additional themes.

Our study for the academic year 2013-2014 covers 341 colleges and universities and the 231 books they assigned. We present the results of our study in terms of findings, facts, and gaps.

The Findings

1. Common reading programs are becoming more popular.
2. The list of readings continues to be dominated by recent, trendy, and intellectually unchallenging books.
3. The assigned books frequently emphasize progressive political themes, and the top subject category is multiculturalism.
4. Colleges increasingly see their common reading as exercises in community-building more than student preparation for academic life.
5. A common reading “industry” is emerging, with publishers, authors, and colleges seeking to advance a particular kind of book.

The Facts

1. **Author speaking:** Of the 341 colleges in our study, 231 (68 percent) brought the author to speak on campus. Having the author speak is seen as a priority for common reading programs.
2. **Rationales:** 77 percent of colleges said that the purpose of their common reading programs was to foster “community,” or create “common” or “shared” experiences among those on and near the campus.
3. **Recent:** More than half of common reading assignments (51 percent) were published between 2010 and 2013, and only five books were from before 1900.
4. **Non-fiction:** 72 percent of assignments were memoirs, biographies, essays, and other non-fiction.
5. **Turnover:** 82 percent of this year’s titles are different from last year’s. Some books that were popular a few years ago are now waning or have disappeared. Many new books – some published as recently as the year in which they were assigned – are being introduced.

The Gaps

1. **Classics:** Only four colleges assigned works that could be considered classics. Those were Melville’s short story “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (LeMoyne College), a compilation of Shakespeare’s works (Indiana University, South Bend), the book of Job from the Bible (St. Michael’s College), and Edgar Allen Poe’s *Great Tales and Poems* (University of Wisconsin, Parkside). Other than these exceptions, the hundreds of common reading programs across the country ignored books of lasting merit. Dickens, Dostoevsky, Austen, and Hemingway were not to be found. There was no trace of Twain, Tolstoy, Brontë, Wilde, Hawthorne, Douglass, or Steinbeck. No *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, or even *Catcher in the Rye*.
2. **Fiction:** Only 28 percent of common reading assignments were fictional. While fiction isn’t going away in the larger scheme of contemporary reading, colleges are predisposed against it because they want to show students socially-engaged authors who are active in the real world.
3. **Modern literature:** Even in confining themselves to living authors, colleges neglect some of the best ones, such as Marilynne Robinson, Thomas Pynchon, Wendell Berry, Donna Tart, Tom Wolfe, and Don DeLillo.
4. **History:** Other than a “media package” on the civil rights movement assigned by the

University of Alabama, Birmingham, no colleges assigned any works of history.

5. **Diversity:** There is essentially a common reading genre – inspiring stories, apocalyptic visions, self-assigned projects, identity crises, advice manuals, and curious trends in human behavior – this is the stuff of common reading, and rarely do colleges deviate from these norms.

The most-assigned book, for the third year in a row, is *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. While there were fewer classic books assigned in 2013-2014 than the year before, there were more of what we called “honorable mentions,” books that treat academic subjects (i.e. physics, economics, poetry, philosophy) with depth and detail, as well as others that take an uncharacteristically hopeful view of immigration, hard work, or life’s challenges.

Questioning Common Reading Choices

Recently college administrators and outside observers have been asking questions as to the value of campus common reading programs. President Mitch Daniels canceled the one at Purdue University because it cost about \$75,000 in book purchases and programming and didn’t seem to show that it was accomplishing its goals. A professor at Mississippi State University created an index to calculate which books are the best (and worst) choices for common reading. Over a dozen faculty and staff members from around the country spoke at a national conference for first-year experience leaders on how to make the most of common reading programs. The state legislature in South Carolina voted to cut the budgets of two public institutions because of constituent complaints on the summer reading assignments.

Students also have doubts about the value of common reading programs. While they recognize the potential of the programs to build intellectual community, students are often disappointed to be given an unchallenging book, or a book ostensibly chosen to fulfill a diversity obligation. Some students said that widespread complaining about the book built its own kind of community on campus.

We talked with program coordinators who brought to light three barriers to choosing better books: that many freshmen have never read a book before; that selection committee votes tend to overrule highbrow suggestions; and that universities cannot enforce the reading with a test.

Colleges overwhelmingly pick very recent, non-fiction books for common reading. This comes with the risk of statements in the book turning out to be unsubstantiated, as has been the case in several popular common reading titles.

Recommendations

The National Association of Scholars finds that common reading programs are in principle a good idea. Especially at a time when true core curricula (as opposed to distribution requirements) have by and large

been abolished, a common reading assignment is an excellent opportunity for colleges and universities to inspire students to read great books and foster intellectual friendship on campus. To make the most of this opportunity, the National Association of Scholars offers 12 recommendations for choosing better books:

1. Seek diversity—the intellectual kind.
2. Seek books that are neither too long nor too short.
3. Seek texts that are just a bit over students' heads, but not so far that they are beyond reach.
4. Seek works that are not contemptuous of humanity or dyed in profound cynicism.
5. In fiction, seek works that exemplify elegance of language and a degree of complexity, along with moral seriousness.
6. In nonfiction, seek works that exemplify important ideas lucidly argued and writers who take their rhetorical task seriously.
7. Pay deliberate attention to important books from earlier eras.
8. Consider that the book you choose will be more than a reading for the students. It will also be a public representation of the college's academic standards, values, and reputation.
9. Be wary of assigning any book that all the members of the committee haven't actually read.
10. Consult with others who read widely and well and who are intimately acquainted with good books.
11. Consult outside sources, such as the National Association of Scholars' list (See Appendix IV: Recommended Books for College Common Reading) or the National Endowment for the Arts program The Big Read.
12. Consider pairing new with old.

FOREWORD: THE BONDS OF LIFE

By Anthony Esolen

It has long been observed, by people who care about words and the things they are supposed to signify, that American colleges and universities are misnamed. There is nothing *collegial* about a college: nothing that binds students and professors with one another, with those that came before them, and those that will come after. There is nothing *universal* about a university: no discipline or intellectual enterprise that unites the wide array of what is studied and done there. There are exceptions, of course, but in general the atomism of American life is reflected in the atomism of higher education.

Some colleges have taken what they see as a small step towards forging again those severed bonds of life. They have begun to require all entering freshmen to read one chosen book over the summer. This book is supposed to provide the basis for a “common experience” during freshman orientation and, at some schools, during the fall semester. Some schools invite the author to speak at convocation, so that the students can meet the celebrity behind the words. All of this can be to the good, depending on the book that is chosen.

Yet it seems that most of the books fall into the category of pop sociology, pop psychology, and mass politics. Almost never is a book chosen for its timeless beauty and wisdom, its enduring power to reveal the glory and shame of mankind. And this is strange.

Such books we will always have with us: *I’m OK, You’re OK*; *Looking Out for Number One*; *The Sensuous Woman*. The best of them make quite a little splash, then the ripples settle, and they are forgotten. This is especially true if they are written about a current political controversy – what we are to do about immigration from Mexico, for example, or who ought to pay for a woman’s contraceptives. Their power lies precisely in their severe limitations. If I may change my metaphor, they are like a small stream forced through a very narrow passage. Within those narrow bounds there is noise and violent motion; past the bounds, nothing.

These books cannot do what their proponents want them to do. Their failure is all the more visible and disappointing once we take a step away from the ephemeral. For what we really should be doing is not giving a thousand young people any old “common experience” or other, but ushering a thousand young people into some significant part of *the common experience* of humankind, by means of a work that others before us have cherished, and that others after us will cherish, as long as men can read and eyes can see. We should choose a book that does more than put Joe and Mary in temporary conversation, before the real courses at the college divide them again for good. We should choose a book that puts Joe and Mary in conversation with one another by inviting them into a lasting conversation with Plato, Cicero, Dante, Goethe, Arnold, or Tocqueville, and with all the men and women who have ever learned from



them or ever will. *That is the only bond that is real and enduring.*

Let me give an example from that sad emperor with the heart at peace, Marcus Aurelius, writing from the German frontier:

Words which were once common and ordinary have now become obsolete; so too the names of men who were once famous, they too have become obsolete. Camillus, Cieso, Volesius, Leonatus; and soon also Scipio, Cato, Augustus, Hadrian, and Antoninus Pius: all these too will be out of date, like names from the legends of another world. I say this of such as once shone out as wonders of the world. As for the rest, no sooner have they expired, than so have all their fame and memory also. What is it then that shall be remembered forever? All is vanity. On what then must we bestow our care and diligence? This alone: that our minds and wills be just, our actions charitable, our speech never deceitful, our understanding not subject to error; that we embrace whatever shall happen to us as necessary, as usual, as ordinary, because it comes from that source and fountain from which you yourself and all things have come to be.

Those are the words of a good and grateful man who endured much in the service of Rome. They can never be out of date; they raise us beyond ourselves and our temporary concerns. They are not the last word on this world and its changes, but they may be for our students a splendid *first word* – for, may it be said to our shame, most of them will never have read the like.

If we are moved by those words, which are but meditations, how much more might we be moved by such thoughts and feelings when they are embodied in the finest of human art? We might then stand beside Lear on the heath, crying out against the fates, but also seeing for the first time that he has never really attended to the miseries of the poor; or with Arthur, looking upon the broken and weeping Guinevere, seeing that his attempt to bestow upon his knights his high vision of justice has failed; or with Raskolnikov, flinging himself upon the earth and confessing that he has sinned against all the world. These things cause us to find ourselves by forgetting ourselves. Then, only then, can we begin to come together.

MECHANICS OF COMMON READING PROGRAMS

A college conducting a common reading program chooses one book¹ for the academic year and asks freshmen to read it, often over the summer before the start of the fall semester. The common reading usually serves as an introduction to college life and offers a first impression of the mission and academic intensity of the institution.

Many common reading programs include a full year of preparation for the organizers and require large funds (in the case of Purdue University, which cancelled its reading program in 2014, the budget was over \$75,000²) to cover author visits, the provision of book copies to first-year students, themed events, and salaries of committee members.

Various colleges offer meet-and-greets with book authors, small group sessions, writing workshops, themed dinners, lectures, and film nights. For example, Indiana University at South Bend hosted a year-long celebration of Shakespeare for its “One Book, One Campus.” Another campus of Indiana University (Northwest), which assigned *The House on Mango Street*, held “book discussions, spoken word seminars and contests, writing workshops, and a speaker series focused on building a stronger awareness of the Latino culture.”³

UC Berkeley’s On the Same Page program paused its common reading program for two years to sponsor “Take Your Genes to Cal,” a program in which students were invited to submit to the university their own DNA samples; and “Voices of Berkeley,” which recorded students’ voices for acoustic analysis. Berkeley returned to reading in 2012; for the 2013-2014 academic year, it assigned Turing’s Cathedral for its yearlong theme “The Dawn of the Computer Age.”

A small number of colleges incorporate common reading into freshman seminars and include the book on the syllabus; most, however, make common reading extracurricular. Winona State University (Minnesota) has “faculty adopters” who choose to integrate the book into their courses.

Mandatory or Optional?

While every college with a common reading program would like for the students to read the book, we found only two (Florida International University and The King’s College) that enforce the reading by testing students on it.

1 Each year some institutions assign more than one book, but this is rare. In the 2013-2014 academic year, six colleges and universities chose two or three assignments (some are essays and books of poetry) as common reading: Loras College (Dubuque, Iowa), Stanford University, The King’s College (New York, New York), the University of Alaska at Anchorage, the University of California at Santa Barbara, and the University of Minnesota.

2 Colombo, Hayleigh, “Purdue faculty backs reinstating common reading program,” *JC Online*, April 22, 2014. <http://www.jconline.com/story/news/college/2014/04/21/purdue-faculty-backs-reinstating-common-reading-program/7991125/>.

3 Indiana University Northwest News, News 2013, “Initiative kicks-off at IU Northwest with salsa dancing class, Latino youth discussion on Sept. 25,” <http://iun.edu/news/2013/OneBook-MangoStreet.htm>.

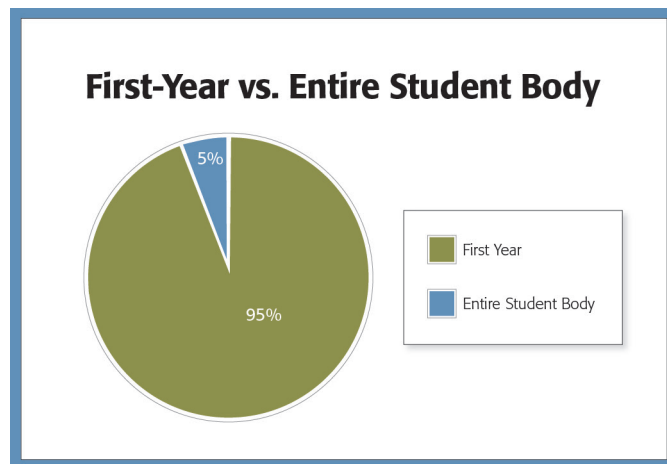
Some others ask students to turn in an essay on the book or ask them to be prepared to discuss it in a small group setting at orientation. Sometimes peer pressure—and the desire to make a good first impression in college—is enough to compel students to read the text, and sometimes not.

Jocelyn Lee, a student at Cornell University ('16), observed, "Although there was no penalty for not completing the essay, I could see in the small group discussion seminar during orientation that, when it came time to turn in our essays, the one girl who didn't have one to hand in seemed mildly uncomfortable."

Most common reading is not enforced with a test or essay and is technically optional. As these programs are usually extracurricular, there is often little incentive to read the book.

Colleges vary in the language they use to indicate that students are "expected," "required," "invited," "encouraged," or "asked" to read the book. Sometimes the webpage for common reading simply says some version of, "You will read the book." Davidson College writes, "All new students need to obtain a copy for themselves and read the selection before the Book Discussion session during orientation."⁴

Common reading programs rely primarily on either an honor system or on the factor of public embarrassment that would result if a student who didn't read the book was called upon to discuss it in a group setting. Even under pressure to be ready for such a discussion, a student could most likely get a feel for the book by reading a summary and skimming a few pages—with no need to read the entire text.



For Freshmen or for All Students?

Most reading programs exist solely for first-year students and serve as an introduction to college life. Of the 341 colleges we surveyed, only 16 colleges clearly stated that the book was intended to be read by the entire student body.

Author Speaking?

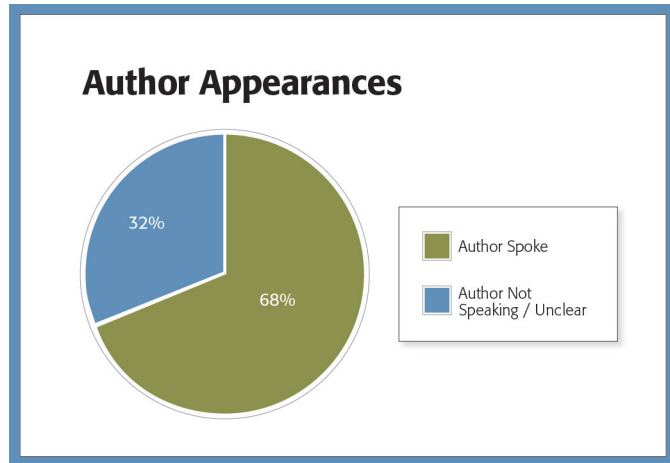
In the criteria listed for choosing a common reading, most programs suggest that committee members should choose a book whose author is living—and not only living, but available to visit.

⁴ Indiana University Northwest News, News 2013, "Initiative kicks-off at IU Northwest with salsa dancing class, Latino youth discussion on Sept. 25," <http://iun.edu/news/2013/OneBook-MangoStreet.htm>.

Of the 341 colleges in our study, 231 (68 percent) brought the author to speak on campus.⁵ The other 110 either did not have the author speak or did not specify one way or the other. Only 5 colleges chose books with non-living authors.

Most often when an author comes to speak he gives one lecture at the beginning of the fall semester

(convocation is the most popular occasion), but he may also host a discussion group or one-on-one session with winners of a common reading essay contest. Sometimes the college chooses the author in part because of his availability and connection to the institution. Agnes Scott College (Georgia), Juniata College (Pennsylvania), Hollins University (Virginia), and others chose books by alumni; and Princeton and Sewanee chose titles by current faculty members.



Choosing the Books

Common reading programs often involve an extended process for selecting the book. The book may be selected either by one person, a committee of several—or several dozen—people, or by a vote open to the wider community of faculty, staff, and students.

At Winona State University administrators, faculty, staff, and students agreed that *Tomatoland* by Barry Estabrook would suit the university's focus on food, agriculture, and sustainability and the yearlong theme, "Civic Action."



Providence College Friar reading *Outliers*
<http://www.providence.edu/news/headlines/Pages/Outliers-chosen-as-Freshman-Common-Reading-Book.aspx>

Every year at the University of Maine honors college, upper-class students enrolled in a course called "Honors 309: The Honors Tutorial" choose the book for incoming students to read the following year.

Some common reading choices are made by individuals acting alone. Randall Balmer, Professor of the Arts and Sciences and Chair of Religion at Dartmouth, was asked by the dean to choose the university's new student reading.

At Princeton University, incoming president Christopher L. Eisgruber made an executive decision on

⁵ Blake Mycoskie, author of *Start Something that Matters*, had to cancel his appearance at Coastal Carolina University due to a freak snowstorm.

the text for the Princeton Pre-Read. Ironically, he wanted to avoid classic books specifically because he believed such books would check the free flow of ideas. One of the criteria that president Eisgruber included in the list he gave to faculty members when soliciting ideas was: "The book should be something that students can argue with and about; for this reason, I'm inclined to avoid 'classics' that students might feel obliged to venerate."

Eisgruber also desired that the book be one that raises "the question of how one lives a meaningful life."

The University of Louisville's criteria for its book are typical; they include "readability," "relatability to students," potential to encourage community engagement, and potential to promote critical thinking. The determination of whether a book meets these standards is left up to the interpretation of the committee members. The guidelines suggest that the book's length should not exceed 300 pages.

Names

Most common reading programs have similar names and are simply called "Common Reading Program" or "First-Year Summer Reading." Some find more creative monikers: On the Same Page (University of California-Berkeley), Preface (University of South Carolina-Upstate), First Year Enlightenment (Lafayette College), Macreads (Macalester College in Minnesota), The Chancellor's Reading Club (Fayetteville State University).

Social Media

In recent years, colleges have used social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and blogs to spread information about their common reading programs. Some colleges ask students to contribute to online forums such as Blackboard. Over the summer, students "get to know" their classmates by participating in discussion groups and answering study questions on the texts.



Molloy College Students reading *Outcasts United*

<http://www.molloy.edu/academics/first-year-experience/common-reading-program>



Sam Houston State Students reading *The Power of Habit*

http://www.shsu.edu/~pin_www/T@S/sliders/2013/powerofhabit.html



California State Northridge's 2014-2015 common reading book is *The Postmortal*

<http://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/academic-first-year-experiences/common-read>

Most colleges have dedicated web pages which include promotional videos, photographs, and updates.

There is also a website, "CommonRead," which serves as a general resource page for common reading programs everywhere.

Many colleges promote their books by posting pictures of students reading them at the beach or at landmarks around the world during summer vacation.



CommonReads Facebook Page
<https://www.facebook.com/commonreads>

Institution Name	Year Theme
Adelphi University	Changing the Nature of War and Peace
Albion College	Sustainability
Appalachian State University	Muslim Journeys
Barry University	Reclaiming Community from a Culture of Violence
Belmont Abbey College	The Quest for What Lasts/The Grace of the Unexpected
Belmont University	E Pluribus Unum: Dialogue in the Digital Age
University of California, Berkeley	Computer Age
Emmanuel College (Massachusetts)	Academic Integrity
Florida Southern College	Civilization and Environment
Georgia College	Diversity
Hiram College	Ability and Disability (Annual Ethics Theme)
Indiana University, South Bend	Much Ado About Will: 450 Years and Counting!
Indiana University, Southeast	Public and Private Ethics: Who Decides?
Linfield College	Legacies of War
Otterbein College	Journeys
Rockhurst University	<i>Magis</i> (Latin for "more," "better," or "for the greater glory of God")
Saint Mary's College of California	MAKING... ⁶
Spokane Falls Community College	Of Living and Dying: Profit, Politics, and Power
St. Edwards University	Expanding Human Rights
Stanford University	Home
Susquehanna University	Technology in Our Lives
The King's College	Justice and Mercy
University of Alaska, Anchorage	Information, Ideas, Ideology: Shaping Your Reality
University of California, Davis	September 11
University of Pennsylvania	Year of Sound
Webster University	Year in International Human Rights: Disability Rights
Winona State University	Civic Action

Yearlong Themes

Some colleges connect their common reading programs with a yearlong theme that is incorporated into campus events or curricula. This year, social justice and ethics were prominent among the themes we observed associated with common reading.

MARKETING THE BOOKS: THE BIRTH OF A NEW LITERARY GENRE

Common reading books have become a genre in themselves. Several contemporary authors have built their careers by taking advantage of the market for college summer reading books, and a variety of publishers specifically promote books as candidates for college common reading programs.

The Facebook page for the website CommonReads displays photos of authors who are major players in this genre. Photo albums on the page include pictures from Random House's annual First-Year Experience Author Luncheon and from the University of South Carolina's annual convention on the First-Year Experience. The authors seem to have developed a network, and the web page cites them as "favorite authors," acknowledging specifically that these are CommonRead writers.

Authors

Rebecca Skloot, author of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, the most-assigned common reading for the third year in a row, advertises on her website that nearly 150 colleges, universities, and high schools have chosen her book for "One City, One Book" programs. In the 2013-2014 academic year, 13 institutions chose *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, and in the 2012-2013 year, 31 institutions selected it. Most of Rebecca Skloot's speaking schedule is filled with lectures at colleges, universities, and high schools, and her book appears as a recommended text on Random House's First-Year Experience resource pages.



Rebecca Skloot's website
<http://rebeccaskloot.com/faq>

One reason that colleges choose this particular book is its commodification. The author has made a career of speaking about her book, especially at colleges and universities. Rebecca Skloot and members

⁶ St. Mary's elaborates on this theme by saying:

"The First Year Experience (FYE) theme for 2013-2014, 'MAKING...,' engages you to think about the life you will be MAKING at Saint Mary's College. What path will you forge in your next four years? How will you MAKE the most of your college experience? How will you MAKE a difference? What will you be MAKING?"

of the Lacks family travel extensively to promote the book and discuss its themes. Skloot has developed a presentation to deliver wherever she goes. She has also created videos, a teacher's guide, and even a jeopardy game as part of the teaching resources accompanying the book.

The second most assigned book this year was *This I Believe*, an essay collection edited by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman. The book was assigned by 11 institutions and this year surpassed *The Other Wes Moore*, which was the second most assigned book in 2012-2013. *This I Believe*, which gathers together some of the essays National Public Radio solicited from listeners willing to share their core.

The original program director, Edward Morgan, described the show as a “non-religious” program, and the

Radio Luxembourg version of the show in 1956-1958 was described as “the human drama programme telling of faith in times of trouble and adversity,” and “the programme that brings you human drama and tells the story of people where courage and belief form an integral part of their life.”⁷

Despite dropping to third place in the most widely-assigned books competition, Wes Moore, author of *The Other Wes Moore*, has had great success marketing his book to colleges. In the 2013-2014 year, Moore's book was chosen by 9 institutions, and in the 2012-2013 year, Moore's book was chosen by 18 institutions.

Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, authors of *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (assigned by 5 colleges), have created a “movement” that aims to “create a fairer, freer, safer world for women and girls.” To spread their message, the authors visit colleges and universities around the country. On their website, they have created a Half the Sky video game that Facebook users can play to learn more about oppression of women around the world.

Other prominent common reading authors include Doc Hendley, author of *Wine to Water* (assigned six times in 2013-2014), Conor Grenan, author of *Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal* (assigned six times), Kristen Iversen, author of *Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the*



This I Believe's website
<http://thisibelieve.org/>



Wes Moore's website
<http://theotherwesmoore.com/>

7 “This I Believe,” Nation Master, Encyclopedia, <http://www.statemaster.com/encyclopedia/This-I-Believe>.

Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats (assigned five times), and Mark Haddon, author of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime* (assigned four times).

Conference on the First-Year Experience

Many common reading authors advertise their work at the University of South Carolina's Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience (FYE), an event now in its 34th year, with about 2,000 attendees representing over 600 institutions.

At the 2014 FYE conference, common reading programs were central in fourteen sessions⁸, including:

- "Debating the Value of Common Reading Programs" – responding to articles that "have criticized these programs"
- "Twenty Years of the First Year Reading Experience" – with University of South Carolina
- "Common Sense and Uncommon Data in Common Reading Programs" – with Mississippi State University
- "Making the Common Reading Experience Come to Life: A Narrative" – with University of Kentucky and author Kelsey Timmerman (*Where Am I Wearing?*)
- "Common Reading Selections for Institutions with Food or Sustainability Themes" – led by Melville House Publishers Director of Library and Academic Marketing, will suggest two books for sustainability and food themes. "Everyone who attends this session will receive a copy of each book and accompanying teaching guides."
- "Creating a First-Year Experience Page-Turner: A Common Reading Initiative" – with St. Ambrose University
- "When the Book Becomes the Departure Point: Common Reading Programming" – with Washington State University
- "Developing an Exciting Common Reading Program" – with Columbus State University
- "Creating a Sustainable Common Reading Program" – with Kansas State University
- "Required Reading? Integrating Your Common Text Into the First-Year Curriculum"
- "Shaping the Debate about Common Reading Programs" – presenting three scenarios to help coordinators defend their book choices
- "One Book, A Million Possibilities: Why Common Reading Collaborations Work" – three Kentucky universities discuss their collaboration⁹

8 At least four of these sessions cite the National Association of Scholars' Beach Books report.

9 33rd Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience, Conference Program, http://sc.edu/fye/events/presentation/annual/2014/14_FYE_Conference_Program.pdf.

Presenters spoke about how to build successful and “sustainable” programs, how to gain “campus wide buy-in,” how to respond to English faculty members who want to assign Shakespeare in violation of the contemporary-only criterion¹⁰, and how to make the reading “exciting.”

The website of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (FYE Resource Center) offers resources such as book recommendations, study guides, sample event calendars, and suggestions for how to integrate common reading material into classrooms.

The FYE Resource Center also offers a three-week online course titled “Common Readings: Creating Community Beyond the Book,” in which “participants will design a comprehensive plan for their own campus that includes goals and outcomes, an assessment plan, a budget, book selection criteria, and curricular and co-curricular programming.”

Authors who can advertise themselves to this rising market can build successful careers. An industry has been born.

Publishers

Many publishers now offer lists of book recommendations for common reading programs. Some, like Penguin, publish full catalogues of books, while others post smaller lists:

- HarperCollins: Published a “First Year Student” catalogue with 150 recommended titles. The HarperCollins list stands out among other publishers for its inclusion of classics, established authors such as Sylvia Plath, and religious texts.
- Knopf Doubleday Academic Marketing: Published a “First-Year and Common Reading” catalogue with over 60 titles. Each title contains a one-page description and author profile.
- MacMillan Academic Marketing: Suggests 144 titles on a “First Year Reading” list.
- Melville House: Offers a list of 9 recommended texts. Though the top 5 recommendations are some of Melville House’s own titles—*Stuffed & Starved*, *Every Man Dies Alone*, *Debt*, *Revolt on Goose Island*, and *Havana Real*—Melville House also recommends 4 classics: *The Dead* (a short story by James Joyce), *Bartleby the Scrivener*, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, and *The Death of Ivan Ilych*.
- Penguin: Published a catalogue containing over 200 recommended books for the 2013-2014 academic year.
- Random House: Published a catalogue of over 200 titles.

¹⁰ “Shaping the Debate About Common Reading Programs.” Handout, 33rd Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience, February 17, 2014, <http://sc.edu/fye/events/presentation/annual/2014/FD-169%20Shaping%20the%20Debate%20about%20Common%20Reading%20Programs.pdf>.

- Simon and Schuster: Provides a “One Book, One Community” catalogue of 138 titles.

Most of these publishers have devoted specific departments to this sector, along with dedicated staff members.

PURPOSES OF COMMON READING PROGRAMS

On websites for common reading programs, most colleges provide lists of goals that they wish to achieve through their programs. Of the colleges included in our study, the largest number write that the purpose of a common reading program is to create a common experience and help students to build community. We compiled these numbers by searching for words such as “community” and “common experience” within colleges’ program descriptions. We were unable to find rationales and objectives for every institution on our list, but we provide a sampling from those that were available at 239 institutions.

Community

Most colleges seek to build community through their common reading programs. We examined the language that colleges used in website descriptions of their programs and found that 183 of 239 (77 percent) colleges that listed rationales included the terms “shared,” “common,” and “unity.”

Academic expectations

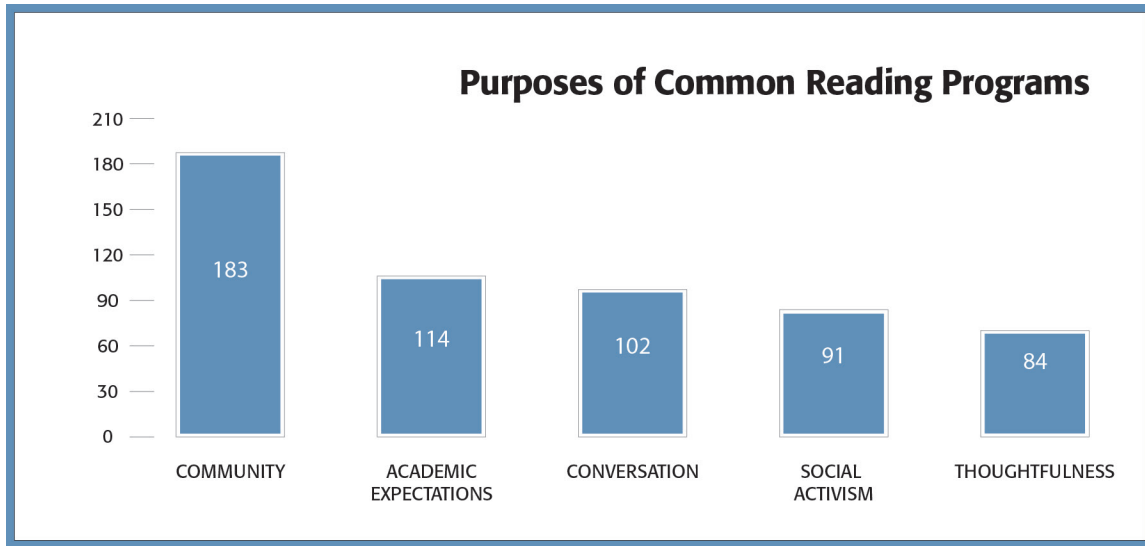
Many colleges stated that they were seeking to use common reading as an on-ramp to prepare students for the challenge of college level-work. Of the colleges observed, 114 (48 percent) used the terms “academic,” “intellectual,” “skills,” “preparedness,” or “expectations.”

Conversation

Beginning a campus-wide conversation is an aim of much of campus common reading. Of the 239 program websites that included rationales and learning goals, 102 (42 percent) included the words “discussion,” “dialogue,” “conversation,” or “talking.”

Social Activism

Many reading programs seek to encourage community activism. We noted 91 institutions (38 percent) that wished to promote some form of civic engagement and used the terms “social,” “activism,” “global citizenship,” “awareness,” or “engagement.”



Thoughtfulness

A number of colleges used the term “critical thinking” in their program descriptions. Of the colleges we observed, 84 (35 percent) used the terms “critical thinking,” “thought,” or “think.”

Clearly, common reading programs do not always aim at advancing students toward academic goals. To many college coordinators, the conversation-starters that a “beach read” offers are equally important—if not more important—than the book’s literary or intellectual merits.

For example, the University of Alabama, Birmingham’s UAB Reads program aims to “promote civic engagement, respectful dialogue about often controversial issues, and more knowledgeable participation in a global society.”¹¹ The UC California, Davis reading committee created its Campus Community Book Project in response to 9/11 and aims to “improve both the campus climate and community relations.”

Some institutions appear to use common reading programs as an excuse to promote political agendas. This has been especially apparent at colleges that chose *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*.

Stanley Kurtz observed in a 2013 *National Review* article, “Obama’s Secret Weapon: The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks,” that *The Immortal Life* became a popular reading assignment during the years when Obama was reelected and Obamacare emerged. This correlation, in Kurtz’s view, is not a coincidence.¹²

Kurtz analyzed the study guides from several colleges and concluded that many institutions likely assigned

¹¹ University of Alabama at Binghamton, UAB Discussion Book, <http://www.uab.edu/faculty/resources/item/151-uab-discussion-book>.

¹² Stanley Kurtz, “Obama’s Secret Weapon: Henrietta Lacks,” August 19, 2013, <http://www.nationalreview.com/corner/356139/obamas-secret-weapon-henrietta-lacks-stanley-kurtz>.

the book in order to promote Obamacare. Study guide questions include the following:

- “Making health care affordable to all Americans has been a recent political focus. What does the story of Henrietta Lacks and her family add to this discussion?” (University of Wisconsin, Madison)¹³
- “The Lacks family’s lack of health insurance can easily be developed into a project about the current healthcare crisis in America. President Obama’s plan can be investigated, as well as comparisons to other countries’ ways of providing healthcare.” (The Community College of Baltimore County)¹⁴
- “Recent political discourse and controversy has surrounded the issue of affordable healthcare in the United States. How do the story of Henrietta Lacks and her family impact this issue? . . . Do you think this book makes a case for universal healthcare?” (The University of South Florida)¹⁵
- “In a profit-driven health care system, all citizens do not have equal access to the treatments and medications made possible by tissue and cell research. What are the intended and unintended consequences of a profit-driven health care system?” (Random House)¹⁶

When the University of Maryland assigned *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* in 2011, it suggested as a resource a lesson plan in which “students will learn to decenter the power of white privilege to stand absolute by critiquing its dominance” and become equipped to “upstage some of the professed valid standpoints (‘truth’) of the totalizing, but oppressive white Other.”

13 UW Madison, Wisconsin, “Go Big Read,” 2010-2011, <http://www.gobigread.wisc.edu/Discussion-Toolkit/Questions2011.pdf>.

14 The Community College of Baltimore County, <http://faculty.ccbcmd.edu/cbc/Henrietta%20Lacks%20Lesson%20Guide.doc>.

15 John Schwirian, “The University of South Florida, A Guide for Teachers Using *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot,” <http://www.usf.edu/atle/documents/handout-henrietta-lacks.pdf>.

16 Random House, Study Guide: *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* by Rebecca Skloot, <http://rebeccaskloot.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/RHsklootTeachersGuideLORES.pdf>.

DO COMMON READING PROGRAMS WORK?

College faculty and staff members are making an effort to find out what makes a common reading program successful. This has taken the form of a rating system invented by a professor who serves on his university's selection committee, and a proliferation of sessions at the FYE conference.

Rating the Books: The "Carskadon Index"

Tom Carskadon, a professor of psychology at Mississippi State University, has developed a rating system he calls the "Carskadon Index" that he uses to rank students' opinions of commonly assigned freshman summer reading books.¹⁷

As an extra credit assignment in his General Psychology course. Over several years, Professor Carskadon has asked students to read a book and answer an anonymous questionnaire. According to Carskadon, about 25 freshmen have read and rated each title in his list of 30 possible and actual common reading texts.

Students rated the books as "great," "good," "okay," "bad," or "terrible." Based on these answers, the books are scored according to Carskadon's system.

Some of the highest-ranked books were *The Glass Castle*, *Water to Wine*, *Zeitoun*, *Little Princes*, and *The Other Wes Moore*, while some of the lowest-ranked books were *Beautiful Souls*, *The Ghost Map*, *Physics for Future Presidents*, *Enrique's Journey*, and *Behind the Beautiful Forevers*.

Carskadon concluded that the only way to succeed in a common reading program is to "select books enjoyable enough that students will actually read them!" He echoed other common reading program coordinators when he said how amazed he was that many students arrive at college "having never read a book they truly enjoyed."

When asked whether he felt that students gave poor ratings to any good books, Carskadon said he thought *Physics for Future Presidents* was really good, that students should have loved it but didn't, and that he didn't know why.

The Carskadon Index for the most part provides a cursory glimpse at how common reading books are perceived by students. It is the first and only attempt to quantify the quality of these books.

Debating the Value

"Debating the Value of Common Reading Programs," the FYE conference session listed above, framed

¹⁷ Professor Carskadon has permitted his index to be published in this report, making it publicly available for the first time. He presented his findings at the 2014 FYE conference and has a handout detailing his methods and listing the books as they were ranked by students. A version of that handout is reprinted in Appendix VII.

questions about the usefulness of these programs:

Common reading programs in higher education began emerging as early as 1965. Over the past decade, these programs have proliferated and are increasingly a key part of many institutions' first-year experience initiatives. However, recently, a number of articles have criticized these programs, specifically questioning their expense, academic rigor (or perceived lack thereof), and the true intellectual impact they have on students. In this session, administrators who work closely with common reading programs will discuss these issues and initiate an open exchange of ideas on the future of common reading in the context of the first-year experience.

Both this panel and the Carskadon Index seek to answer, "What do students gain from common reading?"

STUDENT OPINIONS: COMMON COMPLAINTS

We asked students from four randomly selected colleges—Assumption College, Cornell University, Indiana Wesleyan University, and Florida State University—to share their opinions on college common reading programs. Each student felt that common reading programs were valuable and had the potential to create communal bonding, promote the value of reading among new students, and prepare students for college life. The students also, however, shared several disappointments and were eager to offer suggestions for how their colleges' programs might be improved.

Jocelyn Lee ('16), a junior at Cornell University and winner of Cornell's 2012 Common Read essay contest, enjoyed that her program gave her "something to discuss with fellow incoming students" and thought that the incentive of a cash prize and resume boost to essay winners provided a worthwhile opportunity for students.

However, she also said that "in general, the common reading program didn't seem to be a huge hit." When asked what she would change about the program, she wrote:

I would have chosen a different book. The one assigned (*The Life Before Us*) was so liberal in its theme and message that I felt that the committee chose it to push a political agenda more than they did for its literary merit (which was slight). It wasn't even an interesting book. I didn't enjoy it at all and wouldn't read it again.

Despite disliking the book, Jocelyn wrote that the common reading fostered an immediate sense of community and served as an icebreaker. "Even though I didn't like the book and ended up complaining about it to others, it gave me something to talk about with people I didn't know," she said.

Jonathan Roth ('17), a sophomore at Florida State University and participant in Florida State's 2013 "One



Book, One Campus” program, likewise said, “other than at convocation, I never gave much thought to the book.” According to Jonathan, the “One Book, One College” program “formed a communal bond among freshmen” at convocation, but that bond was “short-lived.” He also noted, “I’m sure 9 out of 10 kids probably didn’t even read the book.”

When asked to suggest an alternative book or a better way of running the program, Jonathan said, “Well the situation is a catch-22. Suggest a more challenging book/a classic of some sort, no one’s going to want to read it. Suggest an easier book and no one’s going to care. I cannot say that there is a sound solution for this.”

Hallie Andrews (‘15), a senior at Indiana Wesleyan University, described a 2011 freshman seminar that included a common read. Its goal was to introduce students to college life and prepare them for the semesters ahead. “It was a great idea. But it failed miserably,” said Hallie.

Hallie disliked the book choice of *Gods Behaving Badly*, which discussed “the horrors of celebrity culture.” She felt that its literary merits were few, it was poorly integrated with the content of the class, and it did little to prepare students for college life.

Of the students whom we asked about college reading programs, Colleen Putzel (‘14), a senior at Assumption College and a member of her college’s common reading committee, had the most positive things to say. Colleen wrote that she enjoyed the way her college set a precedent and “instilled within the first-years the importance of reading.” She felt disappointed, however, that the first year books were never incorporated into class discussions. “While it is not always applicable, I think that even one discussion about it would make it feel more worthwhile to students,” she said. As a whole, however, she appreciated the way that her college put “time and energy put into making this something enjoyable, educational, and fulfilling for the first year students.”

“College is a time to explore, to learn, and to be challenged in every possible way,” she said.

“The common reading program should provide a bridge into college that reflects the mission of the school while challenging the readers to think about something in a new or different way.”

Another student opinion we found on common reading was an op-ed from 2009 by Michaela Morton (‘12) comparing Williams College’s selection to an awkward blind date—“the kind of date where you close the door at the end of the night and think, ‘Really? My best friend thinks that’s my type?’ It sort of makes you have doubts about who your best friend thinks you are. Apparently, Williams thinks I’m 12.”¹⁸

18 Morton, Michaela, “Williams Reads’ book selection was a flop,” Williams Record, February 10, 2009, <http://record.williams.edu/record/articles/seek/2951/>. As of the publication of this report, the link to this article is no longer live. The full text of the article is reprinted in Appendix IX.

Each of these students believes that common reading programs can foster an immediate sense of community and promote intellectual dialogue. It often seems, however, that these college programs underestimate students' desires for challenging and thought-provoking books. We spoke with several coordinators about the criteria used to choose common reading books, and many stated that the books needed to be "accessible" and relevant. Unfortunately, this desire for relevancy often compels committee members to choose books that are unchallenging and unmemorable.

BARRIERS TO PICKING BETTER BOOKS

Directors of college common reading programs often find themselves caught between an ideal and practical limitations.

Earlier this year we spoke with Cheryl Spector, who leads the Freshman Common Reading program at California State University at Northridge (CSUN); our conversation brought to light several constraints that many common reading coordinators face.

COMMON READING COMMITTEES: A SAMPLE		
Institution	English Faculty Members on Committee (%)	Total Faculty Members on Committee (%)
California State University, Northridge	3 percent (1 out of 30)	7 percent (2 out of 30)
College of Charleston (South Carolina)	6 percent (2 out of 31)	39 percent (12 out of 31)
Elon University (North Carolina)	17 percent (2 out of 12)	42 percent (5 out of 12)
Lewis University (Illinois)	9 percent (1 out of 11)	36 percent (4 out of 11)
North Carolina State University	6 percent (2 out of 32)	19 percent (6 out of 32)
Providence College (Rhode Island)	13 percent (1 out of 8)	50 percent (4 out of 8)
Owensboro Community College (Kentucky)	29 percent (6 out of 21)	57 percent (12 out of 21)

Committees

First, the choice of book by committee vote—a convention for many programs—leads to selections being made based on popularity rather than quality. Spector, a professor of English whose dissertation was on Henry James, said that she would like to assign classic books, but that she is determined not to set herself

up as a “dictator” imposing her preferences on others. CSUN’s yearly selection is determined by secret ballot cast by a 30-member committee of volunteers: 11 undergraduate students, 1 graduate student, 4 librarians, 12 lecturers, and 2 faculty members. Of the 30, Spector is the only person with a Ph.D. in English. She noted that many of the committee members are “far from highly educated in literature,” although a significant proportion are English lecturers.

College common reading choices are frequently made by committee vote. We looked at the makeup of seven universities’ selection committees to show a sampling of how many members in each were English faculty members, or faculty members at all.¹⁹ In six of these committees, there were only one or two English faculty members among many.

English professors are not the only scholars qualified to choose books for freshman reading, but in-depth literature study at the Ph.D. level does give them some added authority in that field, and it is worth noting their scarcity on these committees. The variety in (and for some, large size of) these committees reflects the multiplicity of campus constituents that some colleges feel the need to satisfy through their book choices. For example, at three of these seven institutions, the committee included the director of the institution’s office of diversity. The College of Charleston’s website says “The College Reads! committee has always been large and diverse, and has always included administrators, staff, faculty and students broadly representing the entire campus.”

But broad representation is not the best recipe for success in choosing a book-in-common. A committee filled with many members who have not read widely or well naturally tends to prioritize concerns such as equity to the detriment of quality.

Book Virgins

Another major barrier to assigning challenging books is that books are foreign to large numbers of today’s college students. Spector said that of CSUN’s approximately 5,800 new students last year, *many had never read a whole book before*. She said that her colleagues in the English department confirm that most semesters this is the case for several of the students they teach. Presumably, they are talking about books beyond the level of *Where the Wild Things Are*, and presumably they mean that some of their students have never read a book for pleasure, as opposed to reading one assigned for class.

Still, how is it that some students have made it all the way to age 18 without having read a book? Spector projects that “huge high schools, huge classes, busy work, and no individual attention” are part of the problem. “If you read a book ever, it’s a miracle,” she said.

A college’s book-in-common, Spector said, is meant to show students that reading is not drudgery and

¹⁹ We counted as faculty those who were listed on the institution’s website as being either assistant, associate, or full professors.

can even be fun. That's why, she said, "it's not a literature program; it's a reading program," and what's needed is "something manageable and engaging as an important first step." The idea that a common reading must meet students at the level where they already are takes the standard down to the lowest common denominator. As Spector said, "We can't just serve honors students; we have to serve a variety of abilities." One book she had proposed (*The Reluctant Mr. Darwin*, a biography of Charles Darwin) was outvoted because the vocabulary was deemed too challenging. Someone on the committee said that assigning it would be like "dragging the whole class up a mountain."

Thus, many colleges assign books which they term "accessible." This sometimes means a short or easy-to-read book, a graphic novel, or a collection of brief memoirs. Accessibility is also a reason that many colleges bring the author to speak on campus; they think the near-celebrity status will lend appeal to the reading.

That students are being admitted to college without ever having read a book is a striking revelation about the state of admissions. It is evidence that students are unprepared for college—or that colleges are setting the bar too low. We see a need for a new survey to find out what proportion of freshmen have never read a book, what their educational backgrounds are, and how these students fare academically while in college. Do they actually read their first book in college, or does that achievement still elude them by the time they graduate?

Unenforceability

A third apparent barrier, especially for universities and large colleges, is the logistical difficulty of making a book assignment mandatory for all students, or even just all freshmen. While faculty members may expect students to complete assigned reading (and may test them on it) for the individual courses they teach, requiring a reading outside the regular curriculum is harder. For a small institution, it is possible to enforce the requirement by testing all students on the book, but almost no colleges actually do this. One program director at a small Catholic college told us that a test would undermine the purpose of "reading for the joy of reading." (Apparently no joy is to be found in anything on a syllabus.)

As for a state university, Spector said that testing all freshmen would infringe on faculty members' academic freedom, and that trying to make the book mandatory in, for instance, the general education writing course, would take immense "political savvy" because that course is taught across six different departments.

In theory, a university could assign a common reading as part of a core curriculum, but the convention of a predetermined set of core courses taken by every student has all but disappeared from American higher education. It has been replaced mostly by distribution requirements that allow students to choose one or two courses from a long list of offerings in various subjects. This has left both a gap in intellectual

community—one that common reading programs are trying to fill—and a fragmented academic system where departments are largely isolated from one another. That fragmentation then prevents a common book from being assigned.

So what's the problem with having an optional reading? Colleges really do want to encourage students to read the book, but because most can't, or don't, require it, they choose books that they think students will find entertaining. In this way, colleges calculate that any book that doesn't appear immediately appealing to an 18-year-old will simply be ignored.

They may be right about this, but colleges give up too soon. They discount the need of students to encounter ideas that are new to them. While most freshman would never pick up *Middlemarch* on their own, they might later be grateful for having had an occasion to try it. Colleges also discount their own ability to inspire students to take a step outside their comfort zones. As we described in "Mechanics of Common Reading Programs" above, many institutions are highly creative in the ways they foster interest in a book. They can apply the same creative energy to promoting better books.

CONTROVERSIES

Controversies often arise when a college picks a book with a political or ideological slant.

South Carolina

This year's biggest common reading controversy flared up in the spring, when the South Carolina legislature approved budget cuts to two state colleges for assigning books about being gay in America. The College of Charleston assigned *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, and the University of South Carolina-Upstate assigned *Out Loud: The Best of Rainbow Radio*. A full account of the story is found in Appendix VIII, a reprinted copy of Ashley Thorne's article "Caught with Gay Books."²⁰

After the cuts were approved, the outrage from students and faculty members at both colleges unleashed a storm of fury nationwide; protestors published a Tumblr blog²¹, proliferated a hashtag #shameongarrysmith (Garry Smith is the South Carolina representative who proposed the cuts), and sent in pictures of themselves holding signs with messages of pro-LGBT solidarity.

²⁰ Thorne, Ashley, "Caught with Gay Books: South Carolina Punishes Colleges for Freshman Reading," National Association of Scholars, March 6, 2014. http://www.nas.org/articles/caught_with_gay_books_south_carolina_punishes_colleges_for_freshman_reading.

²¹ <http://gayfacesgayplaces.tumblr.com/>.

Purdue

Also this spring, faculty members and administrators criticized Purdue University president Mitch Daniels' decision to discontinue the university's common reading program. Although the faculty senate voted to reinstate the program, President Daniels said he intended to move forward with a newly designed freshman orientation that would not include the common reading program, which cost \$75,000.²² Daniels said it would be "replaced by things that we think will be more valuable to incoming students," with orientation focusing on student integrity, research skills and financial literacy. Jared N. Tippetts, director of student success at Purdue, said this would promote "a stronger academic focus." But Mary Stuart Hunter, who is not at Purdue but leads the FYE Resource Center, told *Inside Higher Ed*, that the common reading program helped counteract the tendency of college students to "become very entrenched in silos"—separating themselves according to their majors.²³

Three Cups of Tea

Some controversies afflict the books themselves. Some initially favored books selected as common reading have been discredited by facts that came out later. Such revelations can be embarrassing for the colleges that select these books.

The most dramatic of these exposés was of Greg Mortenson's book, *Three Cups of Tea*, his memoir of building schools for girls in Pakistan, which was revealed in a CBS *60 Minutes* episode to have made wildly untrue claims. Investigators had gone to the sites of the purported schools and had found empty buildings. Mortenson's charity, Central Asia Institute (CAI), from which he derived a \$180,000 salary, had received over \$70 million in donations from people who wanted to support the work he was supposedly doing. Jon Krakauer, himself the author of common reading title *Into the Wild*, was formerly a generous donor to CAI, but following his research Krakauer led the way in exposing the gaps in Mortenson's account. In 2010 *Three Cups of Tea* was in the top three college common reading choices, but that changed after Mortenson's scam was exposed. Institutions that had scheduled him to speak or receive an award abruptly canceled his appearance on campus.²⁴ No college has assigned *Three Cups of Tea* or *Stones into Schools* (Mortenson's 2009 book) ever since.

Zeitoun

The year after the fall of Mortenson, the seemingly heroic figure of Dave Eggers' 2009 non-fiction book

22 Colombo, Hayleigh, "Purdue Faculty Backs Reinstating Common Reading Program," Lafayette Journal & Courier, April 22, 2014. <http://www.jconline.com/story/news/college/2014/04/21/purdue-faculty-backs-reinstating-common-reading-program/7991125/>

23 Grasgreen, Allie, "Common Reading Canned," Inside Higher Ed, March 26, 2014. <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2014/03/26/after-abrupt-cut-purdue-faculty-call-restoration-common-reading-program#ixzz39QuCaj9p>.

24 One of these was Bucknell University; see "Campus Note Regarding Greg Mortenson." <http://www.bucknell.edu/news-and-media/campus-note-regarding-greg-mortenson.html>.

Zeitoun went to jail for allegedly trying to kill his ex-wife. She said that if he were to be released, "I'd be dead."²⁵ Abdulrahman Zeitoun is described in Eggers' story as a compassionate Syrian-American in New Orleans who canoed through the flooded city after Katrina, rescuing animals stranded by the storm; he was (apparently unjustly) arrested shortly after the hurricane under suspicion of looting, and was later accused of terrorism. The *New York Times* called the book a "powerful indictment of America's dystopia in the Bush era."²⁶

Zeitoun in the book is a peaceful, kind husband and father, but Eggers seems to have been overly rosy in his portrayal of the man's character. In 2012 Zeitoun was charged with domestic abuse, including "punching his now ex-wife in the back of her head and striking her with a tire iron."²⁷ A *Los Angeles Review of Books* article observes that in writing the book, Eggers would often send large sections of the manuscript to Zeitoun for revision, allowing him an editorial privilege with which it would have been easy to paint a picture of enhanced virtuousness.

Zeitoun's popularity for common reading, peaking in 2010 and 2011, is now waning. In 2013-2014, only one college assigned it. The decline may be explained either by the natural evanescence of common reading favor or by the clash of the real life Zeitoun with the literary one.

Matthew Shepard

For 2013-2014, four institutions chose common reading assignments about Matthew Shepard, a gay college student who was tortured and murdered in Laramie, Wyoming in 1998. Salisbury University (Maryland) selected Shepard's mother's 2009 book *The Meaning of Matthew*; and Henderson State University (Arkansas), the University of Richmond, and California State University-Los Angeles assigned the play "The Laramie Project" (2001). The abiding narrative of what happened to Shepard has been that he was tortured and left for dead by two straight, homophobic men, incensed that the 21-year-old Shepard had hit on them at a bar. Matthew Shepard's brutal murder galvanized the LGBT movement. The murder was labeled a "hate crime"²⁸ and the worst act of anti-gay violence in history. The play based on the story (in which famous American actors such as Laura Linney and Andrew Garfield have performed) has been frequently performed at colleges and universities.²⁹

25 Simmerman, John, "Alleged beatings, hit job by subject of best-seller 'Zeitoun' aired in courtroom," NOLA.com, October 18, 2012. http://www.nola.com/crime/index.ssf/2012/10/alleged_beatings_hit_job_by_su.html.

26 Egan, Timothy, "After the Deluge," *New York Times*, August 13, 2009. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/16/books/review/Egan-t.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

27 Patterson, Victoria, "Refusal to Cooperate: The Afterlife of 'Zeitoun,'" *Los Angeles Review of Books*, December 7, 2012. <http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/refusal-to-cooperate-the-afterlife-of-zeitoun>.

28 This category did not at the time apply to sexual orientation; after Matthew Shepard's murder, hate crime legislation was expanded, then signed into law by President Obama in 2009.

29 Google search, "The Laramie Project" site:.edu

Last year that narrative was turned on its head when Stephen Jimenez published the culmination of his thirteen-year investigation, *The Book of Matt: Hidden Truths About the Murder of Matthew Shepard*.³⁰ Jimenez, who is gay, went to Laramie to do research for a screenplay on the story. What he found was that one of Shepard's murderers was also his former lover, that both he and Shepard were dealers and users of methamphetamine, and that the attack was a robbery over drugs—not a reaction against sexual advances by Shepard. Jimenez's book names over 100 sources, and Laramie residents, police, and drug enforcement officers have confirmed his findings.

Writing about *The Book of Matt*, Andrew Sullivan (who is also gay), said that interest groups had deployed "a politically convenient myth about Shepard to raise gobs of money [i.e., for the foundation Shepard's mother created in his name] and pass unnecessary laws."³¹

This is yet another example of the risk colleges take in approving a story before all the facts have been examined. Of course, Jimenez's research ought also to be subject to scrutiny—again, this takes time. His book came out in fall 2013, after common reading for the year had already been selected. It will be worth noting whether assignments about Matthew Shepard disappear from common reading going forward.

Born to Run

Finally, the book *Born to Run* (2009) launched the minimalist running craze that has inspired thousands of runners to shed traditional sneakers to try a more "natural" way. The book, which has been assigned at Bowling Green State University (Ohio) and Appalachian State University (North Carolina), is a result of the author's search to understand how to run without injury. Christopher McDougall consulted members of the Tarahumara tribe of Northern Mexico to learn their secrets of running long distances and concluded that the running shoe industry was mainly a scam. McDougall said he never intended to launch a barefoot running movement, nor did he officially endorse Vibram's Five Finger shoes (which are meant to approximate the barefoot experience), but after his book came out, minimalism in running became hugely popular. Vibram, which had previously marketed its glove-like shoes mainly to kayakers, rock climbers, and hikers, began selling them to runners.

This year Vibram settled a \$3.75 million class action lawsuit alleging that the company had falsely touted the medical benefits of running with Five Finger shoes. One sports blogger commented on the lawsuit, writing, "Science takes time, and since the advent of Christopher McDougall's best-selling *Born to Run* (a book based mainly on anecdote that sparked the minimalist footwear revolution), science has discovered

30 Jimenez, Stephen. *The Book of Matt: Hidden Truths about the Murder of Matthew Shepard*. Hanover: Steerforth, 2013. Print.

31 Conrad, Laurel. "Attacking the messenger to preserve the Matthew Shepard Hate Crime Narrative." *Legal Insurrection*. 2013. <http://legalinsurrection.com/2013/10/attacking-the-messenger-to-preserve-the-matthew-shepard-hate-crime-narrative/>.

that barefoot running can really f*** you up.”³²

All these examples build a case for choosing books for common reading that have stood the test of time—or at least are fictional. Memoirs and other non-fiction whose purpose is raising money and rallying support around a cause are subject to being debunked after more is known.

OTHER COMMON READING DATABASES

To our knowledge the National Association of Scholars publishes the only comprehensive list of books assigned by colleges and universities as common reading. We did, however, find several other sources of information about common reading programs, including:

- Barbara Fister, Academic Librarian, Gustavus Adolphus College: 112 institutions in 2013-2014³³
- National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition (hosted by the University of South Carolina) summer reading database: 7 institutions in 2013-2014³⁴

Our goal was to provide a more complete coverage of this campus trend, so that any college with a common reading program would be included. We also went beyond these other lists by categorizing each book according to subject, theme, author, and date published.

METHODS

What We Included

Our study for the academic year 2013-2014 covers 341 colleges and universities and the 231 books they assigned. To compile our data, we looked at every college we could find that had a common reading program. For the purpose of this study, we counted as “common reading” only books assigned to all freshmen or all students either outside the regular curriculum or in a single freshman seminar course.

Most of the programs in our study assigned the books specifically as summer reading and not as part

32 Gugala, John, “Five Fingers Maker Will Pay Millions to Suckers Who Bought Its Shoes,” *Fittish*, May 7, 2014. <http://fittish.deadspin.com/vibram-fivefingers-still-stupid-now-culpable-1572955736>.

33 Fister, Barbara. “One Book, One College: Common Reading Programs.” Gustavus Adolphus College. 2013. <http://homepages.gac.edu/~fister/onebook.html>.

34 “First-Year Resources.” National Resource Center: First-Year Experience and Students in Transition. 2013. http://tech.sa.sc.edu/fye/resources/fyr/summer_books_list.php.



of the regular semester. Our study does not include books and readings assigned in elective courses. Neither does it include all the readings assigned in the core curriculum at the few colleges that maintain such a core.³⁵

How We Categorized the Books

While we paid attention to trends in the mechanics and purposes of common reading programs, our primary object was to document the books that were assigned and the colleges that assigned them.

Breaking these down, we noted the authors and the years of publication for each book; we categorized each book according to its main subject and its genre; and we observed additional themes, such as whether the book was a graphic novel or whether it conveyed a strong environmental message. We chose only one subject category for each book because we wanted to convey that book's main topic. In determining the subject of a book, we referred both to its content and to reviews of it on Amazon and Goodreads. Of course, some books were difficult to classify. When in doubt we used the category closest to the subject headings listed by the Library of Congress.

Our distinction between "subject category" and "theme" requires a little bit of elaboration. By "subject category" we mean the explicit and encompassing topic of a book. The "subject category" of *The Iliad* is war. (No college we studied selected *The Iliad*, but if one had, we would have classified it as a book about war.) By "theme" we mean an important and recurrent aspect of the book that seems worth noting. Some themes of *The Iliad* that might be worth noting are that it deals with the actions of gods in the life of humanity, human anger, the pursuit of glory, and the role of fate. The "themes" that we take note of as recurrent aspects of many of the selected books are emphases on various racial and ethnic groups, geographic or cultural regions, 9/11, and environmentalism. "Environmentalism" comes into our study both as a "subject category" and as a "theme" for books that are assigned to other subject categories. We also use the term "theme" to take note of two other factors: whether a film version exists, and whether it is a comic book or graphic work. Not every book had a theme, and some books had more than one.

We classified each college and university by type—public, private sectarian, private nonsectarian (we counted as nonsectarian institutions that have only nominal religious affiliations), community colleges, women's colleges, and historically black colleges and universities—and by whether they are ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* among either the top 100 National Universities or the top 100 National Liberal Arts Colleges. We aimed at comprehensiveness rather than selecting a specific cohort, and the common reading programs in our study represent all the institutions that we identified. We welcome tips on others that we do not have here.

³⁵ For example, St. John's requires freshman to follow a schedule in reading *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, and writings of Plato and Aristotle during their first two semesters. While the Gustavus Adolphus College library includes St. John's on its list of common reading programs, we did not.

Here are elements we measured in this study, with respect to books, institutions, and programs:

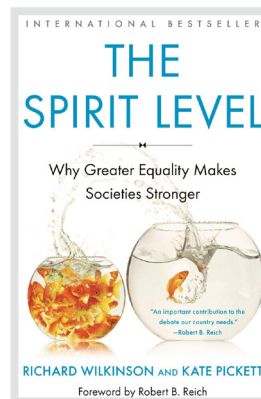
<u>Book</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Programs</u>
Title	Name	Author speaking
Author	Type	Mandatory vs. optional reading
Publication year	Whether ranked in top 100 <i>U.S. News & World Report</i>	First-year vs. all students
Subject category		
Genre		
Theme		

Many of our subject categories overlap with last year's, but others are entirely new. The most popular subjects are books related to multiculturalism, immigration, and racism; social activism and entrepreneurship; philosophy and spirituality; science, overcoming adversity, coming of age; and environmentalism.

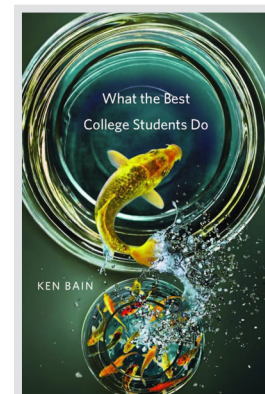
In addition to our official subject categories and themes, we also noticed smaller recurrent concepts. Many books' titles are similar to one another (i.e. *The Big Burn*, *The Big Thirst*, *The Big Truck That Went By*). The phrase "in the shadow of" occurs in three titles (*In the Shadow of the Banyan* by Vaddey Ratner, *In the Shadow of Man* by Jane Goodall, and *Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats* by Kristen Iversen).

Two books even share cover art concepts—a goldfish leaping out of a bowl of its companions into its own bowl (*What the Best College Students Do* by Ken Bain and *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett).

In looking at the big picture of books assigned as common reading, what is striking is the books' *sameness*. Although they cover a wide range of subjects, there is a clear, unique "common reading" genre. Most share the traits of recentness, themes touching on civic responsibility, and "accessibility"—i.e. easiness. Many are memoirs designed to inspire social action. This is so because university selection criteria often limit the pool of potential books to ones that are "readable," short, and relevant.



The Spirit Level
by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett



What the Best College Students Do
by Ken Bain

MAJOR FINDINGS

We present the results of our study in terms of findings, facts, and gaps.

The Findings

1. Common reading programs are becoming more popular.³⁶
2. The list of readings continues to be dominated by recent, trendy, and intellectually unchallenging books.
3. The assigned books frequently emphasize progressive political themes, and the top subject category is multiculturalism.
4. Colleges increasingly see their common reading as exercises in community-building more than student preparation for academic life.
5. A common reading “industry” is emerging, with publishers, authors, and colleges seeking to advance a particular kind of book.

The Facts

1. **Author speaking:** Of the 341 colleges in our study, 231 (68 percent) brought the author to speak on campus. Having the author speak is seen as a priority for common reading programs.
2. **Rationales:** 77 percent of colleges said that the purpose of their common reading programs was to foster “community,” or create “common” or “shared” experiences among those on and near the campus.
3. **Recent:** More than half of common reading assignments (51 percent) were published between 2010 and 2013, and only five books were from before 1900.
4. **Non-fiction:** 72 percent of assignments were memoirs, biographies, essays, and other non-fiction.
5. **Turnover:** 82 percent of this year’s titles are different from last year’s. Some books that were popular a few years ago are now waning or have disappeared. Many new books – some published as recently as the year in which they were assigned – are being introduced.

³⁶ More and more colleges and universities are making common reading a prominent campus tradition. Every time we searched for new colleges to add to our study, we found more. The number of colleges in our report grew by more than 10 percent this year. That colleges are dedicating pages of their websites to common reading is another indicator of the growth of the trend; such pages were much scarcer when we began looking at common reading in 2010.

The Gaps

1. **Classics:** Only four colleges assigned works that could be considered classics.³⁷ Those were Melville's short story "Bartleby, the Scrivener" (LeMoyne College), a compilation of Shakespeare's works (Indiana University, South Bend), the book of Job from the Bible (St. Michael's College), and Edgar Allen Poe's *Great Tales and Poems* (University of Wisconsin, Parkside). Other than these exceptions, the hundreds of common reading programs across the country ignored books of lasting merit. Dickens, Dostoevsky, Austen, and Hemingway were not to be found. There was no trace of Twain, Tolstoy, Brontë, Wilde, Hawthorne, Douglass, or Steinbeck. No *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Great Gatsby*, *The Count of Monte Cristo*, or even *Catcher in the Rye*.
2. **Fiction:** Only 28 percent of common reading assignments were fictional. While fiction isn't going away in the larger scheme of contemporary reading, colleges are predisposed against it because they want to show students socially-engaged authors who are active in the real world.
3. **Modern literature:** Even in confining themselves to living authors, colleges neglect some of the best ones, such as Marilynne Robinson, Thomas Pynchon, Wendell Berry, Donna Tartt, Tom Wolfe, and Don DeLillo.
4. **History:** Other than a "media package" on the civil rights movement assigned by the University of Alabama, Birmingham, no colleges assigned any works of history.
5. **Diversity:** There is essentially a common reading genre – inspiring stories, apocalyptic visions, self-assigned projects, identity crises, advice manuals, and curious trends in human behavior – this is the stuff of common reading, and rarely do colleges deviate from these norms.

THE BOOKS

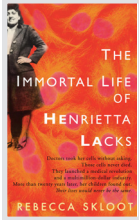
In recording the books assigned as common reading in 2013-2014, we tracked trends in which books were most widely-assigned; the publication dates, main subjects, the genres of each book; and additional themes recurrent throughout the books.

³⁷ We use "classics" in the common sense of writings that are broadly recognized as having stood the test of time. These are books that have gone through many editions and have standing with a general readership as well as high regard among scholars. The National Association of Scholars does not have a canon in the sense of a supposedly exhaustive list of great works of literature, but we acknowledge the test of time.

One striking shared feature among these top 8 books is that with the exception of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Nighttime*, all are nonfiction.

The rest of the books were assigned by one, two, or three institutions. Some authors—Timothy Egan, Dave Eggers, Jay Allison and Dan Gediman, Michael Pollan, Robert Frost, John Green, Sampson Davis, Malcolm Gladwell, Eric Greitens, and Tracy Kidder—had multiple books selected as common reading.

MOST WIDELY-ASSIGNED BOOKS	
Book	Number of Times Assigned
The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks	13
This I Believe	11
The Other Wes Moore	9
Wine to Water	6
Little Princes	6
Half the Sky	5



The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

Rebecca Skloot's biography of Henrietta Lacks and the controversy over her laboratory-cultured cervical cancer cells is the top book for the third year in a row. *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* was published in 2010 and was a popular choice in common reading even that same year. Last year it was chosen by 31 institutions and represented 10 percent of common reading assignments. This year its popularity has faded significantly, but it has remained in first. It was chosen by 13 institutions and represents 4 percent of common reading assignments.

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks has three main threads: (1) a biography of Henrietta Lacks' life and death; (2) a scientific history of how the use of Henrietta Lacks' cells—the first human cells known to self-replicate in vitro rather than die—transformed and aided medical research; and (3) a journalistic first-person account by the author, Rebecca Skloot, on her relationship with many family members of Henrietta Lacks.

As we noted above, numerous colleges have used this book to suggest the merits of universal healthcare. The timing of *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*'s peak popularity coincides with the height of the debate over the Affordable Care Act.

Publication Dates

One of the most striking trends we found was that the large majority of colleges and universities assigned recently published books, rather than older ones that are recognized as classics or literary masterpieces. Out of the 341 universities surveyed, 328 (96 percent) chose books published in or after 1990. Books published in 2009, 2010, and 2011 were the most highly assigned. Colleges assigned only twelve works published before 1990, which were:

Publication Year	Number of Assignments (out of 349)
2010-2013	177
2000-2009	144
1990-1999	13
1900-1989	10
Pre-1900	5

- C. B.C. 1500-2000: Saint Michael's College, *the book of Job*
- C. 1590-1610: Indiana University, South Bend, Shakespeare's Works
- 1824-1849: University of Wisconsin, Parkside, *Great Tales and Poems* of Edgar Allan Poe
- 1853: Le Moyne College, "Bartleby, The Scrivener"
- C. 1853: University of Alabama, Birmingham, "Media package related to 150th anniversary of Emancipation Proclamation"
- 1945: The King's College, *A Masque of Mercy, A Masque of Reason*
- 1956: The King's College, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*
- 1971: Lafayette College, *In the Shadow of Man*
- 1983: Dartmouth College, *The River Why*
- 1984: California State University, Bakersfield, and Indiana University, Northwest, *The House on Mango Street*
- 1984: College of the Redwoods and Humboldt State University, *Fup: A Modern Fable*

Colleges, on the whole, chose books that correspond to recent events or current cultural issues, such as environmentalism, multiculturalism, social activism, information technology, urban poverty in America, alternative energy, animal rights, healthy eating and vegetarianism, and 9/11.

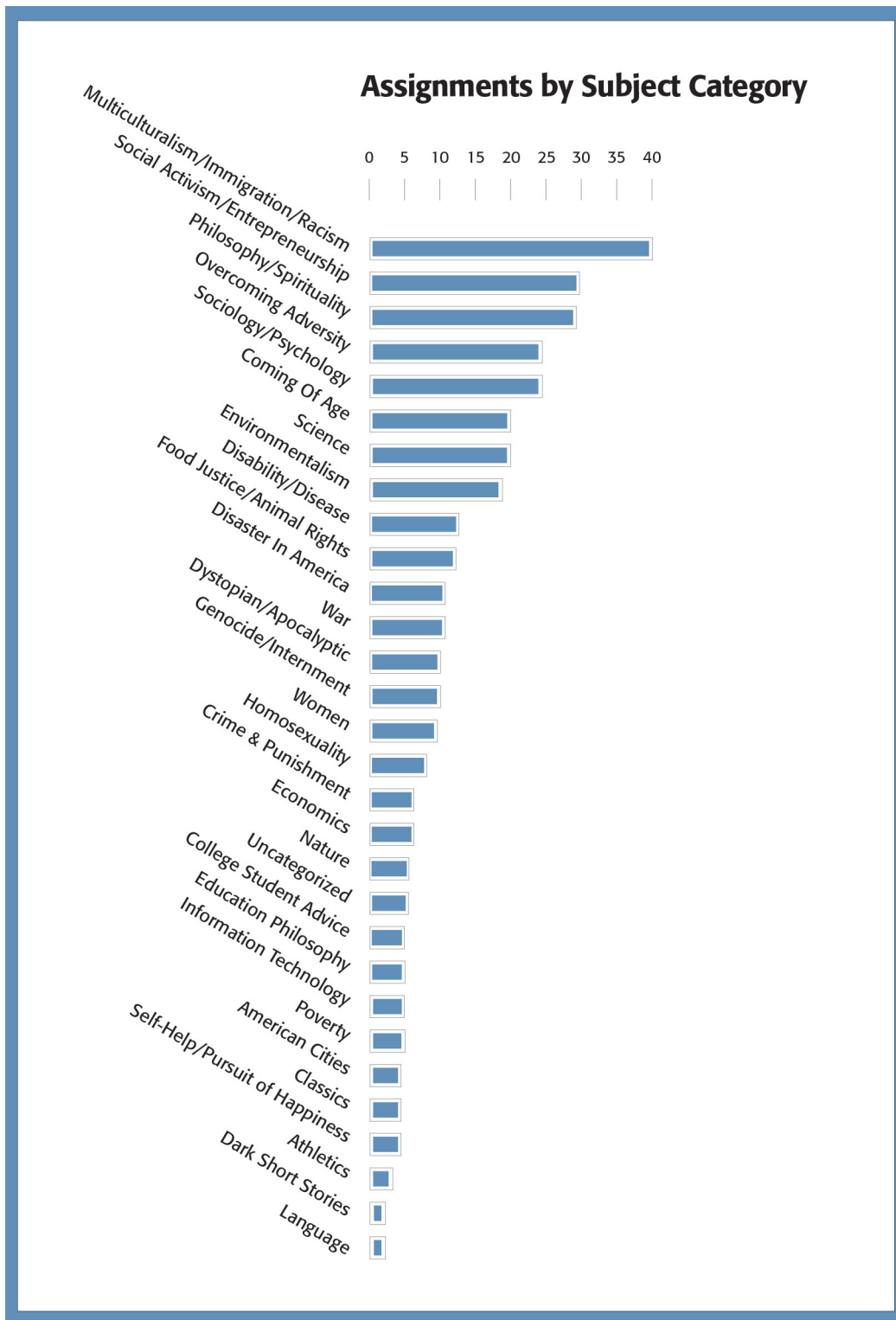
On our list, 177 of the 349 assignments (51 percent) were published in 2010 or later. 311 were

published in or after the year 2000 (94 percent). 334 (96 percent) were published in or after 1990. Only 28 assigned books were published before 2000, and only 5 before 1900.

Subject Categories

Here are the subject categories we observed among books assigned as common reading. Books on multiculturalism, immigration, or racism were the most popular, followed by books on social activism or social entrepreneurship, then by books on philosophy or spirituality.

Subject Category	Number of Colleges
American Cities	4
Athletics	3
Classics	4
College Student Advice	5
Coming of Age	20
Crime and Punishment	6
Dark Short Stories	2
Disability/Disease	13
Disaster in America	11
Dystopian/Apocalyptic	10
Economics	6
Education Philosophy	5
Environmentalism	18
Food Justice/Animal Rights	12
Genocide/Internment	10
Homosexuality	7
Information Technology	5
Language	2
Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism	40
Nature	6
Overcoming Adversity	24
Philosophy/Spirituality	28
Poverty	5
Science	20
Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness	4
Social Activism/Entrepreneurship	29
Sociology/Psychology	24
Uncategorized	6
War	11
Women	9



Genres

We also classified books assigned as common reading according to their genre: memoir, biography, essay, other nonfiction, fiction, play, and verse drama. The top genre for common reading was non-fiction. Memoirs, biographies, essays, and other nonfiction made up 250 of the 349 assignments (72 percent).

Themes

We also took note of thirteen additional themes running through the assigned books. Not every book had one of these themes, and some had more than one. Many of these were in the form of a focus on a particular racial or ethnic group. Among those, books with an African American theme were the most popular. In the past, we have observed a number of books that relate to Hurricane Katrina. This year that theme has been largely succeeded by one on September 11.

Three books were in the form of a graphic novel or memoir, and 50 have TV or film adaptations, some of which are recent (i.e. *Orange Is the New Black*, *The Fault in Our Stars*).

What's Different This Year

This year 231 total books were assigned as common reading, with 189 being new titles since last year. The *Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* is still the most widely assigned book, but it is not nearly as popular as before. Whereas last year *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* was assigned 31 times, this year it was only assigned 13 times. Likewise, *The Other Wes Moore*, though still a top book, was assigned by half as many colleges this year as last year. In general, book choices were more widely spread, and there were fewer frequently chosen books. This year we added 10 new categories: American Cities, Athletics,

Genre	Assignments (out of 349)
Other Nonfiction	129
Fiction	91
Memoir	84
Biography	29
Essay	8
Play	6
Verse Drama	2

BOOK THEMES	
Film/Television version exists	50
Graphic Novel	3
Environmentalism theme	14
Hurricane Katrina theme	2
9/11 theme	12
African American theme	35
African theme	18
East Asian theme	14
European theme	3
Middle Eastern theme	11
Native American theme	9
Latin American theme	20
South Asian theme	12

College Student Advice, Dark Short Stories, Disaster in America, Nature, Food Justice/Animal Rights, Homosexuality, Language, and Social Activism/Entrepreneurship.

Honorable Mentions

Common reading programs offer an excellent platform from which to engage the campus community in conversation on a single theme, introduce new students to college-level reading, expand students' thought lives, and explore the values of the college or university. Shapers of common reading programs ought to make the most of this opportunity.

Some do. While many choices, such as *Water for Elephants* (Southern New Hampshire University), *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (Pennsylvania State University, New Kensington), *The Language of Flowers* (Montcalm Community College), *A Visit From the Goon Squad* (Vassar College)³⁸, and Toni Morrison's *Home* (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), seem more like book club selections inspired by bestseller lists than works that stir the intellect, there are some notable exceptions.

These include the classics listed above, as well as numerous others.

For instance, *Don't Sleep, There are Snakes* (Belmont University) treats applied linguistics with some detail and contains a scholarly exploration of words and phrases from the Pirahã language.

Michael Sandel's book *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do?*, based on his wildly popular Harvard course, is often assigned as a required textbook in courses examining various theories of justice. This philosophical treatment of ethical dilemmas in today's world was assigned as common reading at Kennesaw State University and the University of Cincinnati.

The King's College in New York assigned two verse dramas by Robert Frost and C.S. Lewis's retelling of Greek myth, *Till We Have Faces*. Loras College assigned, as it does every year, three essays on liberal education.

Vanderbilt University and Armstrong Atlantic University assigned Andrew Delbanco's reflections on contemporary higher education, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be*.

Belmont Abbey College assigned *Bend, Not Break*, Ping Fu's memoir about moving from China to the United States. The author takes a uniquely positive view on immigration to the United States and sees it as a chance for opportunity and growth, rather than an entrance into inescapable oppression.

William Peace University assigned *Scratch Beginnings*, Adam Shepard's story of starting with \$25 and attaining the American Dream. The story serves as a counterpart to Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed*. While Ehrenreich starts with the premise that it is impossible to rise from rags to riches, Shepard's

38 One chapter of *A Visit from the Goon Squad* appears in the format of PowerPoint slides.

memoir presents a positive counterargument.

Stanford University's Three Books Program assignments are not particularly outstanding in quality, but the sheer volume of reading it invites new students to complete is impressive. The three books (chosen by an associate professor of English) total 1,082 pages, though Stanford presents the reading as "an opportunity," and it seems unlikely that students read all three cover to cover.

St. Michael's College assigned the book of Job from the Bible; this is the first time we have encountered a biblical text in common reading. Job was, in fact, one of the books NAS has recommended to colleges. Professors of English and others in academe consistently assert that knowledge of the Bible is indispensable for studying other literature. NYU professor Ernest Gilman wrote, "You just do not have the equipment for understanding Western culture unless you've read the Bible."³⁹

The University of Pennsylvania assigned *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop*, a surprisingly scholarly analysis of the poetic craft employed in rap and hip-hop music. Literary scholar and Harvard English Ph.D. Adam Bradley compares the lyrics of contemporary artists such as Jay-Z, Tupac, Nas, and Eminem to rhetorical techniques contained in classic works such as *Beowulf*, *The Iliad*, *Paradise Lost*, and the writings of Edgar Allan Poe.

Steven Levitt's *Freakonomics* (Westminster College) and Richard A. Muller's *Physics for Future Presidents* (Mississippi State University) are both used as textbooks in college courses, and each one offers substantial content in core subjects.

Indiana University, South Bend assigned a collection of Shakespeare's works and hosted a festival in conjunction with the common reading program. The university deserves recognition not only for choosing a challenging, classic author, but for making the most of its program by hosting a rich range of events throughout the year.

Le Moyne College agreed with the National Association of Scholars that classic texts can make good common reading choices. The college assigned Melville's short story "Bartleby the Scrivener," and in a press release Provost Linda LeMura declared, "We refuse to compromise on the common intellectual experience that reading a classic piece of literature like Bartleby evokes in our students."⁴⁰

University of Wisconsin, Parkside assigned *Great Tales and Poems* by Edgar Allan Poe. Though many colleges choose to assign contemporary books so that the authors might speak on campus, the university

39 Marie Goughnour Wachlin, "Why and What Professors of English Say Students Need to Know about the Bible: A Research Report Summary," SBL Forum, n.p. [cited Feb 2008]. Online: <http://sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleID=757>.

40 LeMoyne College, Office of Communications, Press Release Archives, "National Praise for First-Year Reading, Herman Melville's Bartleby, the Scrivener," http://www.lemoyne.edu/AZIndex/OfficeofCommunications/PressReleaseArchive/tabid/795/Default.aspx?udt_2761_param_detail=11926.

has found a clever way around this problem. For its Big-Read 2013 Kick-off event, “Tell-Tale Poe,” the university invited students to witness a performance by “Poe himself” – a professional impersonator. The web announcement says, “Through some unknown agency of the universe, Edgar Allan Poe, who died in 1849, will mysteriously appear at the Kemper Center in Kenosha, Wisconsin.”⁴¹

Rhode Island College chose Pym by Mat Johnson. The title is taken from Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, and it is a literary book in the sense that it forces the contemporary reader’s attention back to an important 19th century novel. Not only does it prompt students to read one of Poe’s lesser known works, but it also is a shrewd satire of the campus diversity industry.

The University of Alabama, Birmingham assigned a “media package” to freshmen as part of the university’s commemoration of the 150th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation and the 50th anniversary of civil rights events in Birmingham. The package contained “texts from Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King and music videos from Miles Davis, Curtis Mayfield, and the Samples Singers.”⁴²

THE COLLEGES

In addition to categorizing the books assigned as common reading, we made observations about the kinds of colleges and universities that have common reading programs. We listed colleges by type and by whether they are top-ranked in *U.S. News & World Report*.

Type

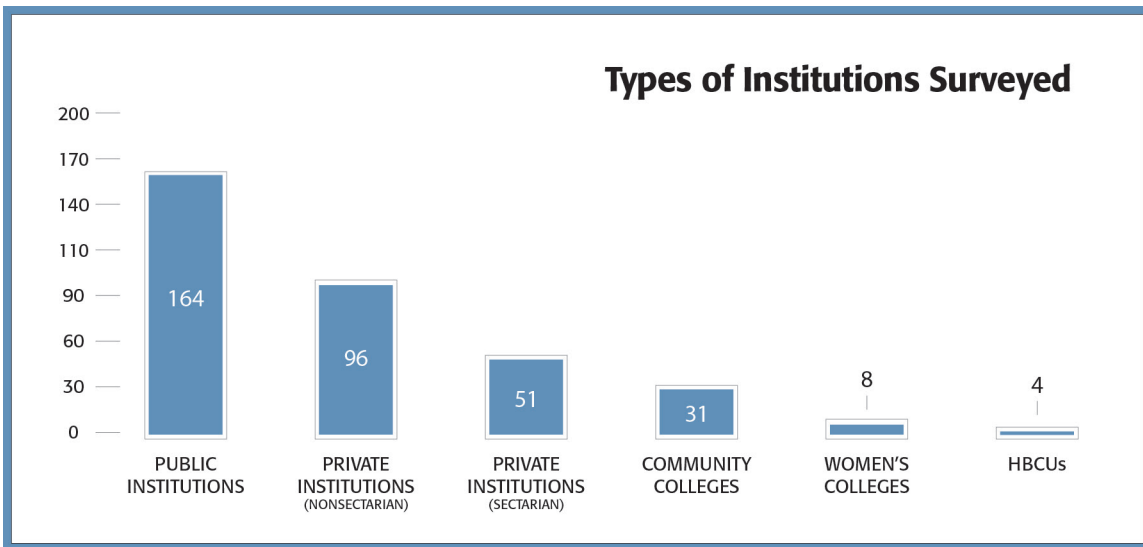
We classified each institution as one of four types: public university, private sectarian (religious), private nonsectarian, and community college.⁴³ We also noted single-sex institutions (in this case, women’s colleges) and HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities). None of the institutions in our study were for-profit colleges or universities.

Institution Type	Number
Public Institutions	155
Private Institutions (Nonsectarian)	92
Private Institutions (Sectarian)	45
Community Colleges	26
Women’s Colleges	9
HBCUs	5

41 Kenosha News: http://www.kenoshanews.com/news/poe_headlines_big_read_473575048.html.

42 University of Alabama, Birmingham, Faculty, Announcements, “Freshman Discussion looks at Civil Rights in Birmingham’s past and future,” <http://www.uab.edu/faculty/announcements/77-freshman-discussion-2013>.

43 The University of Delaware was classified twice, as it is both privately chartered and publicly funded.



Rankings

Many of the colleges and universities that have common reading programs are nationally ranked. We noted which of the 341 institutions were listed by U.S. News & World Report as being in either the top 100 National Universities or top 100 National Liberal Arts Colleges. Fifty-one of the institutions we studied rank among the top 100 National Universities, and 28 rank with the top 100 National Liberal Arts Colleges. The remaining 262 institutions are not ranked on either list.

Ranking Category	Number
National Universities	51
National Liberal Arts Colleges	28
Unranked	262

Last year we observed that most colleges that have common reading programs are middle-tier. This year, however, more Ivy League institutions have jumped on the bandwagon:

- Brown University (*Beautiful Souls: The Courage and Conscience of Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*)
- Cornell University (*When the Emperor Was Divine*)
- Dartmouth College (*The River Why*)
- Princeton University (*The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*)
- University of Pennsylvania (*Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop*)

Other elites include:



- Duke University (*Let the Great World Spin*)
- Georgetown University (*In the Shadow of the Banyan*)
- Hamilton College (*Evocative Objects: Things We Think With*)
- Lafayette College (*In the Shadow of Man*)
- Macalester College (*Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World*)
- Middlebury College (*The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears*)
- Northwestern University (*The Last Hunger Season: A Year in an African Farm Community on the Brink of Change*)
- Tufts University (*Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do*)
- Vanderbilt University (*Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*)
- Vassar College (*A Visit from the Goon Squad*)

Of all these Ivy League and elite institutions, only the University of Pennsylvania assigned one of the books we numbered among “honorable mentions.”

ANALYSIS: THE SPIRIT OF THE BOOK

Students will read only something they find pleasing. That’s the message we heard loud and clear this year from faculty and staff members. Trying to expand the reading horizons of students by assigning better books is a fruitless exercise, they told us. It’s more important to “meet students where they are.”

Even when colleges set the bar at “read something, anything, please,” it is hard for them to tell whether students actually do. Common reading coordinators attest that freshmen enjoy hearing an author speak in person, but as for reading the author’s *printed* words, those coordinators are none too sure that students generally see the point. The coordinators are at a loss to estimate how many actually crack open the assigned book.

“Read something, anything, please” is not of course what colleges want. They aim higher than merely overcoming what we’ve called the “book virgin” problem. It is true that many 18-year-olds arrive at college never having read a book, at least one they liked. If colleges aimed their common reading programs primarily at redressing this problem, they would surely stoop lower by picking something they knew in advance that students would enjoy. This year’s common reading list includes some options along those

lines: *The Hunger Games*, *The Fault in Our Stars*, and *World War Z*. But by and large colleges do aim at a higher standard—at least a little higher. Perhaps that’s because *The Hunger Games* and its hungry companions do little to satisfy the institutional appetite for making a statement. Colleges pride themselves on their ability to be a little daring. In that sense *Fun Home* might better fit a college’s self-esteem than *The Hunger Games*, even if *Fun Home* is really just an extended comic strip. When The College of Charleston picked it, it could feel it had struck a blow for LGBTQ rights in a state where that cause is not popular.

That note of defiance is present in many common reading choices. They show students what side of the culture wars “we” as an institution are on. That’s why colleges picked books on illegal immigration, racial identity, global warming, unjust incarcerations, gay and lesbian life, terrorism paranoia, affirmative action, recycling, vegetarianism, sexism, and wealth inequality. Most colleges claim they assign common readings to build community. But their unspoken purpose is to open students’ eyes to the injustice and inequality all around them—and then to have them do something about it.

A community built on activism, however, is also built on arrogance. It assumes we can bypass the discipline of learning about the world and go straight to remaking it. Students are often canny enough to recognize the attempted manipulation. As one student noted, a common reading program conducted as an exercise in progressive propaganda can “build community” in an unintended way by uniting students in opposition to the common reading itself.

American colleges and universities, however, often miss that nuance. They increasingly see their mission as overtly political, and purely academic considerations are shortchanged. Common reading choices often align with that politicized vision.

Thus the choice of book is narrowed to those that are deemed not only easy to read and likely to be enjoyed by adolescents, but also didactic and conformed to progressive ideology. Not every book in this year’s list matches this description but the great majority do.

Colleges gravitate toward such books to show students, “This is the kind of thing you should *want* to read on your own time, outside class.”

Colleges that wanted to make sure students actually read the assigned books could test students. Of the 341 colleges in our study, only two test. Several coordinators told us that the logistics of such tests made testing impossible. One coordinator asserted that such a test would violate professors’ academic freedom. These don’t seem like very good explanations. After all, colleges routinely test incoming students on other things, such as language proficiency. While testing for common reading compliance involves some difficulties, those could be surmounted. All new students in colleges everywhere must sign up for email, student IDs, and online portals (and at Oklahoma State University this fall, an online course on

sexual assault prevention⁴⁴). Why can't a test on the common reading be another part of that process?

Two possible answers: colleges may be content with the showmanship of assigning a book and see no reason to make a fuss if the assignment is ignored. Making the statement is enough, and perhaps all by itself communicates the underlying message. *We are for gay rights. We favor open borders. We want everyone to support government intervention to stop global warming.* The other possible reason for not testing is that the colleges are a loss as to what to do if the test were to show that few students read the book. The test, after all, would not be reflected in a student's grades. There is an answer to this. Colleges can impose administrative penalties on students who fail to meet non-academic requirements, as when Oklahoma State puts a hold on course registration for any student who fails successfully to complete its sexual assault prevention course. But in our study, only the two colleges that actually have imposed tests for common reading have been willing to elevate the common reading requirement to that level of seriousness.

Tests, of course, are no guarantee that students will take up the spirit of a common reading. Promoting serious intellectual conversation among students on a single theme is not a mechanical exercise. While a test might improve the odds that students will read a book, the larger goal of building a "community" around a shared reading is bound to be elusive—especially if the book itself provides meager intellectual substance.

What all colleges really need is some way to struggle against the premise that *students will read only something they find pleasing*. No doubt this is a hard problem. Even relatively bright students often have little ambition to read books and even less to read books that are not immediately gratifying. Common reading coordinators are faced with a difficulty that cannot be resolved with a simple edict: *Pick better books*.

They should in fact pick better books, and we have suggestions for some they might consider, but beyond picking better books, coordinators (and faculty generally) need to work on turning students' attention to a larger horizon. Their real job is to introduce students to a little of what is "higher" in higher education. They are in the position of offering new students their first glimpse of what it means to seek some elements of truth, beauty, and goodness in the words of a printed book. They have the task of bringing reluctant students to the first lookout point where they can see what lies ahead.

If instead of taking them to that lookout point, the coordinators offer students banal reassurances that everything will be easy, comfortable, and unchallenging, the result will be worse than no common reading at all. Students don't need "relatable" books, or politically correct memoirs, or even classics. What they need is the spirit of taking their own minds seriously and a dawning awareness of how far they will need to go to become truly educated.

44 Vendituoli, Monica, "A Scripted Response to Sexual Assault," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 25, 2014, http://chronicle.com/article/A-Scripted-Response-to-Sexual/148465/?cid=at&utm_source=at&utm_medium=en.

The latter involves humility. A good common reading program should be grounded in the recognition that we do not arrive in college already in possession of what we need to learn. When it comes to common reading, that means picking books that are at least moderately challenging. But that isn't all. Common readings should convey the importance of paying attention before acting. They should embody the principle of listening respectfully to opinions that contradict one's own. They should capture the spirit that loves to learn.

When students love to learn, and see their college loving learning, they will want to read important books, talk about them with others, and join the community of all who have read them before.

The best qualities of a learner do not come naturally to college students, so it falls to the institution to train them. The first step is for the institution to hold itself to these ideals. When a college or university respects opposing views, promotes study ahead of action, patiently seeks evidence for hypotheses, esteems the wisdom of others, and finds wonder in both new discoveries and ancient knowledge—it will show students what higher learning really is.

Ultimately, the flourishing of a common reading program is tied closely to the flourishing of this spirit. It is possible for students to be inspired by the college even before beginning their first classes. Part of that can be done in common reading, part can be done through the testimony of current students, and part can be done in the college's reputation for what it values most. When colleges show students what it means to love learning, getting them to read a book in common over the summer will come much more easily.

Students may still read only something they find pleasing, but their idea of what pleases will have grown up.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Colleges and universities face various pitfalls in choosing a book for common reading. If a college chooses to proceed with a common reading program, it will achieve very little if it does not first assign the task of selection to serious, broadly-educated, and well-read individuals who also understand the shape and trajectory of the curriculum. The following recommendations proceed from the idea that the college has first convened the kind of committee that can actually do the task to which it has been appointed.

1. Seek diversity—the intellectual kind. Mix it up. Bioethics, healthy eating, and oppression are important themes but so are human unity, courage, fidelity, redemption, self-sacrifice, fellowship, and truth, among others.
2. Seek books that are neither too long nor too short. “Too long” means a book that would defeat even the able, well-intentioned, and determined pre-freshman reader (i.e., *War and Peace*). In some cases, colleges would do well to choose long books but assign selections. “Too short” means a book or essay that would invite the pre-freshman to treat the assignment as a triviality, even though it isn’t (i.e., President Kennedy’s “Ask not” inaugural address).
3. Seek texts that are just a bit over students’ heads, but not so far that they are beyond reach. This excludes many works of classical antiquity. Sophocles is best read with the guidance of an instructor. Nietzsche invites wild misreadings from those who lack the philosophical context. Select books that are not found in high school curricula and that represent the reading level you would like students to attain, not the reading level you think they are already on.
4. Seek works that are not contemptuous of humanity or dyed in profound cynicism. Some such books (by, for instance, Samuel Beckett or H. L. Mencken) belong in the college curriculum but are a poor welcome mat to the pre-freshmen who ought to have a somewhat more positive introduction to why colleges exist and why they are devoting time and money to the enterprise.
5. In fiction, seek works that exemplify elegance of language and a degree of complexity, along with moral seriousness.
6. In nonfiction, seek works that exemplify important ideas lucidly argued and writers who take their rhetorical task seriously.
7. Pay deliberate attention to important books from earlier eras. Don’t be dazzled by the contemporary or the idea that students will automatically find the present more “relevant” than the past. College is a place where the claims of authors who lie outside the preoccupations of the moment should be respected.

8. Consider that the book you choose will be more than a reading for the students. It will also be a public representation of the college's academic standards, values, and reputation.
 - A book that is undemanding or merely popular says that a college is intellectually superficial.
 - A novelty book says that a college doesn't take itself with sufficient seriousness and is intellectually immature.
 - A book that aggressively promotes a political agenda says that a college is ideologically narrow.
 - A book that has achieved celebrity but hasn't really been tested by time (such as Greg Mortenson's memoir, *Three Cups of Tea*) risks embarrassment if the story proves to have been loose with the facts.
9. Be wary of assigning any book that all the members of the committee haven't actually read.
10. Consult with others who read widely and well and who are intimately acquainted with good books. Ask several generations of alumni, "Which book that you read in college influenced you the most?" and consider their answers as candidates for common reading.
11. Consult outside sources, such as the National Association of Scholars' list (See Appendix IV: Recommended Books for College Common Reading) or the National Endowment for the Arts program The Big Read.⁴⁵
12. Consider pairing new with old. Try assigning two books for the year: one from an earlier era and one more recent book that complement each another.

⁴⁵ "Books and Guides," The NEA Big Read: <http://www.neabigread.org/books.php>

APPENDIX I: KEY AND TOTALS

Subject Category	Number of Colleges
American Cities	4
Athletics	3
Classics	4
College Student Advice	5
Coming of Age	20
Crime and Punishment	6
Dark Short Stories	2
Disability/Disease	13
Disaster in America	11
Dystopian/Apocalyptic	10
Economics	6
Education Philosophy	5
Environmentalism	18
Food Justice/Animal Rights	12
Genocide/Internment	10
Homosexuality	7
Information Technology	5
Language	2
Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism	40
Nature	6
Overcoming Adversity	24
Philosophy/Spirituality	28
Poverty	5
Science	20
Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness	4
Social Activism/Entrepreneurship	29

Sociology/Psychology	24
Uncategorized	6
War	11
Women	9

Number of Assignments (out of 341)	
National Universities	51
National Liberal Arts Colleges	28
Unranked	262

Themes	Number
Film/Television version exists	50
Graphic Novel	3
Environmentalism theme	14
Hurricane Katrina theme	2
9/11 theme	12
African American theme	35
African theme	18
East Asian theme	14
European theme	3
Middle Eastern theme	11
Native American theme	9
Latin American theme	20
South Asian theme	12

Genres	Number of Assignments (out of 349)
Other Nonfiction	129
Fiction	91
Memoir	84
Biography	29
Essay	8
Play	6
Verse Drama	2

**APPENDIX II: BOOKS CHOSEN AS COMMON READING
2013-2014: FULL LIST BY INSTITUTION NAME**

College/University	Book, Author, Year	Subject Category, Genre, Theme
Adams State University (CO)	<i>Leaving Mother Lake: A Girlhood at the Edge of the World</i> Namu, Yang Erche and Christine Mathieu 2003	Coming of Age Memoir East Asian theme
Adelphi University	<i>Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity</i> Boo, Katherine 2012	Poverty Other Nonfiction South Asian theme
Adler School of Professional Psychology	<i>The Round House</i> Erdrich, Louise 2012	Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism Fiction Native American theme

<p>Agnes Scott College</p>	<p><i>The Starboard Sea: A Novel</i></p> <p>Dermont, Amber</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>Albion College</p>	<p><i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i></p> <p>Allen, Will</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Food Justice/Animal Rights</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
<p>Amarillo College</p>	<p><i>Wine to Water: How One Man Saved Himself While Trying to Save the World</i></p> <p>Hendley, Doc</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Social Activism/Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African theme</p>
<p>American University</p>	<p><i>Notes from No Man's Land: American Essays</i></p> <p>Biss, Eula</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

<p>Appalachian State University</p>	<p><i>American Dervish</i> Akhtar, Ayad 2012</p>	<p>Coming of Age Fiction Middle Eastern theme</p>
<p>Aquinas College (Michigan)</p>	<p><i>The Glass Castle</i> Walls, Jeannette 2005</p>	<p>Coming of Age Memoir Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Armstrong Atlantic University</p>	<p><i>College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be</i> Delbanco, Andrew 2012</p>	<p>Education Philosophy Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Assumption College</p>	<p><i>The Unforgiving Minute</i> Granger, Sarah 2013</p>	<p>War Fiction</p>

Austin Peay State University	<i>Saints at the River</i> Rash, Ron 2004	Environmentalism Fiction Film/Television version exists: Environmentalism theme
Baker University	<i>The Last Lecture</i> Pausch, Randy and Jeffrey Zaslow 2008	Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness Memoir
Ball State University	<i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i> Grennan, Conor 2010	Social Activism/Entrepreneurship Memoir South Asian theme
Bard College at Simon's Rock	<i>Open City</i> Cole, Teju 2011	Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism Fiction African theme

<p>Barry University</p>	<p><i>Don't Shoot: One Man, a Street Fellowship, and the End of Violence in Inner-City America</i></p> <p>Kennedy, David M.</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Crime and Punishment</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>
<p>Baruch College</p>	<p><i>The Age of Miracles</i></p> <p>Walker, Karen Thompson</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>Bates College</p>	<p><i>When We Were the Kennedys: A Memoir from Mexico, Maine</i></p> <p>Wood, Monica</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Memoir</p>
<p>Baylor University (honors program)</p>	<p><i>The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures</i></p> <p>Fadiman, Anne</p> <p>1997</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>East Asian theme</p>

Becker College	<i>Looking for Alaska</i> Green, Jon 2005	Coming of Age Fiction
Bellarmine University	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Philosophy/Spirituality Other Nonfiction
Bellevue College	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Science Biography African American theme; Film/ Television version exists
Belmont Abbey College	<i>Bend, Not Break: A Life in Two Worlds</i> Fu, Ping 2012	Overcoming Adversity Memoir East Asian theme

<p>Belmont University</p>	<p><i>Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes: Life and Language in the Amazonian Jungle</i></p> <p>Everett, Daniel L.</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Language</p> <p>Biography</p>
<p>Bentley University</p>	<p><i>Creating Magic: 10 Common Sense Leadership Strategies From a Life at Disney</i></p> <p>Cockerell, Lee</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Berry College</p>	<p><i>Caleb's Crossing</i></p> <p>Brooks, Geraldine</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Native American theme</p>
<p>Bluffton University</p>	<p><i>Black Ice</i></p> <p>Cary, Lorene</p> <p>1991</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>

Boise State University	<p><i>Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide</i></p> <p>Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Women</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
Boston College	<p><i>Make the Impossible Possible: One Man's Crusade to Inspire Others to Dream Bigger and Achieve the Extraordinary</i></p> <p>Strickland, William E.</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Middle Eastern theme</p>
Bowling Green State University	<p><i>Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen</i></p> <p>McDougall, Christopher</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Athletics</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Native American theme</p>
Brenau University	<p><i>The Butterfly's Daughter</i></p> <p>Monroe, Mary Alice</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Women</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Latin American theme</p>

<p>Brookhaven College</p>	<p><i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i></p> <p>Moore, Wes</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>
<p>Brooklyn College (CUNY)</p>	<p><i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i></p> <p>Diaz, Junot</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists; Latin American theme</p>
<p>Brown University</p>	<p><i>Beautiful Souls: The Courage and Conscience of Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times</i></p> <p>Press, Eyal</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Buena Vista University</p>	<p><i>How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America</i></p> <p>Bayoumi, Moustafa</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Middle Eastern theme; 9/11 theme</p>

Butler University	<p><i>Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, an American Town</i></p> <p>St. John, Warren</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>Middle Eastern theme; African theme</p>
Butte College	<p><i>The Yellow Birds</i></p> <p>Powers, Kevin</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>War</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Middle Eastern theme</p>
California Maritime University	<p><i>Travels of a T-Shirt in a Global Economy</i></p> <p>Rivoli, Pietra</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Economics</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
California State University, Bakersfield	<p><i>The House on Mango Street</i></p> <p>Cisneros, Sandra</p> <p>1984</p>	<p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Latin American theme</p>

<p>California State University, Chico</p>	<p><i>The Yellow Birds</i></p> <p>Powers, Kevin</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>War</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Middle Eastern theme</p>
<p>California State University, Los Angeles</p>	<p><i>The Laramie Project</i></p> <p>Kaufman, Moisés and Tectonic Theater Project</p> <p>2001</p>	<p>Homosexuality</p> <p>Play</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>California State University, Northridge</p>	<p><i>Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i></p> <p>Humes, Edward</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Essay</p>
<p>California State University, Sacramento</p>	<p><i>Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats</i></p> <p>Iversen, Kristen</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Essay</p>

Carroll College (Montana)	<i>What Is the What</i> Eggers, Dave 2006	Genocide/Internment Fiction African theme
Case Western Reserve University	<i>Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking</i> Cain, Susan 2012	Sociology/Psychology Other Nonfiction
Castleton State College (VT)	<i>Everything Matters!</i> Currie Jr., Ron 2009	Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Fiction
Catawba College	<i>The Real Work: Modern Magic and the Meaning of Life</i> Gopnik, Adam 2008	Sociology/Psychology Essay

<p>Cedar Crest College</p>	<p><i>Mighty Be Our Powers</i></p> <p>Leymah Gbowee</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Women</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African theme</p>
<p>Central College</p>	<p><i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i></p> <p>Moore, Wes</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>
<p>Century College</p>	<p><i>The Round House</i></p> <p>Erdrich, Louise</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Native American theme</p>
<p>Chadbourne Residential College (University of Wisconsin-Madison)</p>	<p><i>A Woman Among Warlords: The Extraordinary Story of an Afghan Who Dared to Raise Her Voice</i></p> <p>Joya, Malalai</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Social Activism/Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>

Chaffey College	<i>The Things They Carried</i> O'Brien, Tim 1990	War Fiction Film/Television version exists
Clemson University	<i>The Iguana Tree</i> Stone, Michel 2012	Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism Fiction Latin American theme
Cleveland State University	<i>The Life of Pi</i> Martel, Yann 2001	Philosophy/Spirituality Fiction Film/Television version exists; South Asian theme
Coastal Carolina University	<i>Start Something That Matters</i> Mycoskie, Blake 2011	Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship Other Nonfiction

<p>Coker College</p>	<p><i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i></p> <p>Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Colgate University</p>	<p><i>Tenth of December</i></p> <p>Saunders, George</p> <p>2013</p>	<p>Dark Short Stories</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>College of Charleston</p>	<p><i>Fun Home</i></p> <p>Bechdel, Alison</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Homosexuality</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Graphic Novel</p>
<p>College of the Redwoods</p>	<p><i>Fup: A Modern Fable</i></p> <p>Dodge, Jim</p> <p>1984</p>	<p>Uncategorized</p> <p>Fiction</p>

Collin College	<p><i>Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats</i></p> <p>Iversen, Kristen</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
Colorado Mountain College	<p><i>I'm Down</i></p> <p>Wolff, Mishna</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>
Community College of Baltimore County	<p><i>The Working Poor: Invisible in America</i></p> <p>Shipler, David K.</p> <p>2004</p>	<p>Poverty</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
Concordia College	<p><i>Happiness: The Science Behind Your Smile</i></p> <p>Nettle, Daniel</p> <p>2005</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

<p>Cornell College</p>	<p><i>Zeitoun</i></p> <p>Eggers, Dave</p> <p>2005</p>	<p>Disaster in America</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>Hurricane Katrina theme; Film/ Television version exists; 9/11 theme</p>
<p>Cornell University</p>	<p><i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i></p> <p><i>Otsuka, Julie</i></p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Genocide/Internment</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>East Asian theme</p>
<p>Corning Community College</p>	<p><i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part- Time Indian</i></p> <p>Sherman, Alexie</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Native American theme</p>
<p>Cosumnes River College</p>	<p><i>The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals</i></p> <p>Pollan, Michael</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Food Justice/Animal Rights</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

Cuesta College	<p><i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison</i></p> <p>Kerman, Piper</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Crime and Punishment</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
Culver-Stockton College	<p><i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i></p> <p>Moore, Wes</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>
Cumberland University	<p><i>Shake the World: It's Not About Finding A Job, It's About Creating a Life</i></p> <p>Reilly, James Marshall</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
Curry College	<p><i>Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival and My Journey from Homelessness to Harvard</i></p> <p>Murray, Liz</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

<p>Dartmouth College</p>	<p><i>The River Why</i> Duncan, David James 1983</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality Fiction</p>
<p>Davidson College</p>	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010</p>	<p>Science Biography African American theme; Film/ Television version exists</p>
<p>Delaware County Community College</p>	<p><i>Water by the Spoonful</i> Hudes, Quiara Alegria 2012</p>	<p>Play</p>
<p>Drexel University</p>	<p><i>The Botany of Desire</i> Pollan, Michael 2001</p>	<p>Environmentalism Other Nonfiction Environmentalism theme</p>

Duke University	<i>Let the Great World Spin</i> McCann, Colum 2009	American Cities Fiction
Earlham College	<i>Cutting for Stone</i> Verghese, Abraham 2009	Coming of Age Fiction African theme
East Carolina University	<i>It Happened on the Way to War: A Marine's Path to Peace</i> Barcott, Rye 2011	Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship Memoir
Eastern Illinois University	<i>The Submission</i> Waldman, Amy 2013	Disaster in America Fiction 9/11 theme

<p>Eastern Kentucky University</p>	<p><i>Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It's So Hard to Think Straight About Animals</i></p> <p>Herzog, Hal</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Food Justice/Animal Rights</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Eastfield College</p>	<p><i>One Amazing Thing</i></p> <p>Divakaruni, Chitra</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Disaster in America</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>9/11 theme</p>
<p>Edgewood College</p>	<p><i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time</i></p> <p>Haddon, Mark</p> <p>2003</p>	<p>Disability/Disease</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Elizabethtown College</p>	<p><i>Creating Room to Read: A Story of Hope in the Battle for Global Literacy</i></p> <p>Wood, John</p> <p>2013</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Memoir</p>

Elon University	<p><i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i></p> <p>Grennan, Conor</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>South Asian theme</p>
Emmanuel College (Massachusetts)	<p><i>The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty: How We Lie to Everyone - Especially Ourselves</i></p> <p>Ariely, Dan</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
Evergreen State College	<p><i>Listening Is An Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project</i></p> <p>Isay, Dave</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Uncategorized</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
Fairmont State University	<p><i>In Pursuit of Silence: Listening for Meaning in a World of Noise</i></p> <p>Prochnik, George</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

<p>Fayetteville State University</p>	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010</p>	<p>Science Biography African American theme; Film/ Television version exists</p>
<p>Florida Gulf Coast University</p>	<p><i>Half a Life</i> Strauss, Darin 2010</p>	<p>Coming of Age Memoir</p>
<p>Florida International University</p>	<p><i>Wine to Water: How One Man Saved Himself While Trying to Save the World</i> Hendley, Doc 2012</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship Memoir African theme</p>
<p>Florida Southern College</p>	<p><i>The Hunger Games</i> Collins, Suzanne 2008</p>	<p>Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Fiction Film/Television version exists</p>

Florida State University	<p><i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i></p> <p>Moore, Wes</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>
Fort Lewis College	<p><i>Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats</i></p> <p>Iversen, Kristen</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
Framingham State College	<p><i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i></p> <p>Diaz, Junot</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists; Latin American theme</p>
Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i></p> <p>Skloot, Rebecca</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>African American theme; Film/Television version exists</p>

<p>George Washington University</p>	<p><i>Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Change the World</i></p> <p>McGonigal, Jane</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Georgetown University</p>	<p><i>In the Shadow of the Banyan</i></p> <p>Ratner, Vaddey</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Genocide/Internment</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>East Asian theme</p>
<p>Georgia College</p>	<p><i>Beasts of the Southern Wild</i></p> <p>Betts, Doris</p> <p>1998</p>	<p>Dark Short Stories</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>Georgia Institute of Technology</p>	<p><i>Living with Complexity</i></p> <p>Norman, Donald</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

Georgia State University	<p><i>Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast</i></p> <p>Tretheway, Natasha</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Disaster in America</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Hurricane Katrina theme</p>
Goucher College	<p><i>Let the Great World Spin</i></p> <p>McCann, Colum</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>American Cities</p> <p>Fiction</p>
Grace College	<p><i>In the Presence of My Enemies</i></p> <p>Burnham, Gracia</p> <p>2003</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>9/11 theme</p>
Grand Valley State University	<p><i>The Distance Between Us: A Memoir</i></p> <p>Grande, Reyna</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Latin American theme</p>

<p>Grossmont College</p>	<p><i>The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer</i></p> <p>Mukherjee, Siddhartha</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Disability/Disease</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Guilford Technical Community College</p>	<p><i>Into the Beautiful North</i></p> <p>Urrea, Luis Alberto</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Latin American theme</p>
<p>Gustavus Adolphus College</p>	<p><i>A Pearl in the Storm: How I Found My Heart in the Middle of the Ocean</i></p> <p>McClure, Tori Murden</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Nature</p> <p>Memoir</p>
<p>Hamilton College (New York)</p>	<p><i>Evocative Objects: Things We Think With</i></p> <p>Turkle, Sherry</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

Hamline University	<i>What the Best College Students Do</i> Bain, Ken 2012	College Student Advice Other Nonfiction
Hampshire CollegeGarbology:	<i>Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash</i> Humes, Edward 2012	Environmentalism Other Nonfiction Environmentalism theme
Hawaii Pacific University	<i>In Pursuit of Silence: Listening for Meaning in a World of Noise</i> Prochnik, George 2010	Sociology/Psychology Other Nonfiction
Henderson State University	<i>The Laramie Project</i> Kaufman, Moisés and Tectonic Theater Project 2001	Homosexuality Play Film/Television version exists

<p>Hiram College</p>	<p><i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i></p> <p>Haddon, Mark</p> <p>2003</p>	<p>Disability/Disease</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Hollins University (Virginia)</p>	<p><i>Wild Girls</i></p> <p>Atwell, Mary Stewart</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>Hood College</p>	<p><i>A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier</i></p> <p>Beah, Ishmael</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>War</p> <p>Memoir</p>
<p>Humboldt State University</p>	<p><i>Fup: A Modern Fable</i></p> <p>Dodge, Jim</p> <p>1984</p>	<p>Uncategorized</p> <p>Fiction</p>

Illinois College	<p><i>Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation</i></p> <p>Patel, Eboo</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Memoir</p>
Illinois Wesleyan	<p><i>Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, an American Town</i></p> <p>St. John, Warren</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>Middle Eastern theme; African theme</p>
Indiana State University	<p><i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i></p> <p>Grennan, Conor</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Social Activism/Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>South Asian theme</p>
Indiana University East	<p><i>Wine to Water: How One Man Saved Himself While Trying to Save the World</i></p> <p>Hendley, Doc</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Social Activism/Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African theme</p>

<p>Indiana University Purdue University of Indianapolis</p>	<p><i>No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process</i></p> <p>Beavan, Colin</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
<p>Indiana University, Northwest</p>	<p><i>The House on Mango Street</i></p> <p>Cisneros, Sandra</p> <p>1984</p>	<p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Latin American theme</p>
<p>Indiana University, South Bend</p>	<p>Shakespeare's Works</p> <p>Shakespeare, William</p> <p>C. 1590-1610</p>	<p>Classics</p> <p>Play</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Indiana University, Southeast</p>	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i></p> <p>Skloot, Rebecca</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>African American theme; Film/Television version exists</p>

<p>Ithaca College</p>	<p><i>Brooklyn: A Novel</i> Tóibín, Colm 2009</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism Fiction European theme</p>
<p>Ivy Tech Community College</p>	<p><i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay & Dan Gediman 2006</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Jacksonville State University</p>	<p><i>The Fault in Our Stars</i> Green, John 2012</p>	<p>Coming of Age Fiction Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Johnson State College</p>	<p><i>Detroit: An American Autopsy</i> LeDuff, Charlie 2013</p>	<p>American Cities Other Nonfiction</p>

<p>Juniata College</p>	<p><i>The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle</i></p> <p>Gray, Glenn J.</p> <p>1998</p>	<p>War</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Kalamazoo College</p>	<p><i>In the Shadow of the Banyan</i></p> <p>Ratner, Vaddey</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Genocide/Internment</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Eastern Asian theme</p>
<p>Kansas State University</p>	<p><i>Ready Player One</i></p> <p>Cline, Ernest</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>Kennesaw State University</p>	<p><i>Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do</i></p> <p>Sandel, Michael</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

<p>Kent State University</p>	<p><i>Who Owns the Ice House?: Eight Life-Lessons From an Unlikely Entrepreneur</i></p> <p>Taulbert, Clifton and Gary Schoeniger</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Kingsborough Community College</p>	<p><i>Eating Animals</i></p> <p>Foer, Jonathan Safran</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Food Justice/Animal Rights</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
<p>Lackawanna College</p>	<p><i>No Turning Back</i></p> <p>Anderson, Bryan</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p>
<p>Lafayette College</p>	<p><i>In the Shadow of Man</i></p> <p>Goodall, Jane</p> <p>1971</p>	<p>Food Justice/Animal Rights</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>

<p>Laguardia Community College</p>	<p><i>State of Wonder</i></p> <p>Patchett, Ann</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>Le Moyne College</p>	<p>Bartleby, The Scrivener</p> <p>Melville, Herman</p> <p>1853</p>	<p>Classics</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Lehigh University</p>	<p><i>The Madonnas of Echo Park</i></p> <p>Skyhorse, Brando</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists; Latin American theme</p>
<p>Linfield College</p>	<p><i>Thieves of Baghdad: One Marine's Passion to Recover the World's Greatest Stolen Treasures</i></p> <p>Bogdanos, Matthew and William Patrick</p> <p>2005</p>	<p>War</p> <p>Nonfiction</p>

<p>Longwood University</p>	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i></p> <p>Skloot, Rebecca</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>African American theme; Film/ Television version exists</p>
<p>Loras College</p>	<p><i>"Only Connect..." The Goals of a Liberal Education</i></p> <p>Cronon, William</p> <p>1998</p>	<p>Education Philosophy</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
<p>Loras College</p>	<p><i>On the Purpose of a Liberal Arts Education</i></p> <p>Harris, Robert</p> <p>1991</p>	<p>Education Philosophy</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
<p>Loras College</p>	<p><i>They Knew Calculus When They Left: The Thinking Disconnect Between High School and University</i></p> <p>St. Jarre, Kevin</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Education Philosophy</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>

<p>Louisburg College</p>	<p><i>Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man, and Life's Greatest Lesson</i></p> <p>Albom, Mitch</p> <p>1997</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Louisiana Tech University</p>	<p><i>The Last Lecture</i></p> <p>Pausch, Randy</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness</p> <p>Memoir</p>
<p>Loyola Marymount University</p>	<p><i>Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion</i></p> <p>Boyle, Fr. Greg, S.J.</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Luther College</p>	<p><i>The Space Between Us</i></p> <p>Umrigar, Thrity</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Women</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>South Asian theme</p>

<p>Macalester College Mountains</p>	<p><i>Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World</i></p> <p>Kidder, Tracy</p> <p>2004</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>Latin American theme</p>
<p>Marietta College</p>	<p><i>Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i></p> <p>Timmerman, Kelsey</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Economics</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Marquette University</p>	<p><i>One Amazing Thing</i></p> <p>Divakaruni, Chitra</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Disaster in America</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>9/11 theme</p>
<p>MassBay Community College</p>	<p><i>The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream</i></p> <p>Davis, Sampson, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt, with Lisa Frazier Page</p> <p>2002</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>

<p>Meredith College</p>	<p><i>Finding the Game: Three Years, Twenty-Five Countries, and the Search for Pickup Soccer</i></p> <p>Oxenham, Gwendolyn</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Athletics</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Methodist University</p>	<p><i>Ethics and College Student Life</i></p> <p>Strike, Kenneth and Pamela Moss</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>College Student Advice</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Miami University (Ohio)</p>	<p><i>Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Change the World</i></p> <p>McGonigal, Jane</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Michigan State University</p>	<p><i>The Yellow Birds</i></p> <p>Powers, Kevin</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>War</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Middle Eastern theme</p>

<p>Michigan Technological University</p>	<p><i>Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats</i></p> <p>Iversen, Kristen</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
<p>Middle Tennessee State University</p>	<p><i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i></p> <p>Allison, Jay & Dan Gediman</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Middlebury College</p>	<p><i>The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears</i></p> <p>Mengestu, Dinaw</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>African theme; African American theme</p>
<p>Millersville University</p>	<p><i>How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America</i></p> <p>Bayoumi, Moustafa</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Middle Eastern theme, 9/11 theme</p>

<p>Minnesota State University, Mankato</p>	<p><i>Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness</i></p> <p>Kidder, Tracy</p> <p>2000</p>	<p>Genocide/Internment</p> <p>Biography</p>
<p>Mississippi State University</p>	<p><i>Physics for Future Presidents</i></p> <p>Muller, Richard A.</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>9/11 theme</p>
<p>Missouri State University</p>	<p><i>Start Something That Matters</i></p> <p>Mycoskie, Blake</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Mitchell College</p>	<p><i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i></p> <p>Allison, Jay & Dan Gediman</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

Molloy College	<i>Ready Player One</i> Cline, Ernest 2011	Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Fiction
Montana State University	<i>The Life of Pi</i> Martel, Yann 2006	Philosophy/Spirituality Fiction Film/Television version exists
Montcalm Community College	<i>The Language of Flowers</i> Diffenbaugh, Vanessa 2011	Overcoming Adversity Fiction
Moraine Valley Community College	<i>World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War</i> Brooks, Max 2006	Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Fiction

<p>Moravian College</p>	<p><i>The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger</i></p> <p>Wilkinson, Richard and Kate Pickett</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Economics</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Mount Holyoke College</p>	<p><i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i></p> <p>Diaz, Junot</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists; Latin American theme</p>
<p>Mountain View College</p>	<p><i>One Amazing Thing</i></p> <p>Divakaruni, Chitra</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Disaster in America</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>9/11 theme</p>
<p>Murray State University</p>	<p><i>Sum: Forty Tales from the Afterlives</i></p> <p>Eagleman, David</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Fiction</p>

Nassau Community College	<p><i>The Warrior's Heart: Becoming a Man of Compassion and Courage</i></p> <p>Greitens, Eric</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
New College of Florida	<p><i>Clybourne Park</i></p> <p>Norris, Bruce</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>African American theme</p>
New York University (College of Arts and Science)	<p><i>Eat the City: A Tale of the Fishers, Foragers, Butchers, Farmers, Poultry Minders, Sugar Refiners, Cane Cutters, Beekeepers, Winemakers, and Brewers Who Built New York</i></p> <p>Schulman, Robin</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Food Justice/Animal Rights</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
Norfolk State University	<p><i>The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream</i></p> <p>Davis, Sampson, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt, with Lisa Frazier Page</p> <p>2002</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>

<p>North Carolina A&T State University</p>	<p><i>Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us</i></p> <p>Moss, Michael</p> <p>2013</p>	<p>Food Justice/Animal Rights</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>North Carolina Central University</p>	<p><i>The Kite Runner</i></p> <p>Hosseini, Khaled</p> <p>2003</p>	<p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Middle Eastern theme; Film/ Television version exists</p>
<p>North Carolina State University</p>	<p><i>The Alchemy of Air</i></p> <p>Hager, Thomas</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>North Central College</p>	<p><i>Stumbling on Happiness</i></p> <p>Gilbert, Daniel</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

Northern Arizona University	<i>Every Day</i> Levithan, David 2012	Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi Fiction
Northern Illinois University	<i>Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation</i> Patel, Eboo 2007	Philosophy/Spirituality Memoir
Northern Kentucky University	<i>Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2008	Economics Memoir
Northwestern University	<i>The Last Hunger Season: A Year in an African Farm Community on the Brink of Change</i> Thurow, Roger 2012	Food Justice/Animal Rights Other Nonfiction African theme

<p>Occidental College</p>	<p><i>The Big Thirst: The Secret Life and Turbulent Future of Water</i></p> <p>Fishman, Charles</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
<p>Ohio Northern University</p>	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i></p> <p>Skloot, Rebecca</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>African American theme; Film/ Television version exists</p>
<p>Ohio State University</p>	<p><i>The Submission</i></p> <p>Waldman, Amy</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Disaster in America</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>9/11 theme</p>
<p>Oklahoma City University</p>	<p><i>Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years with a Midwife in Mali</i></p> <p>Holloway, Kris</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Women</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>A</p>

Otterbein College	<i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i> Grennan, Conor 2010	Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship Memoir South Asian theme
Owensboro Community and Technical College	<i>The Namesake</i> Lahiri, Jhumpa 2002	Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism Fiction Film/Television version exists; South Asian theme
Pace University	<i>Class Matters</i> Keller, Bill 2005	Sociology/Psychology Other Nonfiction
Pacific Lutheran University	<i>Into the Beautiful North</i> Urrea, Luis Alberto 2009	Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism Fiction Latin American theme

<p>Paine College</p>	<p><i>The Bond: Three Young Men Learn to Forgive and Reconnect with their Fathers</i></p> <p>Davis, Sampson, George Jenkins, and Rameck Hunt, with Lisa Frazier Page</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>African American theme</p>
<p>Parkland College</p>	<p><i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i></p> <p>Moore, Wes</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>
<p>Pellissippi State Community College</p>	<p><i>A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail</i></p> <p>Bryson, Bill</p> <p>1997</p>	<p>Nature</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Pennsylvania State University, Berks</p>	<p><i>Beautiful Souls: The Courage and Conscience of Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times</i></p> <p>Press, Eyal</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

<p>Pennsylvania State University, Harrisburg</p>	<p><i>Beautiful Souls: The Courage and Conscience of Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times</i></p> <p>Press, Eyal</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Pennsylvania State University, New Kensington</p>	<p><i>The Perks of Being A Wallflower</i></p> <p>Chbosky, Stephen</p> <p>1999</p>	<p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Princeton University</p>	<p><i>The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen</i></p> <p>Appiah, Kwame Anthony</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Providence College</p>	<p><i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time</i></p> <p>Haddon, Mark</p> <p>2003</p>	<p>Disability/Disease</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>

<p>Purdue University</p>	<p><i>No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process</i></p> <p>Beavan, Colin</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
<p>Queens University of Charlotte</p>	<p><i>Arcadia</i></p> <p>Groff, Lauren</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>Ramapo College</p>	<p><i>Digital Vertigo: How Today's Online Social Revolution Is Dividing, Diminishing, and Disorienting Us</i></p> <p>Keen, Andrew</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>The Internet</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Raritan Valley Community College</p>	<p><i>Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival and My Journey from Homelessness to Harvard</i></p> <p>Murray, Liz</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p>

Rhode Island College	<i>Pym</i> Johnson, Mat 2011	Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism Fiction African American theme
Rhode Island School of Design	Essay Collection Unknown Unknown	Uncategorized Essay
Rice University	<i>Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking</i> Cain, Susan 2012	Sociology/Psychology Other Nonfiction
Rockhurst University	<i>The Freshman Survival Guide</i> Bradbury-Haehl, Nora and Bill McGarvey 2011	College Student Advice Other Nonfiction

<p>Roxbury Community College</p>	<p><i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness</i></p> <p>Alexander, Michelle</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>African American theme</p>
<p>Rutgers, School of Arts and Sciences (honors program)</p>	<p><i>The Speed of Dark</i></p> <p>Moon, Elizabeth</p> <p>2002</p>	<p>Disability/Disease</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>Sacred Heart University</p>	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i></p> <p>Skloot, Rebecca</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>African American theme; Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Saint Louis University</p>	<p><i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i></p> <p>Grennan, Conor</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Social Activism/Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>South Asian theme</p>

Saint Mary's College of California	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i></p> <p>Skloot, Rebecca</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>African American theme; Film/Television version exists</p>
Saint Michael's College	<p>The book of Job</p> <p>Mitchell, Stephen (trans.)</p> <p>1979, trans.; B.C., orig.</p>	<p>Classics</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
Salem State University	<p><i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison</i></p> <p>Kerman, Piper</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Crime and Punishment</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
Salisbury University	<p><i>The Meaning of Matthew: My Son's Murder in Laramie, and a World Transformed</i></p> <p>Shepard, Judy</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Homosexuality</p> <p>Biography</p>

<p>Sam Houston State University</p>	<p><i>The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business</i></p> <p>Duhigg, Charles</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>San Jose State University</p>	<p><i>Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West</i></p> <p>Harden, Blaine</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Genocide/Internment</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>East Asian theme</p>
<p>Sewanee: The University of the South</p>	<p><i>The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature</i></p> <p>Haskell, David George</p> <p>2013</p>	<p>Nature</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Shepherd University</p>	<p><i>Strange As This Weather Has Been</i></p> <p>Pancake, Ann</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>

Sierra Nevada College	<i>Old School</i> Wolff, Tobias 2003	Coming of Age Fiction
Skidmore College	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Overcoming Adversity Memoir African American theme
Smith College	<i>My Beloved World</i> Sotomayor, Sonia 2012	Overcoming Adversity Memoir Latin American theme
South Dakota State University (honors college)	<i>The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy Seal</i> Greitens, Eric 2011	Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship Memoir

<p>Southern Connecticut State University</p>	<p><i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i></p> <p>Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Southern Methodist University</p>	<p><i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i></p> <p>Moore, Wes</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>
<p>Southern New Hampshire University</p>	<p><i>Water for Elephants</i></p> <p>Gruen, Sara</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Spokane Falls Community College</p>	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i></p> <p>Skloot, Rebecca</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>African American theme; Film/Television version exists</p>

Springfield College	<i>The Cellist of Sarajevo</i> Galloway, Steven 2008	Overcoming Adversity Other Nonfiction European theme
St. Bonaventure University	<i>Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats</i> Iversen, Kristen 2012	Environmentalism Memoir Environmentalism theme
St. Edwards University	<i>Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide</i> Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn 2006	Women Biography Film/Television version exists
St. John's University (New York)	<i>My Beloved World</i> Sotomayor, Sonia 2012	Overcoming Adversity Memoir Latin American theme

<p>St. Mary's College of Maryland</p>	<p><i>The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail—But Some Don't</i></p> <p>Silver, Nate</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>St. Peter's University</p>	<p><i>A Pearl in the Storm: How I Found My Heart in the Middle of the Ocean</i></p> <p>McClure, Tori Murden</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Nature</p> <p>Memoir</p>
<p>Stanford University</p>	<p><i>First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers</i></p> <p>Ung, Loung</p> <p>2000</p>	<p>Genocide/Internment</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>East Asian theme</p>
<p>Stanford University</p>	<p><i>The Art of Fielding</i></p> <p>Harbach, Chad</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Athletics</p> <p>Fiction</p>

<p>Stanford University</p>	<p><i>The Outsourced Self: Intimate Life in Market Times</i></p> <p>Hochschild, Arlie Russell</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>State University of New York, Brockport</p>	<p><i>Creating Room to Read: A Story of Hope in the Battle for Global Literacy</i></p> <p>Wood, John</p> <p>2013</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>State University of New York, Oswego</p>	<p><i>The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl</i></p> <p>Egan, Timothy</p> <p>2005</p>	<p>Disaster in America</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Susquehanna University</p>	<p><i>The Most Human Human/A collection of readings on the university's theme for the year, "Technology in our lives."</i></p> <p>Christian, Brian</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Essay</p>

<p>Sweet Briar College</p>	<p><i>Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide</i></p> <p>Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Women</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Tennessee Tech University</p>	<p><i>How Starbucks Saved My Life: A Son of Privilege Learns to Live Like Everyone Else</i></p> <p>Gill, Michael Gates</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Texas Christian University</p>	<p><i>Brother, I'm Dying</i></p> <p>Danticat, Edwidge</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Latin American theme</p>
<p>Texas State University</p>	<p><i>Behind Happy Faces: Taking Charge of Your Mental Health--A Guide for Young Adults</i></p> <p>Szabo, Ross and Melanie Hall</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Disability/Disease</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

<p>The Citadel</p>	<p><i>A Few Good Men</i> Sorkin, Aaron 1990</p>	<p>War Play</p>
<p>The College of New Jersey</p>	<p><i>The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster</i> Katz, Jonathan M 2013</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship Other Nonfiction Latin American theme</p>
<p>The College of Wooster</p>	<p><i>Enrique's Journey</i> Nazario, Sonia 2005</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism Other Nonfiction Latin American theme</p>
<p>The King's College</p>	<p><i>A Masque of Mercy</i> Frost, Robert 1945</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality Verse Dramas</p>

<p>The King's College</p>	<p><i>A Masque of Reason</i></p> <p>Frost, Robert</p> <p>1945</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Verse Dramas</p>
<p>The King's College</p>	<p><i>Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold</i></p> <p>Lewis, C.S.</p> <p>1956</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>The Pennsylvania State University</p>	<p><i>Beautiful Souls: The Courage and Conscience of Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times</i></p> <p>Press, Eyal</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Thomas Aquinas College</p>	<p><i>The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer</i></p> <p>Mukherjee, Siddhartha</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Disability/Disease</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

Thomas College	<p><i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i></p> <p>Moore, Wes</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>
Trinity University	<p><i>The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer</i></p> <p>Mukherjee, Siddhartha</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Disability/Disease</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
Triton College	<p><i>College Rules! How to Study, Survive, and Succeed in College</i></p> <p>Nist-Olejnik, Sherrie and Jodi Patrick Holschuh</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>College Student Advice</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
Troy University	<p><i>To the Last Breath: A Memoir of Going to Extremes</i></p> <p>Slakey, Francis</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Nature</p> <p>Memoir</p>

<p>Tufts University</p>	<p><i>Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do</i></p> <p>Steele, Claude M.</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Tulane University</p>	<p><i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness</i></p> <p>Alexander, Michelle</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>African American theme</p>
<p>United States Coast Guard Academy</p>	<p><i>Bearing Drift</i></p> <p>Eident, Peter</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p>
<p>University at Buffalo, SUNY</p>	<p><i>The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference</i></p> <p>Gladwell, Malcom</p> <p>2000</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

University of Akron	<p><i>Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison</i></p> <p>Kerman, Piper</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Crime and Punishment</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
University of Alabama, Birmingham	<p>Media Package on Emancipation and Civil Rights</p> <p>Various authors</p> <p>c. 1853</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Essay</p> <p>African American theme</p>
University of Alaska, Anchorage	<p><i>Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West</i></p> <p>Harden, Blaine</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Genocide/Internment</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>East Asian theme</p>
University of Alaska, Anchorage	<p><i>The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone on the Media</i></p> <p>Gladstone, Brooke</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Graphic Novel</p>

<p>University of Arizona (honors college)</p>	<p><i>Planetwalker</i> Francis, John 2008</p>	<p>Environmentalism Memoir Environmentalism theme</p>
<p>University of Arkansas</p>	<p><i>Crazy: A Father's Search Through America's Mental Health Madness</i> Earley, Pete 2006</p>	<p>Disability/Disease Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>University of California, Davis</p>	<p><i>Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide</i> Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn 2006</p>	<p>Women Biography Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>University of California, Los Angeles</p>	<p><i>Pedro and Me</i> Winick, Judd 2000</p>	<p>Homosexuality Memoir Graphic Novel</p>

University of California, Merced	<p><i>The Unwanted Sound of Everything We Want: A Book About Noise</i></p> <p>Keizer, Garret</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
University of California, Santa Barbara	<p><i>Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything</i></p> <p>Foer, Joshua</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
University of California, Santa Barbara	<p><i>The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America</i></p> <p>Egan, Timothy</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Disaster in America</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
University of Cincinnati	<p><i>Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do</i></p> <p>Sandel, Michael</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

<p>University of Delaware</p>	<p><i>My Beloved World</i></p> <p>Sotomayor, Sonia</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Latin American theme</p>
<p>University of Florida</p>	<p><i>A School for My Village: A Promise to the Orphans of Nyaka</i></p> <p>Kaguri, Twesigye Jackson and Susan Urbanek Linville</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African theme</p>
<p>University of Houston, Downtown</p>	<p><i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time</i></p> <p>Haddon, Mark</p> <p>2003</p>	<p>Disability/Disease</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>University of Houston, Victoria</p>	<p><i>Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West</i></p> <p>Harden, Blaine</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Genocide/Internment</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>East Asian theme</p>

University of Idaho	<p><i>Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit</i></p> <p>Estabrook, Barry</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Food Justice/Animal Rights</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	<p><i>Almost Home: Helping Kids Move from Homelessness to Hope</i></p> <p>Ryan, Kevin and Tina Kelley</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Social Activism/Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
University of Kansas	<p><i>The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl</i></p> <p>Egan, Timothy</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Disaster in America</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
University of Kentucky	<p><i>Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i></p> <p>Timmerman, Kelsey</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Economics</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

<p>University of Louisiana, Monroe</p>	<p><i>This I Believe I & II (selections)</i></p> <p>Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>University of Louisville</p>	<p><i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i></p> <p>Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>University of Maine (honors college)</p>	<p><i>The Sparrow</i></p> <p>Russell, Mary Doria</p> <p>1996</p>	<p>Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>University of Maryland, Baltimore County</p>	<p><i>Hot: Living Through the Next Fifty Years on Earth</i></p> <p>Hertsgaard, Mark</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>

University of Maryland, College Park	<p><i>The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail—But Some Don't</i></p> <p>Silver, Nate</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
University of Massachusetts, Amherst	<p><i>No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process</i></p> <p>Beavan, Colin</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
University of Michigan, Flint	<p><i>The Submission</i></p> <p>Waldman, Amy</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Disaster in America</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>9/11 theme</p>
University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development	<p><i>The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir</i></p> <p>Yang, Kao Kalia</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>East Asian theme</p>

<p>University of Minnesota, College of Liberal Arts</p>	<p><i>The Round House</i> Erdrich, Louise 2012</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism Fiction Native American theme</p>
<p>University of Mississippi</p>	<p><i>The Unforgiving Minute</i> Mullaney, Craig 2009</p>	<p>War Memoir</p>
<p>University of Montana, Missoula</p>	<p><i>Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World</i> Kidder, Tracy 2003</p>	<p>Social Activism/Entrepreneurship Biography Latin American theme</p>
<p>University of New Haven</p>	<p><i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i> Otsuka, Julie 2002</p>	<p>Genocide/Internment Fiction East Asian theme</p>

<p>University of New Mexico</p>	<p><i>The Working Poor: Invisible in America</i></p> <p>Shipler, David K.</p> <p>2004</p>	<p>Poverty</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>University of New Orleans</p>	<p><i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i></p> <p>Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill</p>	<p><i>Home</i></p> <p>Morrison, Toni</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>War</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>University of North Carolina, Charlotte</p>	<p><i>Wine to Water: How One Man Saved Himself While Trying to Save the World</i></p> <p>Hendley, Doc</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Social Activism/Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African theme</p>

<p>University of North Carolina, Greensboro</p>	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i></p> <p>Scloot, Rebecca</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science Biography</p> <p>African American theme; Film/ Television version exists</p>
<p>University of North Carolina, Wilmington</p>	<p><i>The Wave: In Pursuit of the Rogues, Freaks, and Giants of the Ocean</i></p> <p>Casey, Susan</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>University of Northern Florida</p>	<p><i>Outliers: The Story of Success</i></p> <p>Gladwell, Malcom</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>University of Northern Iowa</p>	<p><i>The American Way of Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields, and the Dinner Table</i></p> <p>McMillan, Tracie</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Food Justice/Animal Rights</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

University of Pennsylvania	<i>Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop</i> Bradley, Adam 2008	Language Other Nonfiction
University of Pittsburgh	<i>Pittsburgh: A New Portrait</i> Toker, Franklin 2009	American Cities Other Nonfiction
University of Rhode Island	<i>Caleb's Crossing</i> Brooks, Geraldine 2011	Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism Fiction Native American theme
University of Richmond	<i>The Laramie Project</i> Kaufman, Moisés and Tectonic Theater Project 2001	Homosexuality Play Film/Television version exists

<p>University of South Carolina</p>	<p><i>The Postmortal</i></p> <p>Magary, Drew</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>University of South Carolina, Aiken</p>	<p><i>Into the Wild</i></p> <p>Krakauer, Jon</p> <p>1996</p>	<p>Nature</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>University of South Carolina, Upstate</p>	<p><i>The Best of Rainbow Radio</i></p> <p>Edited by Ed Madden and Candace Chellew-Hodge</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Homosexuality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>University of Tennessee, Chattanooga</p>	<p><i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i></p> <p>Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Philosophy/Spirituality</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

University of Tennessee, Knoxville	<i>Earth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet</i> McKibben, Bill 2010	Environmentalism Other Nonfiction Environmentalism theme
University of Texas, San Antonio	<i>The Devil's Highway</i> Alberto Urrea, Luis 2005	Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism Biography Latin American theme
University of Toledo	<i>Thriving in College and Beyond</i> Adapted for the University of Toledo by Jennifer Rockwood 2009	College Student Advice Other Nonfiction
University of Vermont	<i>The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic: And How it Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World</i> Johnson, Steven 2006	Disability/Disease Other Nonfiction European theme

<p>University of Virginia (School of Engineering & Applied Science)</p>	<p><i>The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains</i></p> <p>Carr, Nicholas</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>The Internet</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>University of Washington</p>	<p><i>Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error</i></p> <p>Schulz, Kathryn</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>University of West Florida</p>	<p><i>The Road</i></p> <p>McCarthy, Cormac</p> <p>2006</p>	<p>Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>University of Wisconsin, Madison</p>	<p><i>A Tale for the Time Being</i></p> <p>Ozeki, Ruth</p> <p>2013</p>	<p>Coming of Age</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>East Asian theme</p>

University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee	<p><i>The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir</i></p> <p>Yang, Kao Kalia</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>East Asian theme</p>
University of Wisconsin, Parkside	<p><i>Great Tales and Poems</i></p> <p>Poe, Edgar Allan</p> <p>1824-1849 (volume published in 2007)</p>	<p>Classics</p> <p>Fiction</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
University of Wisconsin, Stevens Point	<p><i>Crazy Brave: A Memoir</i></p> <p>Harjo, Joy</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>Native American theme</p>
Utah State University	<p><i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope</i></p> <p>Kamkwamba, William and Bryan Mealer</p> <p>2000</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African theme</p>

<p>Vanderbilt University</p>	<p><i>College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be</i></p> <p>Delbanco, Andrew</p> <p>2012</p>	<p>Education Philosophy</p> <p>Essay</p>
<p>Vassar College</p>	<p><i>A Visit from the Goon Squad</i></p> <p>Egan, Jennifer</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Uncategorized</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>Ventura College</p>	<p><i>Packing for Mars: The Curious Science of Life in the Void</i></p> <p>Roach, Mary</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Villanova University</p>	<p><i>Good Kings Bad Kings</i></p> <p>Nussbaum, Susan</p> <p>2013</p>	<p>Disability/Disease</p> <p>Fiction</p>

Virginia Commonwealth University	<p><i>Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us</i></p> <p>Moss, Michael</p> <p>2013</p>	<p>Food Justice/Animal Rights</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	<p><i>Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal</i></p> <p>Grennan, Conor</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>South Asian theme</p>
Wallace State Community College	<p><i>While the World Watched: A Birmingham Bombing Survivor Comes of Age During the Civil Rights Movement</i></p> <p>McKinstry, Carolyn Maull</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>
Wartburg College	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i></p> <p>Skloot, Rebecca</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>African American theme; Film/ Television version exists</p>

<p>Washburn University</p>	<p><i>Rode</i></p> <p>Fox Averill, Thomas</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Uncategorized</p> <p>Fiction</p>
<p>Washington State University (University College)</p>	<p><i>Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error</i></p> <p>Schulz, Kathryn</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Sociology/Psychology</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Washington University in St. Louis</p>	<p><i>Notes from No Man's Land: American Essays</i></p> <p>Biss, Eula</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/ Racism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Webster University</p>	<p><i>The Short Bus: A Journey Beyond Normal</i></p> <p>Mooney, Jonathan</p> <p>2007</p>	<p>Disability/Disease</p> <p>Memoir</p>

Wentworth Institute of Technology	<i>Life After Death</i> Echols, Damien 2012	Crime and Punishment Memoir
West Texas A&M University	<i>Wine to Water: How One Man Saved Himself While Trying to Save the World</i> Hendley, Doc 2012	Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship Memoir African theme
Western Michigan University	<i>Anatomy of Injustice: A Murder Case Gone Wrong</i> Bonner, Raymond 2012	Crime and Punishment Other Nonfiction
Western New England College	<i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> Sherman, Alexie 2007	Coming of Age Fiction Native American theme

<p>Western Washington University</p>	<p><i>Early Warming: Crisis and Response in the Climate Changed North</i></p> <p>Lord, Nancy</p> <p>2011</p>	<p>Environmentalism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p> <p>Environmentalism theme</p>
<p>Westfield State University</p>	<p><i>Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide</i></p> <p>Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn</p> <p>2008</p>	<p>Women</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>Film/Television version exists</p>
<p>Westminster College (honors program)</p>	<p><i>Freakonomics</i></p> <p>Levitt, Steven D. and Stephen J. Dunbar</p> <p>2009</p>	<p>Economics</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>
<p>Whitman College</p>	<p><i>Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do</i></p> <p>Steele, Claude M.</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism</p> <p>Other Nonfiction</p>

William Paterson University	<i>The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains</i> Carr, Nicholas 2010	The Internet Other Nonfiction
William Peace University	<i>Scratch Beginnings: Me, \$25, and the Search for the American Dream</i> Shepard, Adam 2007	Poverty Memoir
Wingate University	<i>Wine to Water: How One Man Saved Himself While Trying to Save the World</i> Hendley, Doc 2012	Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship Memoir African theme
Winona State University	<i>Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit</i> Estabrook, Barry 2011	Food Justice/Animal Rights Other Nonfiction Environmentalism theme

<p>Winthrop University</p>	<p><i>The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope</i></p> <p>Kamkwamba, William and Bryan Mealer</p> <p>2000</p>	<p>Social Activism/ Entrepreneurship</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African theme</p>
<p>Wright State University</p>	<p><i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i></p> <p>Moore, Wes</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Overcoming Adversity</p> <p>Memoir</p> <p>African American theme</p>
<p>Xavier University</p>	<p><i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i></p> <p>Skloot, Rebecca</p> <p>2010</p>	<p>Science</p> <p>Biography</p> <p>African American theme; Film/ Television version exists</p>

APPENDIX III: TITLES BY SUBJECT CATEGORY

American Cities

Detroit: An American Autopsy

Let the Great World Spin

Pittsburgh: A New Portrait

Athletics

Born to Run: A Hidden Tribe, Superathletes, and the Greatest Race the World Has Never Seen

Finding the Game: Three Years, Twenty-Five Countries, and the Search for Pickup Soccer

The Art of Fielding

Classics

Bartleby, The Scrivener

Great Tales and Poems

Shakespeare's Works

The Book of Job

College Student Advice

College Rules! How to Study, Survive, and Succeed in College

Ethics and College Student Life

The Freshman Survival Guide

Thriving in College and Beyond

What the Best College Students Do

Coming of Age

A Tale for the Time Being

American Dervish

Arcadia

Cutting for Stone

Half a Life

Leaving Mother Lake: A Girlhood at the Edge of the World

Looking for Alaska

Old School

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

The Fault in Our Stars

The Glass Castle

The House on Mango Street

The Kite Runner

The Perks of Being A Wallflower

Crime and Punishment

Anatomy of Injustice: A Murder Case Gone Wrong

Don't Shoot: One Man, a Street Fellowship, and the End of Violence in Inner-City America

Life After Death

Orange Is the New Black: My Year in a Women's Prison

Dark Short Stories

Beasts of the Southern Wild

Tenth of December

Disability/Disease

Behind Happy Faces: Taking Charge of Your Mental Health--A Guide for Young Adults

Crazy: A Father's Search Through America's Mental Health Madness

Good Kings Bad Kings

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time

The Emperor of All Maladies: A Biography of Cancer

The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic: And How it Changed Science, Cities, and the Modern World

The Short Bus: A Journey Beyond Normal

The Speed of Dark

Disaster in America

Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast

One Amazing Thing

The Big Burn: Teddy Roosevelt and the Fire that Saved America

The Submission

The Worst Hard Time: The Untold Story of Those Who Survived the Great American Dust Bowl
Zeitoun

Dystopian/Apocalyptic/Sci-Fi

Every Day
Everything Matters!
Ready Player One
The Age of Miracles
The Hunger Games
The Postmortal
The Road
The Sparrow
World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War

Economics

Freakonomics
The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger
Travels of a T-Shirt in a Global Economy
Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes

Education Philosophy

"Only Connect..." The Goals of a Liberal Education
College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be
On the Purpose of a Liberal Arts Education
They Knew Calculus When They Left: The Thinking Disconnect Between High School and University

Environmentalism

Early Warming: Crisis and Response in the Climate Changed North
Earth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet
Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats
Garbology: Our Dirty Love Affair with Trash
Hot: Living Through the Next Fifty Years on Earth
No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process
Planetwalker
Saints at the River
Strange As This Weather Has Been
The Big Thirst: The Secret Life and Turbulent Future of Water
The Botany of Desire

Food Justice/Animal Rights

*Eat the City: A Tale of the Fishers, Foragers, Butchers, Farmers, Poultry Minders, Sugar Refiners,
Cane Cutters, Beekeepers, Winemakers, and Brewers Who Built New York*

Eating Animals

In the Shadow of Man

Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us

Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat: Why It's So Hard to Think Straight About Animals

*The American Way of Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields, and the Dinner
Table*

The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities

The Last Hunger Season: A Year in an African Farm Community on the Brink of Change

The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals

Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit

Genocide/Internment

*Escape from Camp 14: One Man's Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the
West*

First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers

In the Shadow of the Banyan

Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness

What Is the What

When the Emperor Was Divine

Homosexuality

Fun Home

Pedro and Me

The Best of Rainbow Radio

The Laramie Project

The Meaning of Matthew: My Son's Murder in Laramie, and a World Transformed

Language

Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop

Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes: Life and Language in the Amazonian Jungle

Multiculturalism/Immigration/Racism

Black Ice

Brooklyn: A Novel

Brother, I'm Dying

Caleb's Crossing

Clybourne Park

Crazy Brave: A Memoir

Enrique's Journey

How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America

I'm Down

Into the Beautiful North

Media Package on Emancipation and Civil Rights

Notes from No Man's Land: American Essays

Open City

Outcasts United: A Refugee Team, an American Town

Pym

The Beautiful Things That Heaven Bears

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

The Devil's Highway

The Distance Between Us: A Memoir

The Iguana Tree

The Latehomecomer: A Hmong Family Memoir

The Madonnas of Echo Park

The Namesake

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness

The Reluctant Fundamentalist

The Round House

*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the
Collision of Two Cultures*

*While the World Watched: A Birmingham Bombing Survivor Comes of Age During the Civil Rights
Movement*

Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do

Nature

A Pearl in the Storm: How I Found My Heart in the Middle of the Ocean

A Walk in the Woods: Rediscovering America on the Appalachian Trail

Into the Wild

The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature

To the Last Breath: A Memoir of Going to Extremes



Overcoming Adversity

Bearing Drift

Bend, Not Break: A Life in Two Worlds

Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival and My Journey from Homelessness to Harvard

How Starbucks Saved My Life: A Son of Privilege Learns to Live Like Everyone Else

In the Presence of My Enemies

My Beloved World

No Turning Back

The Bond: Three Young Men Learn to Forgive and Reconnect with their Fathers

The Cellist of Sarajevo

The Language of Flowers

The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates

The Pact: Three Young Men Make a Promise and Fulfill a Dream

Philosophy/Spirituality

A Masque of Mercy

A Masque of Reason

Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation

Beautiful Souls: The Courage and Conscience of Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times

Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do

Sum: Forty Tales from the Afterlives

The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen

The Life of Pi

The River Why

This I Believe I and II: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women

Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold

Tuesdays with Morrie: An Old Man, a Young Man, and Life's Greatest Lesson

Poverty

Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity

Scratch Beginnings: Me, \$25, and the Search for the American Dream

The Working Poor: Invisible in America

Science

Moonwalking with Einstein: The Art and Science of Remembering Everything

Packing for Mars: The Curious Science of Life in the Void

Physics for Future Presidents

State of Wonder

The Alchemy of Air

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

The Wave: In Pursuit of the Rogues, Freaks, and Giants of the Ocean

Self-Help/Pursuit of Happiness

Creating Magic: 10 Common Sense Leadership Strategies From a Life at Disney

Make the Impossible Possible: One Man's Crusade to Inspire Others to Dream Bigger and Achieve the Extraordinary

The Last Lecture

Social Activism/Entrepreneurship

A School for My Village: A Promise to the Orphans of Nyaka

A Woman Among Warlords: The Extraordinary Story of an Afghan Who Dared to Raise Her Voice

Almost Home: Helping Kids Move from Homelessness to Hope

Creating Room to Read: A Story of Hope in the Battle for Global Literacy

It Happened on the Way to War: A Marine's Path to Peace

Little Princes: One Man's Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal

Mountains Beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, A Man Who Would Cure the World

Shake the World: It's Not About Finding A Job, It's About Creating a Life

Start Something That Matters

Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion

The Big Truck That Went By: How the World Came to Save Haiti and Left Behind a Disaster

The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope

The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy Seal

The Warrior's Heart: Becoming a Man of Compassion and Courage

Who Owns the Ice House?: Eight Life-Lessons From an Unlikely Entrepreneur

Wine to Water: How One Man Saved Himself While Trying to Save the World

Sociology/Psychology

Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error

Class Matters

Evocative Objects: Things We Think With

Happiness: The Science Behind Your Smile

In Pursuit of Silence: Listening for Meaning in a World of Noise

Living with Complexity

Outliers: The Story of Success

Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking

Reality Is Broken: Why Games Make Us Better and How They Change the World



Stumbling on Happiness

The (Honest) Truth About Dishonesty: How We Lie to Everyone - Especially Ourselves

The Influencing Machine: Brooke Gladstone on the Media

The Outsourced Self: Intimate Life in Market Times

The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business

The Real Work: Modern Magic and the Meaning of Life

The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail—But Some Don't

The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make A Big Difference

The Unwanted Sound of Everything We Want: A Book About Noise

Whistling Vivaldi: How Stereotypes Affect Us and What We Can Do

Digital Vertigo: How Today's Online Social Revolution Is Dividing, Diminishing, and Disorienting Us

The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains

Water by the Spoonful

Uncategorized

A Visit from the Goon Squad

Essay Collection

Fup: A Modern Fable

Listening Is An Act of Love: A Celebration of American Life from the StoryCorps Project

Rode

*The Most Human Human/A collection of readings on the university's theme for the year,
"Technology in our lives."*

War

A Few Good Men

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier

Home

The Things They Carried

The Unforgiving Minute

The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle

The Yellow Birds

Thieves of Baghdad: One Marine's Passion to Recover the World's Greatest Stolen Treasures

Women

Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity for Women Worldwide

Mighty Be Our Powers

Monique and the Mango Rains: Two Years with a Midwife in Mali

The Butterfly's Daughter

The Space Between Us

APPENDIX IV: RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR COLLEGE COMMON READING PROGRAMS

Here are 50 books the NAS recommends for colleges and universities with common reading programs. The first list contains 40 books appropriate in level of difficulty and length for any college freshman. The second list contains ten more ambitious choices either because of length (i.e. *The Aeneid*) or intrinsic difficulty (i.e. *The Confidence Man*). For each book, we give several reasons as to why it would be a good choice for college common reading.

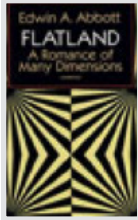
In compiling our list, we had several considerations.⁴⁶ We sought to follow our own recommendations listed above, and we also aimed to accommodate colleges that approach common reading assignments at different levels of difficulty, which is why we divided our list into two parts. Our goal is to offer constructive help.

An Invitation

We invite colleges and universities that have common reading programs, and those that are considering the idea, to use our list as a resource. We believe an educationally worthy program could be built around any one of these books. Of course, our list is not intended to be exhaustive. It is, instead, a prompt to stimulate scholars who are convinced that their institutions can and should aim higher. We recognize that every college is different, and that there is no one book that would be a suitable common reading choice for all. Our list is not a list only of classics, though it includes some.

⁴⁶ This list was first published in Wood, Peter, and Ashley Thorne, "Read These Instead: Better Books for Next Year's Beaches," National Association of Scholars, September 17, 2010, http://www.nas.org/articles/Read_These_Instead_Better_Books_for_Next_Years_Beaches.

40 Recommended Books Appropriate For Any College Common Reading Program



Flatland

Edwin Abbott Abbott (1884)

This short book is a mathematician's foray into fiction with a story about two-dimensional creatures—squares, triangles, and such—living on a plane. Their conceptual horizons are challenged when a three-dimensional creature, a sphere, drops in. We picked it because (a) it is a deft analogy for us three-dimensional creatures trying to imagine our four-or-more dimensional universe, (b) it is one of few mathematical classics completely open to math-resistant students, and (c) it is a subtle provocation to students to open their minds to unexpected intellectual possibilities. It also contains some mild but amusing social satire.



Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe (1958)

Among the first African novels written in English, *Things Fall Apart* depicts the Igbo of southern Nigeria during the period of initial Western colonization. The protagonist is an ambitious young man in a traditional village who gains fame through a feat of wrestling and goes on to become a powerful leader, only to see his world collapse. We picked it because (a) it is a classic of indictment of colonialism but comes with the complicating twist that it is written in a colonial language by an author who has thoroughly absorbed a Western aesthetic sensibility, and (b) it puts the real questions of cultural relativism on the table.



A Death In The Family

James Agee (1957)

A posthumous autobiographical novel, *A Death in the Family* is based on the death of his father in an automobile accident when Agee was only six. The novel richly depicts life in Knoxville, Tennessee, around 1915. We picked it because of (a) the sheer beauty of Agee's writing and its emotional depth, (b) its capacity to become a lasting presence in the lives of its readers, and (c) the opportunity it affords independence-minded college students to think about the fragility of family and community and their own rootedness in the world.



Confessions

Augustine (398 A.D.)

The *Confessions* is perhaps the very first autobiography, at least in the modern sense of someone examining the interior side of his life as well as the external events. We picked it because (a) it shows a smart, ambitious student who thirsts for knowledge and who makes the most of his academic studies, (b) it presents the challenge of taking ideas not just as cold objects of study but as insights that may have life-changing consequences, and (c) it is one of the key books for understanding what is distinctive about Western civilization.



The Pilgrim's Progress

John Bunyan (1678)

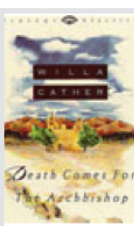
Once the most widely read book in English besides the Bible, *The Pilgrim's Progress* is an astonishingly successful allegory. We picked it because it is (a) a key influence on English fiction, (b) a tour-de-force of metaphor and analogy, and (c) a vivid introduction to Christianity that secular students can grasp. Though accessible to children at one level, *The Pilgrim's Progress* has depths of psychological and moral insight that fully justify it as a reading for college students.



The Plague

Albert Camus (1947)

The novel depicts a city in French colonial Algeria that is quarantined during an outbreak of the bubonic plague. Camus describes the divergent ways those trapped in the city cope with the situation. We picked it because it is a compelling depiction of some of the great themes of 20th-century existential philosophy: the sense of a meaningless void against which humans struggle to achieve a sense of dignity; the feelings of alienation and exile poised against human solidarity and love; and the demand for something better than personal happiness.



Death Comes For The Archbishop

Willa Cather (1927)

This episodic novel, based on the life of Jean-Baptiste Lamy, depicts the work of a devout French priest sent to reorganize the Catholic mission in New Mexico after the territory has been annexed by the United States. We picked it because (a) Cather's quietly expansive vision of the American landscape is an unsurpassed literary accomplishment, (b) students can gain something vital from this account of steady purpose in the pursuit of an ideal, and (c) the book offers

a perspective on the mingling of cultures that strongly contrasts to the currently fashionable accounts of ethnic antagonism.



The Decipherment Of Linear B

John Chadwick (1958)

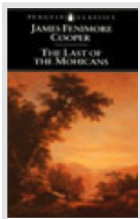
This is the story of how Michael Ventris solved a 50-year mystery by deciphering the language of an ancient Cretan script known as Linear B. Chadwick was Ventris’s friend and close collaborator and wrote that “even when [Ventris’s] success was assured, when others heaped lavish praise on him, he remained simple and unassuming, always ready to listen, to help and to understand.” We picked this book because (a) it is a true story of the heroism of scholarship: tenacious curiosity and earnest study bring order out of confusion; (b) it provides students with an example of a moment when the facts proved academic consensus wrong; and (c) it unlocks a door to the Hellenic world at the time of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.



Under Western Eyes

Joseph Conrad (1911)

This novel, set in St. Petersburg and Geneva, is Conrad’s answer to Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. We chose it because (a) the narrator observes a non-Western mindset through “Western eyes”—a skill Western students should learn; (b) it depicts both the allure and the repugnance of terrorism (to which Conrad in his introduction to the book referred as “senseless desperation provoked by senseless tyranny”); and (c) it shows the truth as being worth defending despite the cost.



The Last Of The Mohicans

James Fenimore Cooper (1826)

By the time Cooper wrote this novel, the French and Indian War was as distant a memory as World War II is today. The story is a complicated account of the sharp-shooting white orphan Hawkeye, raised by Indians to protect the daughters of a British colonel from the perils of war and the unwanted attentions of a treacherous Huron warrior. We picked it because, (a) despite its wildly implausible plot, the book captures America’s exuberant vision of itself early in our history, (b) Cooper’s romantic sense of place and sense of nostalgia for the lost grandeur of the Native American tribes of the east can also enrich contemporary students’ understanding of their national

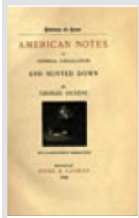
heritage, and (c) the book is one kind of answer to the question, “Who are we?” And the answer involves a lot more cultural and racial “hybridity” than we typically recognize in the writings of America’s first professional writers.



The Voyage Of The Beagle

Charles Darwin (1839)

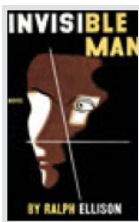
This is Darwin’s classic account of his expedition from 1831 to 1836 around coastal South America to the Galapagos Islands, Tahiti, Australia, across the Indian Ocean to Mauritius, and back to England, on which he made most of the observations that led eventually to his theory of evolution by natural selection. (*The Voyage* went through several editions and one of the augmented later ones might be a better choice.) We picked it because (a) it is a dazzling display of young Darwin’s curiosity and his powers of observation of people and places as well as the natural world, (b) students can benefit from a robust example of careful observation and collection of facts as worthy pursuits in their own right, and (c) *The Voyage* offers a fresh point of entry into the intellectual adventure of scientific inquiry.



American Notes For General Circulation

Charles Dickens (1842)

Dickens published this account of his travels just after his six-month visit to the United States. It is an unflattering portrait of a country that effusively welcomed him—far too effusively in his judgment. We picked it because (a) Dickens’ account of American character still resonates, (b) the book lampoons qualities in which Americans continue to take pride, and (c) it raises important questions about celebrity, status, travel, crime, law, and a host of other themes that still preoccupy us.

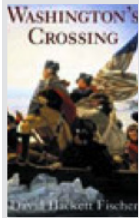


Invisible Man

Ralph Ellison (1952)

This novel presents the memory of an unnamed African American character who is currently living as a hermit in the basement of a New York City apartment building. In his youth in a small southern town he was school valedictorian and went on to college but was expelled. As he struggles to make a life for himself, he encounters a succession of people—most of whom see him not as the individual that he is but only in relation to their particular take on race—promoting

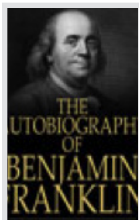
various responses to white oppression: accommodation, Communism, black nationalism, and cynicism. We picked it because (a) it is a powerful evocation of the deadening quality of ideological responses to racism, and (b) it depicts the struggle for individuality in circumstances that strongly reinforce the claims of group identity. These are very much living questions on most college campuses.



Washington's Crossing

David Hackett Fischer (2004)

We wanted to include a book about George Washington and had hundreds to pick from. We chose Fischer's account of a pivotal moment, when General Washington, faced with the imminent collapse of the whole Revolution, seized the initiative by crossing the Delaware River on Christmas night and mounting a surprise attack on the Hessian garrison at Trenton. We picked it because (a) Washington is a difficult figure for today's American students to comprehend, and Fischer succeeds admirably in showing him as a vivid human being, (b) the book takes us out of "the American Revolution" as an abstraction and gives us a sense of the war as a matter of real choices made under life-and-death conditions, and (c) it is the kind of history writing that will whet students' appetites for more.



The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin

Benjamin Franklin (1791)

This unfinished autobiography, written as a letter to Franklin's son, opens a window into the life and mind of one of our nation's most beloved founding fathers. We picked it because (a) it captures Franklin's unique genius as an equally accomplished scientist, inventor, entrepreneur, publisher, creative writer, aphorist, diplomat, and political thinker, (b) American college students should be familiar with the framers of the country, and Franklin stands out not only as the elder statesman of the Revolution but as one of the shapers of American character, and (c) in our new age of thrift, Franklin's wisdom—(he coined the phrase, "Time is money," in his "Advice to a Young Tradesman," 1748)—bears new attention.

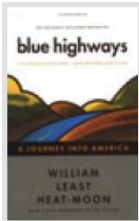


The Blithedale Romance

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1852)

This is Hawthorne's fictionalized account of the utopian Brook Farm community in which he participated for eight months in 1841. The tale includes characters whose contemporary counterparts will soon be part of the lives of the students entering college: a charismatic

hater of the free market, an advocate of “freedom” intent on imposing her own tyranny, weak-willed followers eager to find someone to tell them what to think, aesthetes, and people eager to hide their ordinary appetites behind exotic poses. We picked *The Blithedale Romance* because (a) it is an effective warning against the seductions of utopianism, and (b) it helps us see that the longing for social justice needs to be grounded in a real understanding of human nature.



Blue Highways

William Least Heat-Moon (1982)

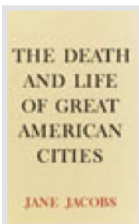
Heat-Moon heads out to see America from the vantage point of the back roads—the ones colored blue on highway maps. The book is largely built on the conversations he has with the people he meets: saloon keepers, fishermen, farmers, a prostitute, a Christian hitchhiker, a Hopi medical student and more. We chose it because (a) it is a quietly evocative picture of America—one that has stood the test of time—and (b) it is a model of first-person writing in which the speaker is unobtrusive and doesn’t get in the way of what he sees and hears.



Their Eyes Were Watching God

Zora Neale Hurston (1937)

This novel by African American folklorist and anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston depicts the life of a thrice-married Florida woman who kills her last husband in self-defense. Much of the dialogue is in black dialect and the book has often been criticized for trading in stereotypes. We chose it because (a) it is an unromanticized picture of social oppression as well as of some fascinating and vanished American subcultures, and (b) it is a consummate work of artistry by a writer who defied the conventions of her time.



The Death And Life Of Great American Cities

Jane Jacobs (1961)

This book started the movement for preserving old neighborhoods in America. It was written as a critique of the kind of “urban renewal” that consisted of flattening whole sections of cities and replacing them with sterile modernist structures that had no connection with actual human communities. She was especially opposed to urban expressways. But Jacobs’ book somehow transcends the policy debates that gave birth to it. We chose it because (a) it is a model of public policy advocacy, (b) it remains a compelling vision of the best of urban life, and (c) it can provoke students to think more deeply about the material basis of American life: how our prosperity and our sense of community depend on our use of space.



Kim

Rudyard Kipling (1901)

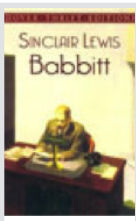
This is a book that vividly portrays British colonial India through a homeless white orphan's eyes. We picked it because it (a) raises provocative questions about contemporary American views of personal identity, multiculturalism and colonialism, and (b) is an extraordinarily artful tale of political intrigue. American higher education today spends considerable effort denouncing colonialism, post-colonialism, Orientalism, etc. Why not give students a chance to read a masterpiece from the writer who was one of colonialism's greatest and most sophisticated admirers?



Darkness At Noon

Arthur Koestler (1940)

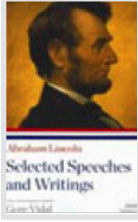
In this novel, Koestler, a former Communist, depicts the world of Stalin's show trials. The protagonist, Rubashov, is a true believer in the Communist system, but is arrested, interrogated, and struggles with the meaning of his life and loyalties as he awaits his certain execution. One of the classics of anti-totalitarian literature. We picked it because (a) it powerfully portrays the awful system of oppression at the heart of the Soviet system, (b) it is a testimony to the profound importance of individual rights and political freedom—so easily taken for granted by those who have always enjoyed them—and (c) Koestler takes us inside the mind of someone trapped by ideology.



Babbitt

Sinclair Lewis (1922)

Babbitt is a partner in an upper Midwest real estate firm in this satiric novel. His life is devoted to social climbing until in a moment of crisis he realizes the vapidness of his materialism. At that point he plunges headlong into flouting social conventions, but eventually becomes disillusioned with the emptiness of rebellion as well. We picked this book because it is the classic indictment of American middle class complacency, and students deserve the chance to think this through. Is American life the sum of culturally-dead self-seeking Babbitts who conform even in their nonconformity? How true is this picture?



Selected Speeches And Writings (Selections)

Abraham Lincoln (1832-1865, Published In This Volume In 2009)

It was the Great Emancipator who held the United States together during the Civil War. His strength of character, sharp wit, and quest for peace made him one of our nation's greatest presidents. Of all Lincoln's speeches, our strongest recommendations for students are these three: the speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria (October 16, 1854); the address to the Washington Temperance Society of Springfield, Illinois (February 22, 1842); and the second inaugural address (March 4, 1865). And one of the best ways to learn the power of persuasive argument is to read some of the Lincoln-Douglas debates on slavery.



On Liberty

John Stuart Mill (1869)

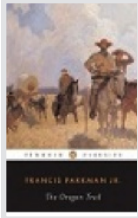
This is a short book on the limits of political power. Mill argues, most importantly, for freedom of thought and speech, and points out that partisans who suppress criticism ultimately weaken the views they are trying to protect. We picked *On Liberty* because (a) the substance of the essay bears directly on contemporary higher education, where "political correctness" has limited the liberty to discuss important ideas, and (b) the book is a model of lucid philosophical exposition.



Homage To Catalonia

George Orwell (1938)

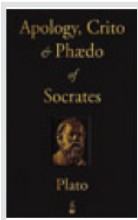
Orwell, a journalist, reflects on his experiences during the Spanish Civil War from December 1936 to June 1937, where he had the misfortune to enlist in a non-Stalinist Marxist militia that Soviet-controlled Communists had secretly determined to liquidate. Betrayed by people he mistook as allies, Orwell began a painful reconsideration of his views. He remained a socialist but had grown wise to the lawless nature of totalitarian regimes, and he came to loathe Stalinism. We picked this book because (a) it represents a genuine act of personal courage, (b) it vividly depicts the human reality of the great contest of political ideals that defined the twentieth century, and (c) it exemplifies lucid political writing.



The Oregon Trail

Francis Parkman (1847)

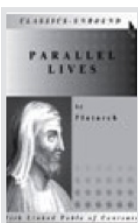
A classic of frontier literature, *The Oregon Trail* is American historian Francis Parkman's detailed and sometimes graphic account of life in the pre-Civil War West. He writes of buffalo hunting on the prairie, the hardships faced by westward-bound travelers, and the day-to-day lives of American Indians. Though Parkman's personal narrative is colored by the prejudices of his time, his book remains a fascinating window into an era of American history whose influence continues to this day. We picked it because (a) it exemplifies history written on a grand scale, an attempt to encompass a large topic and a large idea; and (b) Parkman conveys an unapologetic sense of the energy, courage, and sheer enterprise of America's western pioneers.



Apology, Crito, and Phaedo of Socrates

Plato (C. 399-387 B.C.)

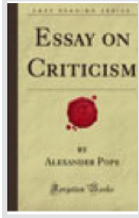
These are key works of philosophy that students who sign up for a philosophy course will probably read. But they are a common inheritance that everyone should know, and they can be read easily without a teacher's assistance. *The Apology* is Socrates' self-defense when he is charged with corrupting the youth of Athens. *Crito* is Socrates' explanation to a friend why he must obey the laws of Athens and accept the death penalty. We picked these two dialogues because together they present a profound debate about the place of the intellectual in society, the pursuit of truth, and the necessity of the law.



Parallel Lives (Selections)

Plutarch (Second Century A.D.)

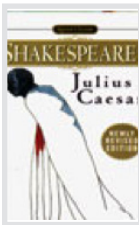
Plutarch pairs biographies of famous men, one Greek, one Roman, to illuminate their character. We picked it because (a) it gives students a vibrant narrative view of ancient Greek and Roman culture, (b) it examines what it means to be "good," and (c) as a commentary on leadership, it influenced the writers of *The Federalist Papers*.



Essay On Criticism

Alexander Pope (1711)

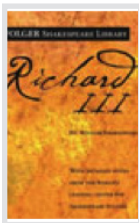
This is the only English verse on our list. Pope's poem begins with a warning that incompetent criticism poses a greater danger than poor creative writing. The latter "tries our patience," but poor judgment offered up authoritatively can "mis-lead our Sense." The *Essay on Criticism* can be read hurriedly and with no profit, but for the reader who pays attention, it is a font of good insight. We picked it because (a) it emphasizes the need for a moral seriousness in the critical inquiries that lie ahead for the college student, (b) it is one of those rare works that fully embodies the strictures it lays down: it practices what it preaches, and (c) it just might help some students improve their writing.



Julius Caesar

William Shakespeare (C. 1599)

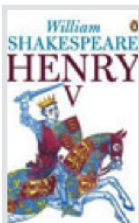
This play once was and should still be a standard part of the high school English curriculum, but it is not. We picked it (a) to restore a vital literary reference point, (b) to invite students to think about demagoguery and the willingness of people to sacrifice freedom to follow a charismatic leader, and (c) to urge students to reflect on conflicts between personal loyalty and public duty.



Richard III

William Shakespeare (C. 1592)

This play offers one of Shakespeare's great villains, who despite his awful deeds somehow wins a share of our sympathy. We picked it because it is English literature's best portrayal of political manipulation and cunning self-advancement, which are qualities that students need to be on guard against in college no less than in the rest of life.



Henry V

William Shakespeare (C. 1598)

This play is about the maturation of a king and his extraordinary success on the battlefield. The St. Crispin's Day speech is one that every student should know. We picked *Henry V* because it is the richest of Shakespeare's history plays and it has profound things to say about the responsibilities of leadership.



A Footnote To History: Eight Years Of Trouble In Samoa

Robert Louis Stevenson (1892)

The author of *Treasure Island* and *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and other popular works moved to Samoa in 1890 in search of a place to recover his health. This book is his account of the colonial struggle to possess the island, as the United States, Germany, and Britain squabbled with each other and a hopelessly outgunned Samoan king. Stevenson is on the side of the Samoans. The *New York Times* hailed the book on its first publication as “an entertaining and brilliant piece of narrative.” We picked it because (a) it is a superbly written work that makes an otherwise forgotten episode in colonial history into a lens for the vanities of politics and power, and (b) it is a good benchmark for students to think about American military ventures in faraway places.



Life On The Mississippi

Mark Twain (1883)

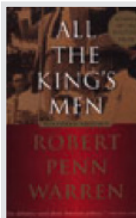
Twain is remembering his life before the Civil War as an apprentice steamboat pilot. The book is as broad and digressive as the river itself, but we have a charming companion to keep it interesting. We picked it because (a) Twain is one of the great native talents of American literature and *Life on the Mississippi* shows him in a genial mood, and (b) the book opens a window on a distinctly American combination of technical expertise, intellectual aspiration, and ironic observation.



Candide

Voltaire (1759)

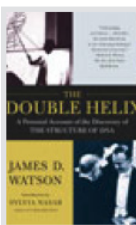
This eighteenth century satire of a young man under the spell of a philosophy that glibly treats the order of the world as “all for the best,” would seem to be superfluous counsel in an age where students are more likely to be surrounded by dire warnings that things are bad and about to get much worse. But as a story of progressive (and sometime hilarious) disillusionment, *Candide* still has something to teach. We picked it because it is a timeless warning not to mistake beautiful theories for fact.



All The King's Men

Robert Penn Warren (1946)

Warren's novel about the rise of a populist politician in the South presents the interplay of cynical calculation and idealistic yearning in American life. Based loosely on the life and death of Louisiana governor and senator Huey P. Long, the book is a classic portrayal of one of the weaknesses of our system of governance. We picked it because (a) it presents political corruption but is ultimately a counsel against viewing politics as mere manipulation, (b) it is a rich and vivid depiction of the insider's view of political life, and (c) it provides students an occasion to come to terms with their own temptation to think of governance as a raw, anything-goes game.



The Double Helix

James D. Watson (1968)

Watson's first-person account of the discovery of the double helix structure of DNA continues to provoke controversy, especially over Watson's cursory treatment of Rosalind Franklin, whose x-ray diffraction images of DNA were crucial to the hypothesis that he and his colleague Francis Crick developed. Nonetheless, the book is a classic insider account of one of the great scientific breakthroughs of the last century. We picked it because (a) it is a vivid portrayal of how scientific reasoning, personal ambition, and individual character come together in actual research, and (b) students need to know about some of the foundational discoveries that underlie contemporary medicine and technology.



The Right Stuff

Tom Wolfe (1979)

This book examines the lives of test pilots and astronauts, and chronicles the early years of the U.S.-manned space program. We picked it because (a) Wolfe's sympathetic engagement with the pilots brings to life the human side of this hugely complex scientific and technical accomplishment, (b) the book exemplifies the rhetorical power of the "new journalism" when it was truly new, and (c) it offers a compelling portrait of courage and self-reliance.



The Book Of Job

(C. 1000 B.C.)

Among the most profound and unsettling stories in the Bible, the book of Job depicts a righteous man brought to the depths of suffering by the seeming capriciousness of God. Job rejects the counsel of his friends to curse God for his fate, but he does eventually complain. God's answer is awesome—and frightening. We picked this book because (a) it is among the most accessible points of entry to the Bible for secular students, and (b) it is a terrific story that can lead to important questions about the nature of justice.

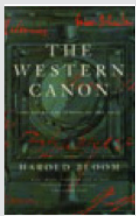


The Book Of Ecclesiastes

(C. 970-930 B.C.)

A king searches for meaning in life by successively seeking wisdom, pleasure, wealth, sex, and power. Having achieved them, he finds that they fail to fulfill his longings and are ultimately meaningless. We picked this book because it asks many of life's deepest questions: why work so hard if it doesn't bring real happiness and death is inevitable? What is there to live for, really? Why do bad things happen to good people? Why are some people wealthy while others are poor? In this way it also speaks to the rising concern on college campuses for social justice.

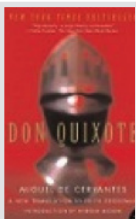
10 Recommended Books For More Ambitious College Common Reading Programs



The Western Canon

Harold Bloom (1994)

Bloom's enthusiasm for great books is infectious. Students won't have read many of the books he discusses but will want to.

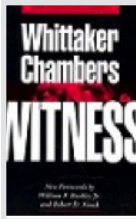


Don Quixote

Miguel De Cervantes (1605)

Is Don Quixote a hero, a fool, a madman—or all three? *Don Quixote* is a rich, gargantuan saga of the adventures of the iconic windmill-tilting knight-errant Don Quixote and his faithful squire Sancho Panza. The book has been called the “first modern novel,” and Harold Bloom writes that the tale of Don Quixote's impossible quest “contains within itself all the novels that have followed in its sublime wake.” The book might be the longest work a college student will ever

read, but it will also be the most memorable.



Witness

Whittaker Chambers (1952)

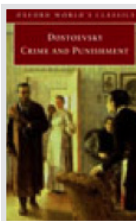
A former Communist and Soviet spy, Chambers repented and exposed former State Department official Alger Hiss as a fellow Communist and spy. Hiss denied the allegation but evidence emerged that Chambers was right. Though the statute of limitations on espionage had run out, Hiss went to prison on a perjury conviction. In *Witness* Chambers goes beyond the details of this case to offer a broad reflection on the course of twentieth-century history and the fate of Western civilization as it faced the challenge of totalitarian Communism.



Democracy In America

Alexis De Tocqueville (1838)

De Tocqueville remains the best observer of the American social and political experiment. A long read but not inherently difficult.



Crime And Punishment

Fyodor Dostoevsky (1866)

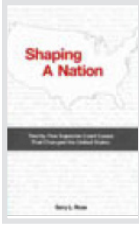
A psychological masterpiece. No one regrets reading it, though it is a long journey.



The Confidence-Man

Herman Melville (1857)

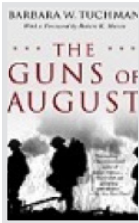
Easy to read but baffling to some readers, since Melville refuses to say exactly who among the large cast of characters aboard the Mississippi steam ship *Fidèle* is the confidence man. Is America a confidence game?



Shaping A Nation: 25 Supreme Court Cases

Gary Rose, Ed. (2010)

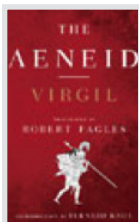
We are a nation of laws—and of Supreme Court opinions. It is a good idea for students to start college having read some of the most important ones.



The Guns Of August

Barbara Tuchman (1962)

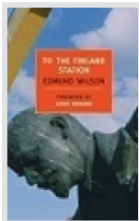
Winston Churchill called the first month of World War I a “drama never surpassed.” Renowned historian Barbara Tuchman’s classic chronicle of the first month of World War I and the events leading up to it is “more dramatic than fiction.” We chose this book because of its stellar writing, sweeping historical insight, and the story’s intimate bearing on the rest of the twentieth century: for, in many ways, the beginning of World War I was the beginning of the modern world.



The Aeneid

Virgil (19 B.C., Fagle’s Translation, 2006)

An epic in every sense, *The Aeneid* is one of the masterpieces of Western civilization.



To The Finland Station

Edmund Wilson (1940)

In *To the Finland Station*, Edmund Wilson traces historical, political, and ideological threads from the French Revolution to the Russian Revolution of 1917. The title refers to the St. Petersburg train from which Lenin emerged to take charge of the burgeoning Bolshevik revolt. Wilson’s narrative is an intellectual and cultural history that reveals the connections between the revolutionary era and the rise of socialism.

APPENDIX V: BEACH BOOKS IN PRACTICE: THE VIEW FROM MY ISLAND

By Cheryl Spector

We asked coordinators of college common reading programs to contribute their perspectives on our report and on common reading programs more generally. Among these was Cheryl Spector, Professor of English and Director of Academic First Year Experiences and California State University, Northridge.

At California State University, Northridge, the Freshman Common Reading selection committee is midway through the process of choosing our ninth book. We'll announce the winning title in early January 2015, and I'll spend the following several months on programming that targets faculty and staff who will be working with the fall 2015 incoming freshman class.

If you have not participated in a program of this kind, you might think that the process is simple and straightforward: one picks the best book possible—preferably a complex and thought-provoking literary classic, or a challenging and compelling work of non-fiction. That view is partially right: the best book possible is the goal. But in practice, one must choose a work in context and under a set of local circumstances.

I'm an English professor. My dissertation examined the role of literary allusions in selected novels of Henry James. But a work by Henry James would be a poor choice indeed for the freshman common reading program at our campus. Allow me to explain why.

To begin with, the Common Read selection is not required reading for our incoming freshman class (well over 5000 new students). We begin registering freshmen for their fall classes in early April, a time when their thoughts are focused firmly on senior prom. They haven't yet decided what summer job to seek to help them pay for college; they are hoping that they will magically be exempt from the math and writing courses in our state-wide Mandatory Early Start program (which most of them are required by Board of Trustees policy to complete during the summer). For our students, summer reading is not the much-anticipated leisure-time luxury that delights most faculty members. Reading is something assigned, something that looms and punishes. To suggest that students read what one of my own colleagues called "an improving book" not of their own choosing during the summer because it is good for them is not very different from removing high-fat pizza and sugary drinks from the high school cafeteria because these things are bad for them. On both counts the adults are correct—but students go right on not reading while drinking sodas and eating burgers and pizzas as though we had never spoken. Students, in short, resist reading.

Of course, students resist a lot of the things we want them to do. College math comes to mind. But college math, and for that matter high school math, have a big advantage over summer reading: they occur during school. They are social in nature; they are part of the curriculum; and faculty guide (or coach



or cajole or threaten) students to completion and occasional mastery. In the summer, students are free. Their time is their own.

But, you might ask, can't colleges institute assignments targeting the summer reading? How about a quiz, discussion groups, a bit of writing due when students arrive for move-in?

If we were a small (or even smallish) residential college, that would be a very reasonable plan. But we're a large urban university. About 5 percent of our students live on campus; the rest live elsewhere, and they start their semester with their first class—not with a week-long orientation program. Furthermore, with more than 5,000 of them, it's not clear who would be reading or evaluating the quiz or written work—or leading small-group discussions. That would require time and money we don't have.

If you work with 18-year-olds or have even a cursory acquaintance with Student Affairs or student development theory, you probably know all about the zone of proximal development, and you may skip immediately to the next paragraph. For the rest of you: our freshmen are teenagers. They are finally beginning to learn how to control their impulses and manage their time. They are not yet reliably able to read an assigned text on their own just because it's the right thing to do. They're ready to start learning how to do the right thing—but if you build a common reading program and simply expect that they'll rise to the occasion, you will find yourself in deep trouble.

Then, of course, we have our faculty. I am an outspoken defender of academic freedom. Even if I had the authority to require faculty to adopt the freshman common reading as a text in their classes, I wouldn't do it. Instead, I pitch each year's book as hard as I can, offering faculty discussion groups, sample assignments, suggested topics, lists of discussion questions, and so on. Faculty on and off the selection committee have told me privately that this or that nominated title was a wonderful book, but would require unbearably steep uphill teaching just to get freshmen to grapple with the vocabulary.

It's obvious that no book will please everyone on campus. I hope that my discussion here, however, has offered enough context to explain some of the factors that affect our selection process at my campus (and I think at many others).

The English professor in me secretly wants to choose a slim volume of fine poetry for our next common reading title. Though I work with a thirty-member selection committee comprising students, faculty, and staff, I can be quite persuasive, and I just might carry the day. But I've learned over the years to defer to the wisdom of the committee, which has been a remarkably successful strategy. Besides, we now vote via secret ballot, so I've lost even the inadvertent pressure that I used to exert without realizing it when I could see who was voting for which book.

The fact is that we are not just choosing a book; we are constructing a community of readers and a program of events. The author's visit adds star power—and while I didn't need to get autographs from

James Joyce and Charles Dickens to become a devotee of their works when I was in college, if I could have, I certainly would have.

The bottom line is that the hard-working faculty and staff who run freshman common reading programs never intended to be arbiters or guardians of high culture. Most of us have instead hoped to draw new students into a community of readers by offering books that required just enough work—but not too much—for what in most cases is spare time reading, not assigned reading attached to graded essays or exams. Sure, we could have picked *The Iliad* or *Daisy Miller* or *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. And some of our entering freshmen might even have completed reading one of those books successfully over the summer. But students capable of reading—really reading—most of the impressive titles on the recommended list of NAS Beach Books don't need to be invited to join the community of readers.⁴⁷ They already live there, and likely always will.

Faculty who aim to reach students like themselves could certainly do worse than follow the advice NAS offers. But those of us who want to reach the far broader collection of students who are *not* likely to pursue PhDs will continue to follow our different routes.

Though the 2014 edition of the NAS *Beach Books* report is still under wraps as I write (and I haven't read it), I'm told that it will suggest there is an alliance between publishers, authors, and college common reading programs that aims to advance a particular kind of book. Such an alliance seems highly unlikely, particularly considering that the aims of the three parties to it would be at odds with one another. Publishers want to make money. Authors want their own books to succeed. College common reading programs want to select books that their freshmen will read and engage with. Some authors, of course, do set out to write for their readers. (Dickens certainly did that, and was spectacularly successful.) But there are many kinds of readers, and college freshmen, while visible, are hardly the largest group. Nor are college freshmen a homogeneous group: they are at least as different as the colleges they attend. There is no alliance. There are market forces, and laws of supply and demand; and there is the sensible notion that if a book worked remarkably well at one college last year or the year before, it might work well at one's own college this year or next. But there is no cabal of nefarious players aiming to restrict the list of available books to a narrower, shallower few.

Freshman Common Reading programs perform admirable work: they persuade reluctant readers to read; they advance literacy as a public and private good; and they educate students to understand that books can have profound influences beyond the confines of their covers. For evidence of this last, you have only to look at the faculty/staff resource pages I've assembled for each of the books at Cal State Northridge.

Here, for instance, is the page for last year's *Garbology*: <http://www.csun.edu/afye/Garbology-for-Faculty->

47 The National Association of Scholars, "Recommended Books": http://www.nas.org/resources/recommended_books.

and-Staff.html. It's not selling anything; it doesn't pander; it's not designed to within an inch of its life by a web marketing specialist. But I think the page is very clear about showing how the book we picked is a matter for serious intellectual and artistic consideration. That, of course, is just a webpage at my own campus. Go out and Google for others; you'll find many that are astonishingly rich and—dare I say it?—scholarly in their approach to the books they celebrate.

Freshman Common Reading programs are not fiendish plots devised by liberals and/or anti-intellectuals to bamboozle the public or warp young minds. Rather, they are energetic, creative, and successful programs meant to demonstrate, persuade, and inspire people to see books as the centerpiece of college intellectual life. See for instance our invitation to this year's freshman class at <http://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/academic-first-year-experiences/common-read>. I invite the membership of NAS to ally itself with what we do. I have met the enemy, and he is not us.

APPENDIX VI: COMMON READING PROGRAMS: BEGINNING THE PROCESS

Jennifer Klein Morrison

This year we spoke with Dr. Jennifer Klein Morrison, Associate Dean for the First Year at Assumption College, who shared her perspective on our report, on her college's common reading program, and on common reading programs more broadly.

A few years ago I attended a workshop on developing a successful common reading program as part of the annual First Year Experience conference. The workshop leader opened her remarks by claiming that she and her colleagues had discovered the secret formula for selecting a successful common book. We leaned forward. We were all hoping for this. First, she said, it has to be the right length, and she held up her thumb and index finger with a space of about three-quarters of an inch between them. Anything shorter than 175 pages, and it is not serious, she explained, but anything longer, and most students won't read it. Second, she went on, it has to focus on an engaging and inspiring personal story—it's better if it's true, but it can also be fictional, if well told. Third, it has to be about a male protagonist because female students will read anything—they are used to relating to the male experience—but if it's about a woman, the guys won't read it because, well, they don't read "chick lit." We all laughed and shook our heads because she was kidding, of course, but only partly. She went on to say that the books that conformed to this formula seemed to be the most successful at least in terms of engaging student interest. They seemed to be the books that the greatest number of students actually read.

A formula would be very convenient and would make my life as the administrator who oversees the selection and programming for our First Year Common Book much easier, but the fact is, at least at



Assumption College, there could never be a formula, even if it drew on the magic of algorithms. We have criteria for selection that basically encompass the recommendations promoted by the National Association of Scholars⁴⁸—whether fiction or non-fiction, it must stretch the students out of their intellectual comfort zones yet still be accessible, which has obvious implications for length. It must be in keeping with the mission of a small, Catholic, liberal arts college, though we would never expect a single book to “distill” the mission in all its complexity and implications. It must have potential for cross-disciplinary exploration and the development of extra-curricular events, though this has never been an issue.

One key criterion that we use that the NAS does not mention is that the book must in some way address the needs and concerns of first-year students. It must be relevant, in other words, to new students and the particular moment in their lives that they are facing—a moment of transition and transformation, a moment in which they will enter a new community, a moment of great potential but also great risk and anxiety. In this way, the Common Book serves as an introduction to the college experience in all of its facets. There’s a lot at stake in its selection as the first book students read as they begin their college experience, and the NAS is certainly correct in calling attention to Common Reading books and programs as a trend worth tracking in higher ed.

NAS draws a correlation between the abolition of core curriculums and the rise of Common Reading Programs. At least at Assumption, this is hardly the case. For better or worse, we have had the same, somewhat tinkered, core for the past thirty years, and it includes courses in Philosophy, Theology and History that introduce students to texts that are foundational to western civilization. The First Year Common Book is *not* a species of “that dangerous supplement,” in other words, meant to compensate for a glaring absence in the curriculum, and in so doing, it only calls attention to the absence.⁴⁹ I would argue that the development of Common Book Programs derives more from a growing awareness, sponsored in part by The National Resource Center on the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, that students today come to college in need of orienting, in need of guidance in the mysterious ways of higher education. This is because the face of higher education is changing—it is more diverse and includes more first-generation and high-risk populations of students. When I was a freshman in college in the early 1980s, there were no orientation programs for students, or for our parents. My dad dropped me off in front of the “dorm” because he could not find parking, and that was it. Sink or swim. But the cost of education is too high for all parties for that approach now, and colleges understand all too well the importance of retaining the students that they have.

At least at Assumption, Student Affairs oversaw the inception of orientations for first-year students, and

48 I refer throughout to the August 2013 report, *Beach Books: 2012-2013* published by the National Association of Scholars. For their recommendations, see pp. 36-37.

49 Jacques Derrida was obviously not referring to core curricula when he discussed “. . . That Dangerous Supplement . . .” in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 141-165, but the idea that the supplement by the nature of its very existence calls attention to the lack or deficit that it aims to fix seems applicable here.

faculty initiated the establishment of the First Year Common Book as a means of infusing the orientations with academic content and helping to prepare students for college-level work. We have no first-year seminar, so it is used exclusively in the June and August orientations, and there is an online bridge through Blackboard in between. Student orientation leaders model how to read and prepare for the class discussions of the common book with faculty members during the orientations and online. But even more than using the book to teach new students about academic expectations, we want the first reading experience of our new students to be a positive one. We want them to feel the excitement of engaging in an intellectual conversation about meaning and ideas. Students can't enter into that experience if they don't read. So choosing a book that students will actually read on their own has become a high priority.

I think we can all agree that education is a process. Common Book Programs are about beginning the process. Many students who attend our June orientation have not graduated from high school yet. In those three summer months before they start college, they are still very much high school students. Other than the introduction that they receive in the model classes at orientation, they are not reading these books with the regular guidance of a faculty member who can help them to see themes and discover meaning as they go along, something the NAS report rightly points out, but then seems to forget in its list of 50 recommended books. This is a fundamentally different rhetorical situation from what they will encounter in September. At the beginning of the process, we need to meet students where they are.

And who are the students we are meeting? As I mentioned, they are more diverse, for one. In the past 15 years, Assumption has gone from just under 5% to almost 20% ALANA (African-, Latino/Hispanic-, Asian-, and Native-American). More of our students are also the first in their families to attend college, which means that they are more at risk for leaving college without graduating. These trends at Assumption are in sync with national trends. We want all of our students to feel that they belong at Assumption, that they can succeed. When we hand them a book that seems to bear no relevance to their world and experience, we are sending a very different message. The NAS notes, somewhat disapprovingly, that the overwhelming majority of Common Reading books were first published after 1990. I would argue that this is because most colleges and universities want to *start* by validating contemporary experience, the experience of our students in the world today. To claim that the only "good books" must have withstood the test of time seems with one sweep to negate the validity of present experience. When we do that, we are doing exactly what Parker Palmer identifies as problematic with current practice in higher education: "[W]e teach our students to distrust direct experience in favor of hidden insular entities and discrete causal factors that cognition can represent but never directly reveal. In this view, students are denied direct experiential access to the truth of their world and must contend with models of reality instead."⁵⁰ With the guidance of a faculty member, we can extend their horizons and get them to see beyond the scope of

50 Parker J. Palmer and Arthur Zajonc with Megan Scribner, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010), p. 60.

their immediate experience, but not at the beginning of the process.

For the class of 2018, we chose Jeannette Walls's *The Glass Castle*, a memoir that has been adopted by many colleges. Walls's memoir is engaging, inspiring and accessible, but even more than that it is about one woman's determination to find her own path in life, to separate herself from the life and values of her parents. As our students prepare to leave home for the first time, they need to think about how much of home they will bring with them, how much they will leave behind, and what kind of identity they will forge for themselves through this new experience called an education in the liberal arts. Walls also vividly describes growing up in dire poverty. Recognizing the poverty that surrounds us and shapes many lives is the first step to doing something about poverty. The commitment to help others less fortunate is very much in keeping with our mission as a Catholic institution, but it has to begin with a recognition of the problem—a problem that Walls makes very real and compelling because she is a wonderful writer. We think our students will want to read her whole story. Reading and then thinking about all of these things are good places to begin the college experience, and that's what it is—a beginning.

APPENDIX VII: COMMON READING BOOKS AND A MEASURE OF STUDENT REACTION TO THEM

By Thomas G. Carskadon⁵¹

A version of this document was given as a handout in the 2014 First Year Experience conference session "Common Sense and Uncommon Data in Common Reading Programs." It is printed here with the author's permission.

The Trend

Common reading programs are proliferating at colleges and universities nationwide, and there is keen interest in identifying suitable books to use in such programs. According to the National Association of Scholars (www.nas.org/images/documents/BeachBooks-2013.pdf), which painstakingly updates these data annually through the efforts of Executive Director Ashley Thorne, in the academic year 2012-2013 309 institutions nationwide were known to have adopted 190 different books for their common reading programs. The National Association of Scholars website is an excellent source for guidance and ideas, and it provides a national picture that is both interesting and useful.

The Philosophical Question

Each institution must make a philosophical choice as to which is more important: the students' discovery

⁵¹ Copyright © 2014. All rights reserved; may not be copied, distributed (including electronically), or quoted without specific permission. Contact: Thomas G. Carskadon, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology and Director of First-Year Experience Programs, Mississippi State University; tomcarskadon@psychology.msstate.edu; 662-325-7655.



that reading books can be enjoyable and rewarding (“the book”); or the pulling together of the campus community around a common theme that is supported by a rich range of interdisciplinary programming, culminating in an on-campus presentation by the author or other recognized experts and the concomitant favorable publicity for the institution (“the event”). Ideally, you want both, but the world is seldom ideal. Our vote: It’s the book! In our view: It does not matter what book the students do not read. Unless your common reading is required and tested on as part of a course that most students will take—in our experience, this is not usually the case—then the principal motivation you have is a book that students will enjoy enough that they will read it voluntarily. If this criterion is not met, then your program faces difficulties.

Student Behavioral Data

Our experience shows consistently that, in round numbers, half the students will not turn a single page of the book; of those who did not read the book, only 1 in 5 has any intention of ever reading the book; only 20% of students read the book completely; less than 20% of students will voluntarily attend even one program or event related to the book; virtually no students who have not already done so go back and read the book because of the programming; and only 25% of students rate the first-year common reading program as a positive educational experience to have on campus. We do not like these data! However, candor compels us to say that in all probability, faculty and administrative enthusiasm for first-year common reading programs significantly exceeds student enthusiasm for them as they are presently practiced.

How Do We Fix This?

The simplest solution is to select books enjoyable enough that students will actually read them!

Who Should Choose the Book?

Your college or university president or provost is probably not the best choice in most cases, as neither is likely to have time to read completely a number of possible books for adoption, and neither is likely to be active in classroom instruction at all, let alone with first-year students. Furthermore, high-ranking administrators may focus more on the public relations aspects of the choice than on the academic merits of the books being considered. Committees of faculty bibliophiles often have significant and sincere enthusiasm for the task, but members’ tastes in reading are probably quite different from those of students. Your best bet is probably faculty who actually teach first-year students, informed by feedback from representative samples of first-year students. Add in enough others to get administrative and campus-wide buy-in, and be sure to include some students and excellent first-year seminar faculty. At least, that is our general advice.

What We Can Offer You That May Not Be Readily Available Elsewhere

For several years, we have gathered systematic, objective data from representative samples of first-year students. Mississippi State University students are probably comparable to those at many of your

institutions: a wide variety of aptitude levels, majors, races, ethnicities, cultures, etc. We are a state supported, comprehensive, research-extensive university. General Psychology is a university core-curriculum course that meets requirements and is taken by students in almost every major in the university. We give these students the chance to read and evaluate a potential common reading book for extra credit, and most students do. They are assigned one of the books we are evaluating—they do not get to choose it. They are tested on the book. Separately and anonymously, they fill out evaluations of the book, if they report (anonymously) that they actually did read enough of the book to be able to have a reliable opinion. We then apply a special index (the “Carskadon Index”) to make the student evaluations more meaningful and interpretable—see the other side of this sheet for details. We find that this approach works better than simply saying “Book A averaged 4.1 on a 5-point scale but Book B averaged 4.6.” Over the past several years, we have studied student reactions to the two dozen or so most frequently used common reading books around the country, plus about half a dozen others we were interested in locally for various reasons. The results of these studies appear on the next page. As far as we can tell, such data are uncommon and difficult to find elsewhere.

What We Suggest You Do

Consider using our data as a starting point. If possible, generate similar data using representative samples of your own first-year students; experiment with using the Carskadon Index to quantify your data; and share your results with others around the country.

Pick Hits

The data speak for themselves, but certain points merit highlighting. *Brain on Fire* by Susannah Cahalan received the highest score we have ever recorded. It won the 2014 Carskadon Award for Outstanding First-Year Common Reading Book. Another author, Jeannette Walls, has three books in the top 11, and she has won our two previous awards. Finally, a lesser known book I consider so good that I assign it to every student I teach is *In My Hands*, by Irene Gut Opdyke.

Carskadon Index Scores

Below are ranked “Carskadon Index” scores for 30 possible common reading books for which we have readily available data. Twenty to 30 (usually at least 25) first-year students in General Psychology classes read the listed book (for extra credit; a majority of each class opted to do so) and rated it on a 5-point scale (“great;” “good;” “okay;” “bad;” or “terrible”). For each book, we eliminated the top and bottom 10% of the responses, to cut down on extreme responses that might be freakish or spurious, and then applied an index we have devised and used over the last several years. Our thought is that an *ideal* candidate for a common reading book would be rated “great” by a majority of students—twice as many rating it as “great” as rating it as “good”—with only 10% rating it as less than “good” (i.e., “okay,” “bad,” or “terrible”). For our index, we subtracted the percent who failed to rate the book as at least “good” from the

percent who rated it as “great,” and then doubled the result. Thus if 60% of students thought the book was “great,” 30% thought it was “good,” and 10% rated it less than “good,” the resulting index would be $(60\% - 10\%) \times 2 = 100$, an outstanding score. Conversely, if only 10% of students thought a book was “great,” and 60% thought it wasn’t even “good”—i.e., thought it was “okay,” “bad,” or “terrible”—then the resulting score would be $(10\% - 60\%) \times 2 = -100$ (negative 100). Actual Carskadon Index scores can (and do) go above 100 and below negative 100. This is a rough, experimental measure, and small differences are unlikely to be reliable and meaningful. However, unless there is a way to *require* students to read the book and actually *test* to ensure that they have done so, the effectiveness of a first-year common reading program typically hinges on selecting a book that students will enjoy enough that they will read it voluntarily. These data and the procedures that produced them are far from perfect, but given the singular dearth of similar data anywhere else, we offer them here. Our suggestion is to be sure to include in your consideration at least some books that score 80 or higher on the Carskadon index, but to bear in mind that all of these are good books that might well fit the goals of your institution’s program and the characteristics of your student body.

190: *Brain on Fire: My Month of Madness*, by Susannah Cahalan

161: *The Glass Castle: A Memoir*, by Jeannette Walls

152: *Wine to Water: A Bartender’s Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World*, by Doc Hendley

149: *Zeitoun*, by Dave Eggers

146: *Little Princes: One Man’s Promise to Bring Home the Lost Children of Nepal*, by Conor Grennan

142: *The Invisible Girls: A Memoir*, by Sarah Theberge

127: *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates*, by Wes Moore

112: *In My Hands: Memories of a Holocaust Rescuer*, by Irene Gut Opdyke with Jennifer Armstrong

105: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian*, by Sherman Alexie

92: *Half Broke Horses: A True-Life Novel*, Jeannette Walls

88: *The Silver Star: A Novel*, by Jeannette Walls

67: *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, by Rebecca Skloot

66: *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind: Creating Currents of Electricity and Hope*, by William Kamkwamba and Bryan Mealer

62: *This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women*, edited by Jay Allison and Dan Gediman



- 53: *Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference*, by Warren St. John
- 46: *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression Into Opportunity*, by Nicholas Kristoff and Sheryl WuDunn
- 34: *No Impact Man: The Adventures of a Guilty Liberal Who Attempts to Save the Planet, and the Discoveries He Makes About Himself and Our Way of Life in the Process*, by Colin Beavan
- 20: *The Truth Machine*, by James Halperin (out of print but available for free download at www.truthmachine.com)
- 10: *Where Am I Wearing: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes*, by Kelsey Timmerman
- 6: *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood*, by Marjane Satrapi
- 16: *My Own Country: A Doctor's Story*, by Abraham Verghese
- 30: *Never Let Me Go*, by Kazuo Ishiguro
- 48: *Unbowed: A Memoir*, by Wangari Matthai
- 49: *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite With His Mother*, by Sonia Nazario
- 66: *Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity*, by Katherine Boo
- 80: *Physics for Future Presidents: The Science Behind the Headlines*, by Richard A. Muller
- 80: *The Ghost Map: The Story of London's Most Terrifying Epidemic*, by Steven Johnson
- 90: *The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration*, by Isabel Wilkerson
- 106: *The Fish That Ate the Whale: The Life and Times of America's Banana King*, by Rich Cohen
- 110: *Beautiful Souls: The Courage and Conscience of Ordinary People in Extraordinary Times*, by Eyal Press

APPENDIX VIII: “CAUGHT WITH GAY BOOKS: SOUTH CAROLINA PUNISHES COLLEGES FOR FRESHMAN READING CHOICES”

By Ashley Thorne

originally published March 6, 2014 at http://www.nas.org/articles/caught_with_gay_books_south_carolina_punishes_colleges_for_freshman_reading

On February 19, the South Carolina legislature voted 13 to 10 to approve budget cuts to two state colleges. The cuts came in response to two books assigned as freshman reading and some related programming at the colleges. The College of Charleston assigned *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*⁵² by Alison Bechdel, and the University of South Carolina-Upstate assigned, *Out Loud: The Best of Rainbow Radio*⁵³ edited by Ed Madden and Candace Chellew-Hodge.

Both books offer first person accounts by gay authors of the trials and tribulations of being gay in America.

The South Carolina legislature cut \$52,000 from its nearly \$20 million contribution to the College of Charleston’s \$235 million budget. It cut \$17,142 from its \$9.1 million contribution to the University of South Carolina-Upstate’s \$92.2 million budget.

The legislature’s action raises some important and difficult questions. Was it an act of censorship? Or was it an act of stewardship? Were the College of Charleston and the University of South Carolina-Upstate acting within the spirit of academic freedom? Or were they engaged in political advocacy at the expense of their students? What is the proper role of a state legislature in overseeing the actions of public colleges and universities?

Beach Books

I can throw some light on this controversy because in the last four years I have been tracking and publishing reports on common reading programs at colleges around the country. These annual studies have been published by the National Association of Scholars as *Beach Books*.⁵⁴

Common reading programs typically take the form of the colleges assigning a single book to first-year students or to the college as a whole. They have become popular in the last decade or so, partly to offset the lack of a core curriculum. Last year over 300 colleges and universities had common reading programs. As my colleagues at the NAS and I have examined these programs, we have built up a rich picture of the kinds of books, subjects, and authors that dominate; how the books are picked; and the controversies that are sometimes sparked by the choices.

52 *Fun Home* by Alison Bechdel: <http://www.amazon.com/Fun-Home-A-Family-Tragicomic/dp/0618871713>.

53 *Out Loud: The Best of Rainbow Radio* edited by Ed Madden and Candace Chellew-Hodge: <http://www.amazon.com/Out-Loud-Best-Rainbow-Radio/dp/1891885766>.

54 *Beach Books 2012-2013: What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside of Class,* The National Association of Scholars. http://www.nas.org/articles/beach_books_2012_2013.

At some colleges, including USC-Upstate, the common reading is part of a freshman seminar or is required in some other way. At my alma mater, The King's College, the entire student body takes a comprehension test on the book. But at many colleges, including the College of Charleston, students and faculty members are merely "invited" or "encouraged" to read the book. The encouragements range from mild to strenuous.

College of Charleston: *Fun Home*

The College of Charleston in selecting *Fun Home* as a voluntary reading edged towards the strenuous approach. It sent copies to all its incoming students and full-time faculty members and encouraged⁵⁵ them to read it, "as it will be connected to the academic curriculum and campus activities throughout the year." The College explained that the book had been chosen by "a large committee composed of faculty, staff, administrators and students," and that the criteria were "a manageable length, with a living author, with relevant themes and intellectually stimulating topics that will generate meaningful dialogue and engage the campus community in a variety of ways."⁵⁶

Fun Home is a "graphic memoir" in comic book style, about author Alison Bechdel's relationship with her father. Bechdel's story hinges on a few key events. She wrote that at age 19, when in her first year at Oberlin College, she told her parents she was a lesbian; soon after that she learned that her father was gay. Four months after she came out to her parents, her father was hit by a truck and died. Though the family treated his death as an accident, Bechdel believes it was suicide. Her dark, introspective memoir is laced with dead-pan humor but also with showy references to Greek myth, Camus, Proust, Tolstoy, and Joyce. One scene from the Oberlin days is a drawing of four feet in a bed, with the caption, "Joan was a poet and a 'matriarchist.' I spent very little of the remaining semester outside her bed. This was strewn with books, however, in what was for me a novel infusion of word and deed." Other pictures include genital nudity.

While the college made *Fun Home* an optional, "encouraged" reading, it especially encouraged new students to read it. Faculty members were invited to a separate reading group, "The College Colloquium,"⁵⁷ in which they read books on higher education such as Jeff Selingo's *College (Un)Bound*⁵⁸ and Bill Bennett and David Wilezol's *Is College Worth It?*⁵⁹ The College programming⁶⁰ for "The Campus Reads!" included a talk by Bechdel and a lecture on "Same Sex Marriage and the Courts," given by a pro-gay-marriage

55 "The College Reads!," The College of Charleston: <http://collegereads.cofc.edu/>.

56 "Fun Home Selection," The College of Charleston: <http://collegereads.cofc.edu/documents/FunHomeSelection>.

57 "The College Colloquium," The College of Charleston: <http://collegereads.cofc.edu/collegecolloquium/index.php>.

58 *College Unbound* by Jeff Selingo: <http://www.amazon.com/College-Unbound-Future-Education-Students/dp/0544027078>.

59 *Is College Worth It?* By Bill Bennett and David Wilezol: http://www.amazon.com/College-Worth-Secretary-Education-Graduate/dp/1595552790/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1394040563&sr=1-1&keywords=is+college+worth+it.

60 "The College Reads!" events, The College of Charleston: <http://collegereads.cofc.edu/events/index.php>.

Harvard historian who testified in the Proposition 8 case in California. There were no readings or speakers opposed to same-sex marriage.

The College provided a reading guide that encourages students to “identify” with *Fun Home* and to think about “gender roles and sexual identity” within the context of “shifting cultural norms.”⁶¹ Study questions include, “What does Bechdel suggest we risk by denying our erotic truth?” The guide also includes a glossary of the authors referenced in the book, including Colette and Oscar Wilde.

Why the College of Charleston chose *Fun Home* is unclear. The college’s statement simply describes its general criteria for selecting common readings and mentions that *Fun Home* was picked from a list of more than fifty books that had been recommended by members of the campus community. The selection committee, however, could not help but be aware that it was putting a spotlight on a contentious issue. The gay marriage debate has been a prominent national topic for several years. South Carolina does not recognize gay marriage, and in 2006 South Carolina voters by a 78 percent majority passed Amendment 1, which added a Constitutional prohibition on both same-sex marriage and civil unions.

This did not end the matter, particularly because some same-sex couples went out of state to get married in other jurisdictions. In August 2013—well after the book selection committee had picked *Fun Home*—a lesbian couple filed a suit on U.S. District Court challenging the South Carolina ban on same-sex marriage.

In picking *Fun Home* as a common reading, the College of Charleston clearly chose to step into a public and highly political controversy in the state. And it appears to have done so with favor to one side of the debate.

USC-Upstate: *Out Loud*

Over at USC-Upstate, the freshman reading program, Preface, is more integrated into students’ required courses. Its webpage says, “During this program, first-year students read the Preface text in English 101 and most University 101 courses and attend related events in both English 101 and 102.”⁶²

English 101 and 102 are required general education courses, and University 101 is an elective for incoming freshmen and appears to be a euphemism for remediation.⁶³ As at the College of Charleston, Upstate’s Preface is a campus-wide program, though geared especially toward new students. It is sponsored by the department of Languages, Literature, and Composition.⁶⁴

61 The College of Charleston Reading Guide: <http://collegereads.cofc.edu/documents/readingguide.pdf>.

62 University of South Carolina Upstate: http://www.uscupstate.edu/academics/arts_sciences/languages_literature/preface.aspx?id=3591.

63 “Student Success Center,” University of South Carolina Upstate: <http://www.uscupstate.edu/studentsuccess/academicsupport/default.aspx?id=2459>.

64 Languages, Literature and Composition Department, University of South Carolina Upstate: http://www.uscupstate.edu/academics/arts_sciences/languages_literature/Default.aspx.

The stated goals of the common reading are “to help USC Upstate first-year students make connections to each other and to the University, to practice skills that contribute to success in college, and to discuss how a deeper understanding of a shared reading can inform the way we make personal decisions and influence public policy today.” The University does not state on its website how the book is chosen each year, though in one year’s announcement a “Preface committee” is mentioned.

Out Loud is a compilation of radio segments from the program *Rainbow Radio: The REAL Gay Agenda*, which broadcasts on Sundays at 8:00 a.m. from Columbia, South Carolina. Each segment is a personal story told by an LGBT Southerner.⁶⁵ The stories include “Sheila Gets a Shave,” about a little girl who visits her grandfather’s barber shop and gets a make-believe trim; “Torn,” about a lesbian teenager and her mother; and “The Bridge That Has Fallen In,” about a gay man wishing he could go home for Christmas and be at ease with his family.⁶⁶

USC-Upstate’s fall 2013 events related to the Preface reading were required for freshmen. These events included a Constitution Day lecture by NPR game-show host Peter Sagal; a keynote address by *Out Loud* editor Ed Madden; a speech about the first openly lesbian Miss South Carolina contestant; and a talk by a leader of a South Carolina “GLBT civil rights organization” on “104,362 reasons to support equality in South Carolina.”⁶⁷

The book selection raised eyebrows early on, and Faculty Senate minutes from September 2013 show the Senate deciding upon a statement in the wake of unspecified “criticism of the first-year reading selection.”⁶⁸ They chose to say: “USC Upstate’s Faculty Senate reaffirms its support of the PREFACE program and its selections, the academic freedom of our faculty to require course readings that promote critical thinking, and the USC system’s commitment to equality regardless of sexual orientation.” The next item on the Faculty Senate agenda was an announcement about the Pride March on September 14.

Again, while I don’t have access to the internal discussion that prompted USC Upstate to choose *Out Loud*, it is evident that the university understood the surrounding controversy over gay marriage and went ahead with programming that weighed into that controversy decisively on one side of the debate.

Emblematic Choices

Neither *Fun Home* nor *Out Loud* are popular as common reading choices. Brandeis University picked *Fun Home* for its New Student Forum in 2011, but other than that neither book has been selected by any of

65 Rainbow Radio: <https://soundcloud.com/rainbow-radio>.

66 Rainbow Radio stories: <http://vimeo.com/19290891>.

67 Preface Events, University of South Carolina Upstate: https://www.uscupstate.edu/academics/arts_sciences/languages_literature/preface.aspx?id=3611.

68 Faculty Senate Agenda, The University of South Carolina Upstate. 2013. [https://www.uscupstate.edu/uploadedFiles/Faculty_and_Staff/Faculty_Governance/Faculty%20Senate%20agenda%2010_11_2013\(1\).pdf](https://www.uscupstate.edu/uploadedFiles/Faculty_and_Staff/Faculty_Governance/Faculty%20Senate%20agenda%2010_11_2013(1).pdf).



the 300-some colleges and universities NAS surveyed in our three annual *Beach Books* studies to date. Nor has homosexuality been a leading theme among the books chosen. Three years ago the University of Buffalo at SUNY chose a book about the murder of gay college student Matthew Shepard, but by far the dominant trends in book selection overall have been themes of multiculturalism, environmentalism, human rights advocacy, American poverty, and food.

Controversy over common reading choices, however, is not new. In recent years both of the South Carolina colleges have chosen books that occasioned dispute. The College of Charleston selected Greg Mortenson's *Three Cups of Tea* in 2010. (This book was the third most popular common reading choice that year.⁶⁹ The next year, after Mortenson's tales of building schools in Pakistan were exposed as untrue, no colleges picked books by him for common reading.⁷⁰) In 2011 USC-Upstate chose *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem?* by Moustafa Bayoumi, which was hotly contested the year before when Brooklyn College assigned it to incoming students. The controversy was over the book's preferential treatment of Muslims and portrayal of America as oppressive and racist.⁷¹

Such controversies about these books tell us that the public cares about what colleges ask students to read, even if it is not required. That is because when a college assigns just *one book* as an introduction to the institution and to the academic year as a whole, that book may rightly be taken as emblematic of the college's values. The choice of a certain book may not mean that the institution necessarily endorses the viewpoints expressed inside, but it gives clear hints as to what the administration holds as important and as worthy of community-wide discussion. Colleges acknowledge this when they give rationales for their common reading programs.

Legislating Common Reading

When the question of penalizing the two colleges came up in the South Carolina legislature, the representatives were divided between those who wanted to curb one-sided ideology and those who were wary of censorship.⁷² B. R. Skelton, the representative who introduced the motion to reinstate the money to the College of Charleston and USC-Upstate, said, "I didn't think it was appropriate for us to begin funding institutions on the basis of which books are assigned."

There was some inconclusive discussion among the representatives as to where the money would have gone if the colleges kept it, and whether the readings were mandatory. After the vote ended the motion, Mr. Skelton introduced a new one that would require the committee to approve all book choices for the

69 *Beach Books: What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside of Class? 2010-2011*, National Association of Scholars. http://www.nas.org/articles/Beach_Books_What_Do_Colleges_and_Universities_Want_Students_to_Read_Outside_of_Class_2010-2011.

70 "Campus Favorite Greg Mortenson Writing Lies," National Association of Scholars, 2011. http://www.nas.org/articles/Campus_Favorite_Greg_Mortenson_Writing_Lies.

71 Thorne, Ashley. "Common Reading Controversy at Brooklyn College." National Association of Scholars. http://www.nas.org/articles/Common_Reading_Controversy_at_Brooklyn_College.

72 South Carolina State House: <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/video/videofeed.php>.



state's public colleges.

Amid laughter around the long table, Rep. Gilda Cobb-Hunter spoke up, saying, "This is not a joking matter to me...What we did yesterday opened the door for this kind of censorship." She then excoriated the thirteen who had voted against the motion, saying that they should leave these questions to boards of trustees and not try to press their personal beliefs on colleges. She went so far as to suggest that those thirteen would, when one day they reached "the pearly gates," have to turn around and go "straight back down" as a consequence for their narrow-mindedness. "That's where you're going to end up because you don't treat people right; you're intolerant."

Several others echoed Ms. Cobb-Hunter's assertions that the legislature was overstepping its role. Rep. Joseph H. Neal said, "I'm just uncomfortable with the idea that we know better than the professors or the trustee boards." He said that instead of cutting the schools' budgets, the legislature should have written to the boards of trustees to request a review. Rep. James M. Merrill agreed and suggested that there are probably "books very similar to those books at all the other universities that just haven't got the publicity."

Rep. Rita A. Allison responded that after she received complaints from her constituents (USC-Upstate is in her district in Spartanburg, South Carolina), she called the chancellor and sat down and talked with him, along with a number of her constituents. She said, "We were promised that the selection committee and the process of selecting books would be looked at." Her chief concern was that the book was assigned for a course and tied to a grade without any alternative choice for students who felt the book violated their personal beliefs. It would be "fine if they want to read that book but don't mandate the book for a grade," she said. Ms. Allison said she also thought that similar books were being assigned across campuses nationwide and that these two were simply the ones that "just happened to get caught."

What We Learn

The conversation around the long table in the South Carolina legislature is illuminating in several ways. First, there was a healthy tension between the desire to respect academic freedom (several legislators used the term) and the sense that there might be a legitimate problem with exposure to one side of an ideology at the very beginning of college. We *should* respect faculty members' competence to shape the content of the curriculum. We should also raise questions when that curriculum excludes an important side of a debate. As several of the state representatives observed, the universities' boards of trustees properly bear responsibility to ensure the integrity of the curricula. That does not necessarily preclude a role for the legislature but legislative intervention in higher education is fraught with concerns about politicizing what most agree should be academic decisions.

The complication is further tangled by the willingness of many faculty members and college administrators to avow that there really is no significant difference between “academic” and political decisions. The increasingly widespread view on campus that “everything is political” may serve as justification for picking common readings that advance a politically activist agenda, but it can just as easily serve as a warrant for legislators to say, in effect, “We agree. Everything is political, and our politics trump yours.”

In South Carolina who is inappropriately imposing on whom? The colleges on their students, or the legislature on the colleges?

In my view, the answer is probably both. Budget cuts may be a way of getting peoples’ attention, but what we really need is a different spirit among colleges and universities: a determination to choose books based on criteria such as imaginative power, literary merit, and historical significance. Colleges in general need to make better choices, and they need to improve the process for choosing. The National Association of Scholars has recommendations for both:

50 Recommended Books for College Common Reading Programs:

http://www.nas.org/resources/recommended_books

12 Recommendations for Selecting Books for Common Reading:

<http://www.nas.org/images/documents/BeachBooks-2013.pdf> (see page 36-37)

Third, the notion of the two colleges “getting caught” is telling. These are the two where people complained about the reading. It isn’t as if there is a nationwide accountability system scanning colleges looking for things to “catch,” that somehow failed except in these cases. By and large, common reading programs are too bland to occasion any outrage. Many of the books are simply meant as inspirational stories. Though a number of selections are heavy on PC themes, with some exceptions they are not very political or contentious. Then there’s the problem of having to say why a book seems like a poor choice for college common reading. With the two books on homosexuality, the issue is clearer. But if someone objected to, for instance, the most popular common read, *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, a story about a black woman’s stem cells, the complainant could be accused of racism. Indeed, it is hard to say that anything is really wrong with the books that colleges choose for common reading.

Suggestions

So why do some people still have the feeling that *Eating Animals* and *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, while not bad books, are not the best choices for these college reading programs? Perhaps because some of us can think of better choices.



The National Association of Scholars promotes common reading programs: they get students reading in preparation for college, and they give students some intellectual common ground in a time when they may not get that community, based on shared reading, anywhere else. Why not use this unique opportunity to introduce students to some of the best there is in literature, to the ideas that have shaped our nation and civilization? Instead of providing a glossary explaining who Tolstoy, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Oscar Wilde were (as the College of Charleston did), why not have students read the original texts and experience them firsthand?

I would like to see reform in this direction in how colleges approach common reading. I don't see it happening soon, because there are incentives to follow the crowd and choose recent, easy, trendy books. I also don't think that legislating common reading will work. Rather than acting in any way that might invoke accusations of censorship⁷³ (which only makes the books seem more exciting), I think for now, the thing to do is continue to make positive suggestions and to promote better options. NAS is here to help. The NEA Big Read book list also has some good selections.⁷⁴ In the meantime, we will continue to document the books colleges and universities do choose, to follow the trends closely and publicize them.

Maybe I can give the last word to Oscar Wilde, from whom Alison Bechdel took inspiration. *In The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Wilde remarks, "There is no such thing as a moral or an immoral book. Books are well written, or badly written."

Update 3/11/14: The discussion and votes by the South Carolina legislature, addressed in this article, refer to a House Ways and Means Committee meeting on February 19. On March 10, the House as a whole voted to approve the budget cuts endorsed by the Committee. "Recommended Books," National Association of Scholars: http://www.nas.org/resources/recommended_books.⁷⁵

APPENDIX IX: "WILLIAMS READS' BOOK SELECTION WAS A FLOP"

By Michaela Morton ('12)

originally published February 10, 2009 in The Williams Record

Michaela Morton, a recent graduate of Williams College, reflected on the Williams Read program in an essay in the student newspaper. This article was published in 2009, but the metaphor Morton imagined still applies to most college common reading programs.

⁷³ South Carolina State House: <http://www.scstatehouse.gov/video/videofeed.php>.

⁷⁴ "Books and Guides," The NEA Big Read: <http://www.neabigread.org/books.php>.

⁷⁵ "SC House Refuses to Restore Budget Cuts to College of Charleston for Book," *Post and Courier*: <http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20140310/PC1603/140319937>.



Williams students read, obviously. And when Williams Reads as a community, one expects insights from the ensuing conversation. But there are two types of conversation going on here. One is between members of the Williams community; the other is between those same book-readers and their books. For the former to be successful, the latter would have to go well. And in facilitating a relationship between the page and the person, Williams Reads turned out to be kind of like a bad blind date. Not a horrendous one, mind you – not your great-aunt’s set-up with your second cousin – just an awkward, puzzling one. The kind of date where you close the door at the end of the night and think, “Really? My best friend thinks that’s my type?” It sort of makes you have doubts about who your best friend thinks you are. Apparently, Williams thinks I’m 12.

And really, it’s not like 12-year-olds don’t have a lot going for them. I should be clear: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* isn’t a bad guy. He’s kind of sweet. He’s funny. He’s a blossoming artist, though I’ve got to say, his cartoons drove me to distraction sometimes. And he’s growing up. But he’s not grown-up yet, no matter what the New York Times and Newsday say. He’s a little bit immature, a little too young for 18- and 19- and 22-year-olds.

There’s the problem—I was hoping to read a book that would challenge and provoke, not simply fulfill a rubric that designates it “D” for diversity. Next time, I’m hoping Williams thinks enough of me to set me up with a book with a little more heft, a little more subtlety and depth, something that makes me think. Then when my friends ask how my date went, I’ll be able to say, “You should really meet this guy.”

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