

Beach Books: 2016–2017

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



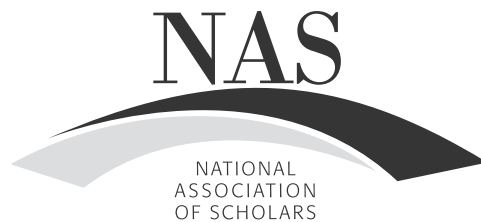
DAVID RANDALL
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS
MAY 2017



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DAVID RANDALL

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ABOUT THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SCHOLARS

Mission

The National Association of Scholars is an independent membership association of academics and others working to sustain the tradition of reasoned scholarship and civil debate in America's colleges and universities. We uphold the standards of a liberal arts education that fosters intellectual freedom, searches for the truth, and promotes virtuous citizenship.

What We Do

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

We publish studies of current higher education policy and practice with the aim of drawing attention to weaknesses and stimulating improvements.

Our website presents a daily stream of educated opinion and commentary on higher education and archives our research reports for public access.

NAS engages in public advocacy to pass legislation to advance the cause of higher education reform. We file friend-of-the-court briefs in legal cases, defending freedom of speech and conscience, and the civil rights of educators and students. We give testimony before congressional and legislative committees and engage public support for worthy reforms.

NAS holds national and regional meetings that focus on important issues and public policy debates in higher education today.

Membership

NAS membership is open to all who share a commitment to its core principles of fostering intellectual freedom and academic excellence in American higher education. A large majority of our members are current and former faculty members. We also welcome graduate and undergraduate students, teachers, college administrators, and independent scholars, as well as non-academic citizens who care about the future of higher education.

NAS members receive a subscription to our journal *Academic Questions* and access to a network of people who share a commitment to academic freedom and excellence. We offer opportunities to influence key aspects of contemporary higher education.

Visit our website, www.nas.org, to learn more about NAS and to become a member.



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Beach Books 2016-17, which covers 348 colleges and universities, continues the National Association of Scholars' long-running record of providing the most comprehensive information about colleges and universities that assign common readings to incoming freshmen. Although there are several databases of common reading assignments, *Beach Books* is the only series that categorizes the books according to their main subjects and tracks trends in genres, publication dates, and additional themes. *Beach Books* also examines the larger administrative programs that have developed around common readings, such as library guides, lectures, and social media campaigns.

The National Association of Scholars believes that common reading programs are a good idea in principle. At a time when core curricula have largely disappeared, a common reading assignment can provide at least an abbreviated substitution that may introduce students to rigorous intellectual standards, inspire them to read further and better than they otherwise would, and foster intellectual friendship on campus. The choice of a classic work can also serve to introduce students to the tradition formed by the best works of Western civilization. We offer critiques of common readings as they actually are, so as to offer guidance for how they may reform themselves along this better model.

Yet while many colleges and universities declare that common readings are important because they set academic expectations, begin conversations, and encourage critical thinking, they usually embed these goals within larger aims to foster community on campus and student activism in the outside world. Common reading programs are dedicated to these non-academic goals. It's in their mission statements.

This year we focus on common reading programs' administrative structures. While we previously noted that common reading programs are associated with administrative sponsors such as Offices of Diversity, we had not explored this background in depth—until now. Our discoveries have caused us to make substantial revisions to our recommendations for common reading programs.

The NAS previously took common reading programs to express the desires of colleges and universities as a relatively undifferentiated whole. Many of the characteristics of common readings programs are actually a consequence of

1. mission statements that explicitly aim at non-academic goals; and
2. administrative control by “co-curricular” bureaucracies.

Our new recommendations therefore focus on

1. changing common reading programs' mission statements; and
2. removing “co-curricular” administrators from control of common reading programs, and replacing them with professors.

We have retained the bulk of our recommendations, which indicate the general spirit with which common reading programs ought to be run. Our new recommendations detail precisely how these older recommendations ought to be put into practice, within the administrative structure of the university.

We have increased the number of our recommended books. We previously recommended 60 books appropriate for any college common reading program, we now recommend 80; we previously recommended 20 books appropriate for more ambitious college common reading programs, we now recommend 30. We have added a further 20 suggestions in genres common reading selection committees tend to prefer—Memoirs, Young Protagonists, Science Fiction, and Graphic Novels.

The Continuing Characteristics

COMMON READING PROGRAMS

- 1. Bureaucratic Exercises.** Common reading programs are largely intended to satisfy accrediting organizations' requirements that institutions promote "student learning outcomes." They are set up to provide assessable data of student reading rather than to promote intellectual inquiry.
- 2. Run by "Co-Curricular" Administrators.** Common reading programs are usually run or dominated by "co-curricular" administrators rather than by professors. This is a major reason why common readings aim at forwarding progressive dogma, and why common readings are dominated by mediocre, new books rather than intellectually challenging books.
- 3. Non-Academic Mission Statements.** Common reading programs' mission statements usually direct committees to fulfill non-academic goals, such as *building community* or *inclusivity*. These non-academic mission statements divert common reading committees from selecting intellectually challenging books that prepare students for college-level academic standards.
- 4. Integrated into Activism Programs.** Common readings are frequently integrated with *service-learning*, *civic engagement*, and other activism programs. Common readings are designed to inspire students to act rather than to educate them to think.
- 5. Obscured Politicization.** Common reading programs forward progressive dogma not only via text selection but also through discussion guides, question prompts, and cooperation with more openly politicized components of the "social justice" archipelago on campuses.
- 6. Advance the Replacement of the Curriculum by the "Co-Curriculum."** Common reading programs make incoming students' first experience in college, and frequently their only common experience, co-curricular. Common reading programs run by "co-curricular" administrators tell students that the heart of college is the "co-curriculum," not the curriculum.

COMMON READINGS

1. **Progressive Books.** Common readings frequently emphasize progressive political themes—illegal immigrants contribute positively to America, the natural environment must be saved immediately—and almost never possess subject matter disfavored by progressives.
2. **Parochial.** Virtually every common reading was written by Americans in the last decade. Only a scattering of colleges assigned works that could be considered classics.¹ Even in confining themselves to living authors, common reading programs neglect some of the best ones, such as Martin Amis, Annie Dillard, Cormac McCarthy, Alice Munro, V. S. Naipaul, Marilynne Robinson, and Tom Wolfe. Classics in translation are nearly absent—and so is anything modern in translation. Common reading programs also neglect works in translation by writers such as Anna Akhmatova, Shusaku Endo, Elena Ferrante, Orhan Pamuk, Wislawa Szymborska, or Mario Vargas Llosa. Even common readings about foreigners generally are written in English.
3. **Mediocre Books.** Common readings are usually banal and intellectually unchallenging.
4. **Largely Nonfiction.** Most common readings are biography, memoir, or other nonfiction. A major rationale for common reading programs is to promote civic engagement by fostering the habits of literary reading, but common readings' focus on mediocre nonfiction undermines this goal.
5. **Promote Activism.** Many common readings are chosen to promote activism; they scarcely mention the complementary virtues of the disengaged life of the mind. They give no sense of how college differs from the world outside, and why that difference matters.
6. **A Narrow, Predictable Genre.** The common reading genre is *parochial*, *contemporary*, *juvenile*, and *progressive*. Not every selected text embraces all these categories, but these adjectives define the characteristic common reading.

¹ 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, have standing with a general readership, and have earned high regard from scholars. The National Association of Scholars does not have a canon in the sense of a supposedly exhaustive list of great works of literature.

The Facts: Common Readings, 2016-2017

1. **Popular and Widespread.** At a minimum, there are common readings at the 348 colleges and universities in this report. These 348 institutions are located in 46 states and the District of Columbia, and include 58 of the top 100 universities and 25 of the top 100 liberal arts colleges in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings.
2. **Author Appearances.** In 2016, authors appeared at 51% of colleges with common reading programs.
3. **Recent.** Three-quarters of common reading assignments (75%) were published between 2010 and the present. Sixteen selections (4.5%) were published in 2016; only 13 (3.7%) were published before 1990. Only 6 (1.7%) were published before 1900.
4. **Nonfiction.** 73% of assignments were memoirs, biographies, and other non-fiction. A handful of these were popular histories; the work that came closest to a professional work of history was classicist/political theorist Danielle Allen's close reading of the Declaration of Independence – *Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality* (2014).
5. **Homogeneous.** In 2016, the three most widely assigned books were virtually identical: recently published nonfiction or memoirs about African Americans suffering from the effects of American racism. Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (2014) was assigned 24 times; Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* (2015) was assigned 19 times; and Wes Moore's *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates* (2010) was assigned 10 times. These 3 books alone made up 15% of all common reading assignments in 2016.
6. **Predictable.** The common reading genre is so constrained by ideological limitations that outside observers can tell in advance what selection committees will choose. Last year we predicted "that Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* (published July 2015) will be one of the five most-frequently selected common readings for 2016-17."² **Our prediction was correct:** *Between the World and Me* was the second-most popular selection in 2016.

² David Randall, *Beach Books 2014-2016: What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside Class?* (New York, 2016), p. 35, https://www.nas.org/images/documents/NAS-BeachBooks2014-16_Full_Report.pdf.

Recommendations

1. **Seek Better Books. Common reading committees should seek out** books that encapsulate intellectual diversity; stretch students’ minds; combine beauty of language, intellectual complexity, and moral seriousness; lift up the institution’s academic standards; and contribute to its intellectual reputation.
2. **Consult Widely.** Consult peers who read widely and well and who are intimately acquainted with good books. Draw on outside sources, such as the National Association of Scholars’ list of Recommended Books (see **Appendix III: Recommended Books for College Common Reading**) or Modern Library’s list of 100 Best Novels and 100 Best Nonfiction.³
3. **Change Mission Statements.** Common reading programs’ mission statements should be altered so as to pursue and assess academic outcomes only, and to add selection criteria that include full-length books, older works, fiction, translations, intellectual complexity, literary quality, local subject matter, and common American character.
4. **Put the Faculty in Charge.** Common reading programs should be shifted from the “co-curricular” bureaucracy to the faculty. Small committees of professors and librarians should staff common reading committees; appoint student discussion leaders; select academic speakers for associated lectures and symposia; and compose associated materials such as discussion guides. All committee members should have their teaching load (or equivalent library duties) reduced by at least 1 course a year, and perhaps 1 course a semester.
5. **Add Writing Requirements.** Common reading programs should introduce students to college-level writing expectations. Common readings should be integrated with academic writing assignments—ideally graded, as part of a regular class.
6. **Divorce from Activism.** Common readings should not promote pledges, service-learning, civic engagement, activism of any kind, or classes, programs, events, or “yearly themes” devoted to any of these activities. Common reading programs should cut all ties to sponsoring administrative sub-units within the university that promote activism, such as Offices of Diversity, Sustainability, or Civic Engagement.
7. **Reduce or Cap Speaker Fees.** Common reading programs should reduce or cap speaker fees. All funds previously dedicated to speaker fees should be transferred toward subsidizing common reading book purchases for students.
8. **Promote Fiscal Transparency.** Common reading programs should publicize all costs on their websites—including speaker fees, staff costs, and administrative overhead.

³ Modern Library, “Top 100,” <http://www.modernlibrary.com/top-100/>.



9. **Donors Should Conduct Due Diligence.** Donors should make funding of common reading programs dependent upon colleges and universities adopting the mission statements and administrative structures recommended above. They should require detailed documentation of all aspects of the common reading programs and provide only time-limited, revocable funding.
10. **Tighten College Admission Standards.** Tighten college admission standards to select a student body with the capacity and desire to read a challenging book.

METHODS

What We Included

Our study of common readings during the academic year 2016–2017 covers 359 assignments at 348 colleges. Our data includes common readings for every college and university we could find—including readings for sub-units of an institution such as honors colleges. We included books assigned as summer readings, whether to freshmen or to all students. Generally these books are outside the regular curriculum, but a few of them are tied to first-year courses.

We mention several universities that have provided a reading list of interesting books for their students to select among, rather than choosing just one book for their students to read—University of California, Berkeley; University of Texas, Austin; and Wake Forest University. We also mention several universities that include large numbers of short assignments. In neither case have we included these assignments in our database, as they would tend to skew the results.

How We Categorized the Institutions and Programs

Each common reading program is categorized by **Institution Name, State, Type of Institution, Top Ranking, Program Name, Intended Audience, and Author Visit.**

We classify each college and university by **Type**—public, private sectarian, private nonsectarian, and community colleges. We also see 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 have attempted to be comprehensive, although we have undoubtedly missed a few programs. We would be grateful for the names of common reading programs we have missed, so we may include them in our next report.

How We Categorized the Books

Each book is categorized by **Author, Title, Publication Date, Genre, Publisher, First Subject Category, Second Subject Category, First Theme, and Second Theme.** We include up to two subject categories and two themes for each book, as a way to be more precise in our description of the common readings.

Inevitably such categorization lacks nuance: we categorize Richard Blanco’s *The Prince of Los Cucuyos: A Miami Childhood* under Artists’ Lives/Arts and Sexual Identity, when Immigration would be a perfectly plausible substitute for either of those two categories. It also flattens works: we put Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* under Family Dysfunction/ Separation, which is a true but not a full definition. We take our subject categories to be meaningful, but we draw conclusions from them with a grain of salt.

Subject Category defines what the book is explicitly about. **Theme** notes aspects of the book that we take to have been of interest to the selection committees or are of interest to us. For example, selection committees place great emphasis on diversity as a euphemism for mentioning various non-white ethnic groups at home or abroad; we have therefore identified a number of ethnic, geographic, and religious subject matters as themes. Selection committees do not explicitly state their interest in whether a work is in the graphic medium, has a film or TV adaptation, or has an association with NPR, but we think these are significant facts that ought to be noted, and so we have included them as well.

Our subject categories largely overlap those of previous years, but with some alterations. We have limited our total number of subject categories to 30.

Classification Elements

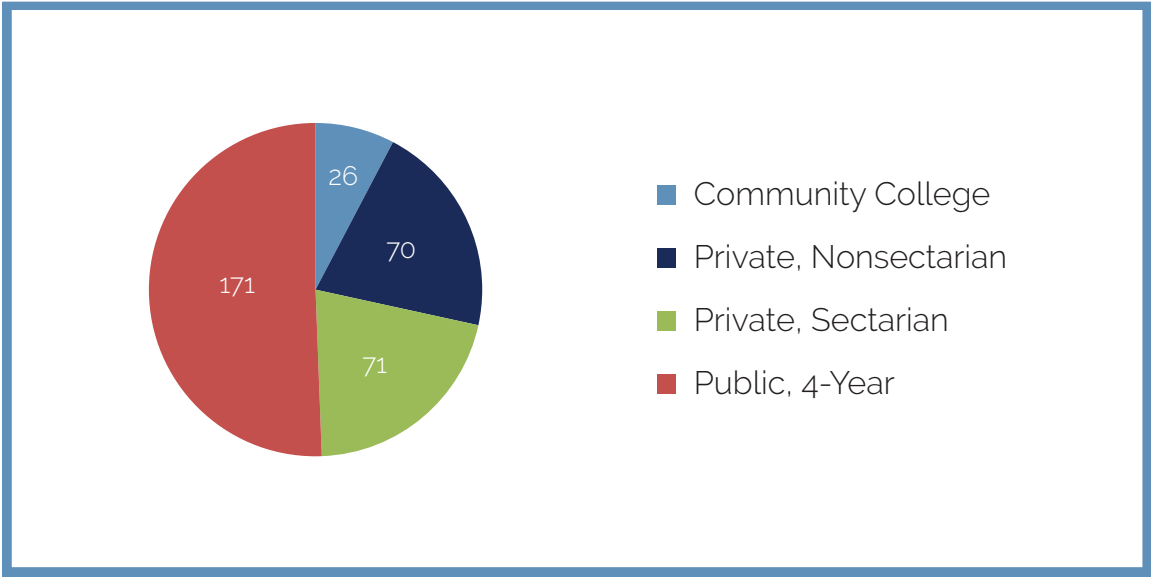
Here are the different elements we measure in this study:

Book	Institution	Programs
Title	Name	Author Speaking
Author	Type	First-year vs. Community
Publication Year	Location	
Subject Category	Whether ranked in top 100	
Genre	<i>U.S. News & World Report</i>	
Theme		

INSTITUTIONS

Types

Beach Books 2016-17 examines 348 colleges and universities. These include 171 public four-year institutions, 81 private sectarian institutions, 70 private nonsectarian institutions, and 26 community colleges.



Locations

These 348 colleges and universities are located in 46 states and the District of Columbia—every part of the Union save Hawaii, New Hampshire, North Dakota, and Wyoming.

INSTITUTION TYPE

State	Number of Institutions	State	Number of Institutions
Alabama	6	District of Columbia	2
Alaska	1	Florida	9
Arizona	3	Georgia	8
Arkansas	1	Idaho	3
California	30	Illinois	11
Colorado	4	Indiana	6
Connecticut	5	Iowa	3
Delaware	1	Kansas	3

State	Number of Institutions	State	Number of Institutions
Kentucky	6	Ohio	15
Louisiana	4	Oklahoma	1
Maine	3	Oregon	3
Maryland	9	Pennsylvania	22
Massachusetts	24	Rhode Island	4
Michigan	12	South Carolina	8
Minnesota	7	South Dakota	2
Mississippi	3	Tennessee	10
Missouri	5	Texas	19
Montana	4	Utah	2
Nebraska	1	Vermont	3
Nevada	1	Virginia	11
New Jersey	9	Washington	7
New Mexico	1	West Virginia	2
New York	29	Wisconsin	2
North Carolina	23		

Rankings

According to the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings, these 348 institutions include more than half of the top 100 universities in the nation and one-quarter of the top 100 liberal arts colleges.⁴

Rankings Type	Number of Institutions
Top 100 Universities Selections	58
Top 100 Liberal Arts Colleges Selections	25
Unranked	263

⁴ *U.S. News & World Report*: National Universities Rankings, <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-universities>; National Liberal Arts Colleges Rankings, <http://colleges.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-colleges/rankings/national-liberal-arts-colleges>.

Readings at Elite Institutions: A Note

Common readings selected at the best colleges and universities (by *U.S. News & World Report* ranking) are usually better than the typical common reading selection—especially at the top universities. Excluding institutions which offered students multiple book choices, below are the assignments at the ten best universities and liberal arts colleges with common reading programs.

TOP UNIVERSITIES

Institution	<i>U.S. News & World Report</i> ranking	Common Reading(s)
Princeton University	#1	Danielle Allen, <i>Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality</i> (2014)
Columbia University	#5 (tie)	Homer, <i>The Iliad</i> , Bks. I–VI (800 BC?)
Stanford University	#5 (tie)	Rebecca Solnit, <i>A Paradise Built In Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster</i> (2010) Justin Torres, <i>We the Animals</i> (2011) NoViolet Bulawayo, <i>We Need New Names</i> (2013) Note: Stanford has students read all three books, not choose one book from among them.
Duke University	#8 (tie)	Bryan Stevenson, <i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> (2014)
University of Pennsylvania	#8 (tie)	Orson Welles, <i>Citizen Kane</i> (1941)

TOP LIBERAL ARTS COLLEGES

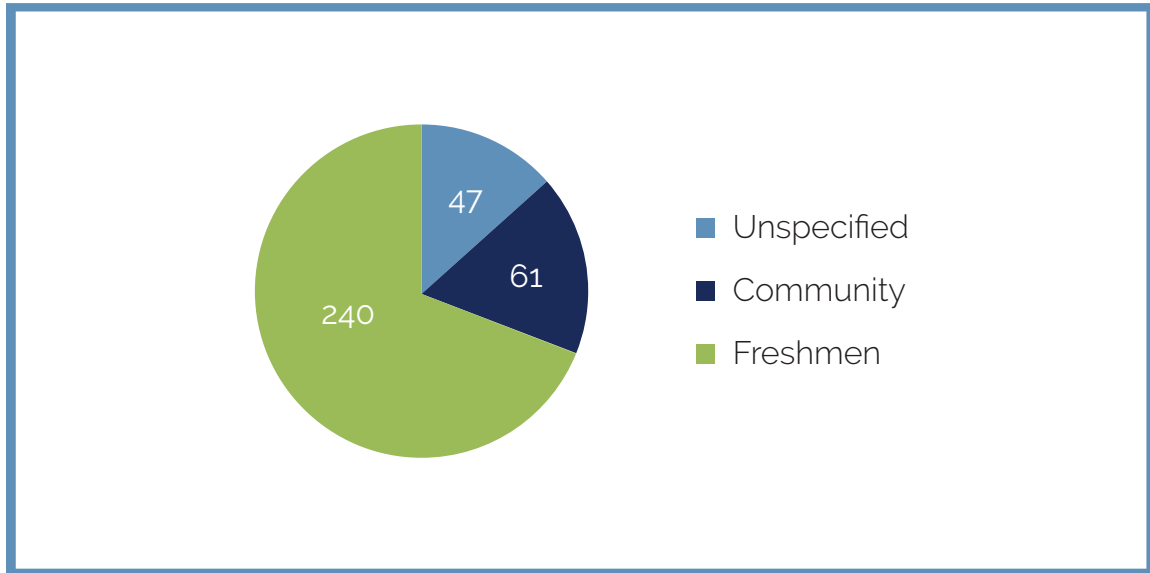
Institution	<i>U.S. News & World Report</i> ranking	Common Reading(s)
Williams College	#1	Elizabeth Kolbert, <i>The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History</i> (2014)
Pomona College	#7 (tie)	Claudia Rankine, <i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> (2014)
Davidson College	#9 (tie)	Ta-Nehisi Coates, <i>Between the World and Me</i> (2015)
Smith College	#12 (tie)	Ruth Ozeki, <i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> (2013)
Vassar College	#12 (tie)	Paul Greenberg, <i>Four Fish: The Future of the Last Wild Food</i> (2010)

COMMON READINGS, 2016-2017

Intended Readers

Of the 348 institutions, 240 directed common readings to incoming freshmen, 61 to the community as a whole, and 47 left the audience unspecified.

INTENDED READERS



Standard Assignments

335 colleges and universities assigned 345 books. That is to say, most common reading programs assigned students one book, and a few assigned more than one book.

The following 10 institutions gave their students more than one assignment:

Institution	Number of Assignments
Cabarrus College of Health Sciences (NC)	2
California Lutheran University	2
Florida College	2
Lehigh University	2
Michigan State University	2

Institution	Number of Assignments
Owensboro Community and Technical College	2
Stanford University	3
Texas A & M University, Texarkana	2
Utah Valley University	2
University of Alaska	2

Cabarrus College assigned one book and one Skills Assessment; the other institutions each assigned 2-3 books.

Non-Standard Assignments

A few colleges gave non-standard assignments. Our comprehensive list includes 348 colleges and universities, and the equivalent of 359 assignments.

The following 14 institutions assigned their students non-standard common readings:

Institution	Assignment Type
Brenau University	Game Booklet
Cabarrus College	Skills Assessment
Fairfield University	Multiple Assignments (4)
Georgia Institute of Technology	Multiple Assignments (11+)*
Knox College	Multiple Assignments (4)
Lasell College	Newspaper Subscription
Roger Williams University	Film Documentary
Santa Clara University	Multiple Assignments (3)
SUNY New Paltz	Multiple Assignments (12+)*
Susquehanna University	Multiple Assignments (15)
University of California, Berkeley	Multiple Choices (20)
University of Texas, Austin	Multiple Choices (57)
Wake Forest University	Multiple Choices (31)
Webster University	Multiple Assignments (3)

* Georgia Institute of Technology and SUNY New Paltz gave students different options about how many Multiple Assignments to complete.

Institutions with **Multiple Assignments** gave many short assignments, which usually didn't add up to the length of one 200-page book. While we have recommended in previous years that colleges and universities assign multiple works, we intended this to be a way of making common readings more challenging. SUNY New Paltz's combination of short essays and TED talks, for example, appears designed to require less of incoming freshmen, not more.⁵ Santa Clara University's common readings—an interview with Michael Jensen on the ethics of integrity, an op-ed by David Brooks on ethics, and a chapter from David Callahan's *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead* (2004) on cheating in academia—largely seem designed to tell incoming students “don't cheat.” This is all to the good, but it sets a low bar for “college expectations.”⁶ We do not think that “multiple short unchallenging assignments” is a good model for common reading programs. In our larger tallies, we count these “Multiple Assignments” as 1 assignment.

Institutions with **Multiple Choices** suggested or required that students read at least one book from a long list of possible suggestions. These lists tended to include better books than the average common reading selection. The University of Texas, Austin's Freshman Reading Round-Up, for example, included Euripides' *Bacchae*, Jane Austen's *Emma*, and T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*—albeit along with more standard fare, such as Ta-Nehisi Coates' *Between the World and Me* and Elizabeth Kolbert's *The Sixth Extinction*.⁷ On the other hand, to give students the choice from a long list of “common readings” means that they aren't really common readings.

For their common readings, Brenau University assigned a **game booklet** so that students could participate in a role-playing game (*The Greenwich Village 1913: Suffrage, Labor, and the New Woman*); Cabarrus College a **skills assessment** (*StrengthsFinder 2.0*); Lasell College a **newspaper subscription** (*Boston Globe*); and Roger Williams University a 14-minute **film documentary** (*Ellis*). These assignments all stretched the boundaries of the common reading genre, but these particular experiments do not set college-level academic expectations.

Webster University's Multiple Assignments included a “Beads of Privilege” activity. This exercise, which requires participants to divide themselves along the “identities” foregrounded by progressive polemic—*race, gender, class*, and so on—seems ill-suited for a program meant to create community.⁸

5 New Paltz State University of New York, Common Summer Reading Program 2016 Study Guide, <https://www.newpaltz.edu/media/student-development/SummerReadingProgram2016StudyGuideThinkingLikeAHuman.pdf>.

6 Santa Clara University, Common Reading for First-Year Students, <https://www.scu.edu/provost/news-stories/common-reading-for-first-year-students.html>.

7 University of Texas, Austin, 2016 Book List, <https://ugs.utexas.edu/frf/archive/2016>.

8 Webster University, Diversity and Inclusion: Common Readings on Racial Inequalities and Social Justice, <http://libguides.webster.edu/diversity/CommonReadings>; Privilege Exercise, <http://www.differencematters.info/uploads/pdf/privilege-beads-exercise.pdf>.

Genres

We classify common reading by genre: biography, memoir, newspaper, nonfiction, novel, play, poetry, and so on. The vast majority of the 359 assignments were in the three allied genres of Nonfiction (142, 40% of the total), Memoir (101, 28% of the total), and Biography (18, 5% of the total). Together there were 261 selections from these three genres, 73% of the total number of assignments.

Novels were the most popular genre of imaginative literature: 64 selections, 18% of the total.

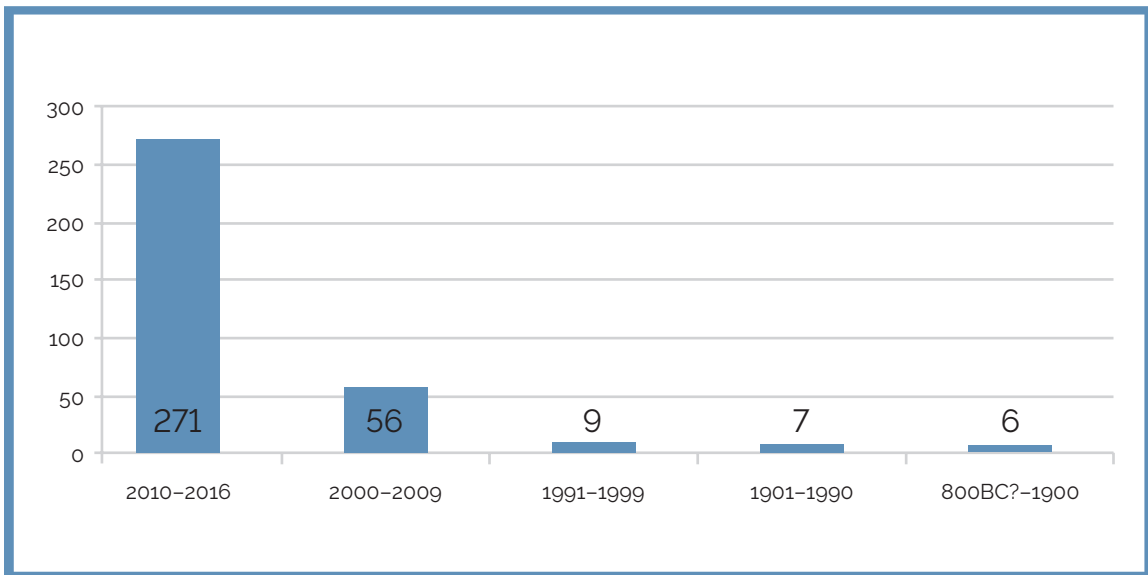
Genre	Number of Assignments
Biography	18
Epic Poem	1
Essay	2
Film	2
Memoir	101
Memoir Poems	1
Multiple Assignments	7
Multiple Choices	3
Musical	1
Nonfiction	142
Newspaper	1
Novel	64
Play	2
Poetry	5
Role Playing Game	1
Short Stories	5
Skills Assessment	1
Speech	2
Total	359

Publication Dates

Common reading committees continue to select almost nothing but books written in the lifetimes of incoming students—and very largely books written since 2010. Out of 349 datable texts selected for 2016-217 common readings, 271 (75%) were published between 2010 and 2016, and 327 (94%) have been published between 2000 and the present. The median publication year was 2013. The most common years of publication were 2014 (85 books, 24% of the total), 2015 (64 books, 18% of the total), and 2013 (41 books, 12% of the total).

Sixteen selections were published in 2016—more than the 13 (3.7%) that were published before 1990. Only 6 (1.7%) were published before 1900.

PUBLICATION DATES



The entire list of 22 common reading selections published from antiquity through 1999 appears below:

COMMON READINGS PUBLISHED BEFORE 2000

Institution	Author	Title	Date
Columbia University	Homer	<i>The Iliad</i> (Books I-VI)	800BC?
Florida College	Pericles	<i>Funeral Oration</i>	431BC
Texas Christian University	Quintus Tullius Cicero	<i>How to Win an Election</i>	64BC
Utah Valley University	William Shakespeare	<i>The Winter's Tale</i>	1623
The King's College	Frederick Douglass	<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave</i>	1845
Florida College	Abraham Lincoln	<i>Gettysburg Address</i>	1863
Le Moyne College	Virginia Woolf	<i>A Room of One's Own</i>	1929
University of Pennsylvania	Orson Welles	<i>Citizen Kane</i>	1941
Lynchburg College	Ray Bradbury	<i>Fahrenheit 451</i>	1953
Connecticut College	Rachel Carson	<i>Silent Spring</i>	1962
Augustana College	James Baldwin	<i>The Fire Next Time</i>	1962
California State University, San Marcos	Peter Matthiessen	<i>Sal Si Puedes [Escape if You Can]: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution</i>	1969
SUNY Brockport	Margaret Atwood	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	1985
University of South Alabama	Art Spiegelman	<i>The Complete Maus</i>	1991
University of South Carolina	Marian Wright Edelman	<i>The Measure of Our Success: A Letter to My Children and Yours</i>	1992
The Citadel	Harold G. Moore and Joseph L. Galloway	<i>We Were Soldiers Once ... And Young</i>	1992
Goucher College	Octavia E. Butler	<i>Parable of the Sower</i>	1993
University of Mount Union	Sherman Alexie	<i>The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven</i>	1993
Owensboro Community and Technical College	Mary Ann Taylor-Hall	<i>Come and Go, Molly Snow</i>	1995
University of Alaska, Anchorage	James McBride	<i>The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother</i>	1995
College of William and Mary	Oliver Sacks	<i>Island of the Colorblind</i>	1997
Occidental College	Don Normark	<i>Chávez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story</i>	1999

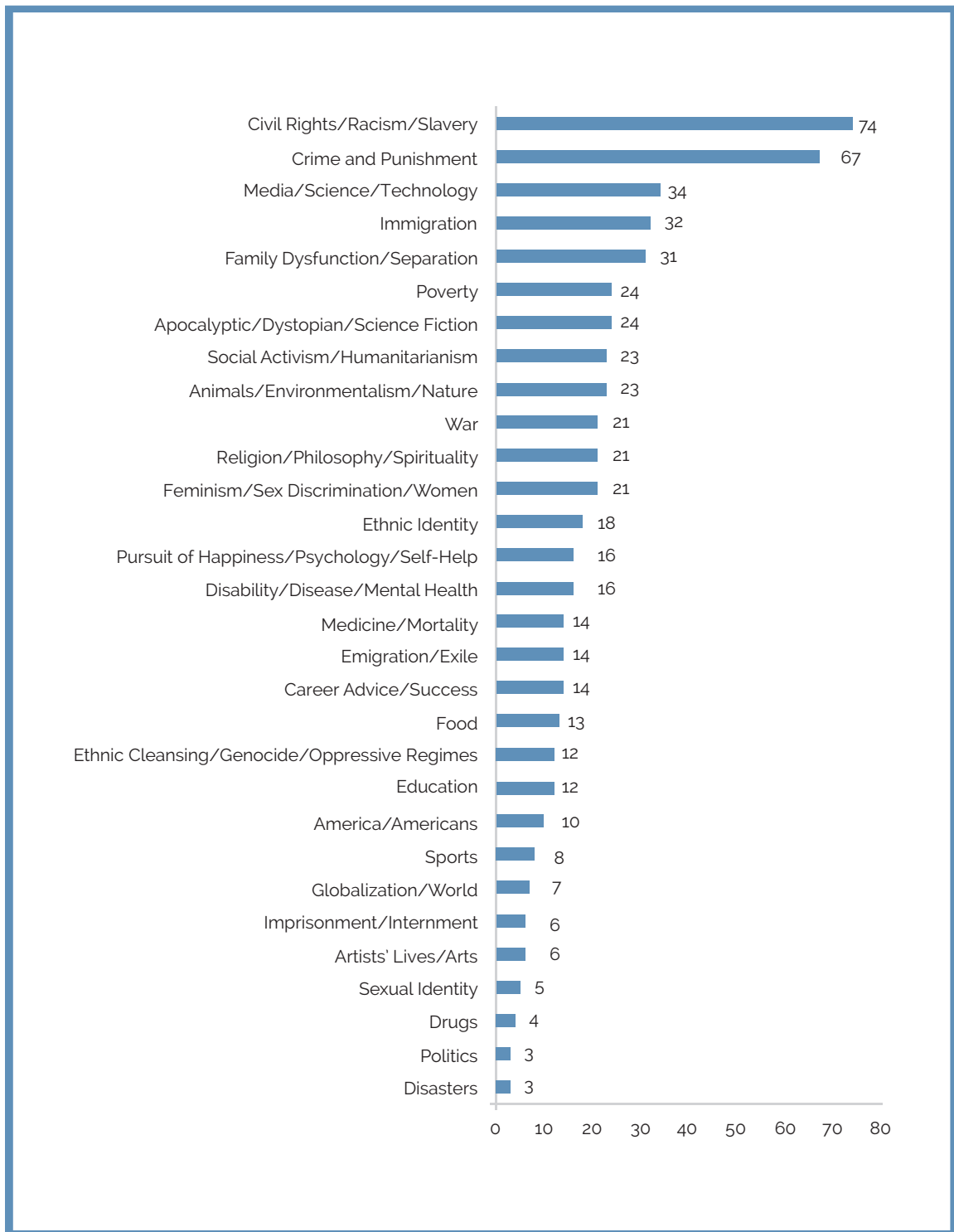
Subject Categories

We divided the common readings into 30 subject categories. Since each book could be assigned up to two categories, the total number of subject categories is greater than the number of assignments. In 2016-17, there were 576 assigned subject categories. The most popular subject categories in 2016-2017 were Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery (74 readings), Crime and Punishment (67 readings), Media/Science/Technology (34 readings), Immigration (32 readings), and Family Dysfunction/Separation (31 readings).

Subject Category	Number of Selections
America/Americans	10
Animals/Environmentalism/Nature	23
Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction	24
Artists' Lives/Arts	6
Career Advice/Success	14
Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery	74
Crime and Punishment	67
Disability/Disease/Mental Health	16
Disasters	3
Drugs	4
Education	12
Emigration/Exile	14
Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/Oppressive Regimes	12
Ethnic Identity	18
Family Dysfunction/Separation	31
Feminism/Sex Discrimination/Women	21
Food	13
Globalization/World	7
Immigration	32

Subject Category	Number of Selections
Imprisonment/Internment	6
Media/Science/Technology	34
Medicine/Mortality	14
Politics	3
Poverty	24
Pursuit of Happiness/Psychology/Self-Help	16
Religion/Philosophy/Spirituality	21
Sexual Identity	5
Social Activism/Humanitarianism	23
Sports	8
War	21
Total	576

2016–2017 ASSIGNMENTS BY SUBJECT CATEGORY



Themes

We have also recorded 18 further themes prominent among these assignments. Most of these register the persisting interest in diversity, defined by non-white ethnicity at home and abroad, but the remainder register other aspects of common readings worth noting. Many common readings discuss books of which a film or television version exists, an increasing number are graphic novels or memoirs, many have a protagonist under 18 or are simply young-adult novels, and a significant number have an association with National Public Radio (NPR). The themes register most strongly the common reading genre's continuing obsession with race, as well as its infantilization of its students, its middlebrow taste, and its progressive politics.

In 2016-17, the most popular themes were African American (103), Latin American (25), Protagonist Under 18 (25), African (15), and Islamic World (13).

Theme	Number of Selections
African American	103
African Diaspora	1
African	15
Asian American	12
Asian	8
Australian	1
European	7
Film/TV version exists	4
Graphic	1
Hispanic	7
Islamic World	13
Latin American	25
Muslim American	12
Native American	4
NPR	6
Pacific Islander	2
Protagonist Under 18	25
Young Adult	5
Total	251

What's Different This Year

The last years have seen a continuing shift toward the already popular subject categories of Racism/Civil Rights/Slavery and Crime and Punishment, and toward African American themes; this year's shift has been exemplified and substantially driven by the popularity of Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*, Ta-Nehisi Coates's *Between the World and Me*, and Wes Moore's *The Other Wes Moore*.

There has been an increase in the absolute number of selections with these subject categories and themes, and an even greater proportional increase, since there are slightly fewer total selections listed in this year's *Beach Books* report. The percentage numbers below are "percentage of total assignments," not "percentage of total subject categories" or "percentage of total themes."

Subject Categories	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery	41 (11%)	64 (18%)	74 (21%)
Crime and Punishment	39 (10%)	53 (15%)	67 (19%)

Theme	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
African American	61 (16%)	99 (27%)	103 (29%)

The growing concentration of the common reading genre's preferred subject matters and themes registers an ever lessening intellectual diversity.

Most Widely Assigned Books

The clustering of common reading selections within the subject categories of Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery and Crime and Punishment, and within the African-American theme, was driven largely by common reading selection committees' choices of a very few books.

MOST WIDELY ASSIGNED BOOKS

Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme	Number of Times Assigned
<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>	24
<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>	19
<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>	10
<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzai, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>	7
<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>	6
<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction	5
<i>The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas</i> Giridharadas, Anand 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>Muslim American theme</i>	5
<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>	5
<i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i> Otsuka, Julie 2002	Novel Emigration/Exile Imprisonment/Internment <i>Asian American theme</i>	5
<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>	5

As noted above, this clustering effect within a few select subject matters and themes reduces the intellectual diversity of the common reading genre as a whole. It also has the effect of reducing intellectual diversity *within* each subject category and theme. For example, an astonishingly large number of the colleges and universities that wish to introduce students to African-American experience have selected a homogenous handful of contemporary works—Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy*, Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me*, Wes Moore’s *The Other Wes Moore*, Rebecca Skloot’s *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*, and Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen*. None, however, assigned the poetry of Robert Hayden, Jacob Lawrence’s *Migration Series*, Ralph Ellison’s “The World and the Jug,” Albert Murray’s *The Hero and the Blues*, James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, or any other representatives of African-American writing and art that stray beyond the narrow preferences of the common reading genre.

Where common readings most pride themselves on diversity, they are most homogenous.

Where common readings most pride themselves on diversity, they are most homogenous.

Predictability

The ideologically-constrained common reading genre has become so homogenous that common reading selections have become predictable.

Last year we wagered “that Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me* (published July 2015) will be one of the five most-frequently selected common readings for 2016-17, and will continue in the top ten for 2017-18.”⁹ **Our prediction was correct:** *Between the World and Me* was the second-most popular selection in 2016-2017 (19 selections), behind only Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (24 selections).

We predict again, with redoubled confidence, that *Between the World and Me* will be one of the five most-frequently selected common readings for 2017-2018.

Even where our predictions go wrong, common reading selection committees frequently choose virtually identical works. We predicted last year that “The transgender movement’s role in fighting the most prominent current sexual identity campaign will make Katie Rain Hill’s *Rethinking Normal: A Memoir in Transition* the common reading at several colleges next year.”¹⁰ Instead,

9 David Randall, *Beach Books 2014-2016: What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside Class?* (New York, 2016), p. 35, https://www.nas.org/images/documents/NAS-BeachBooks2014-16_Full_Report.pdf.

10 David Randall, *Beach Books 2014-2016: What Do Colleges and Universities Want Students to Read Outside Class?* (New York, 2016), p. 35, https://www.nas.org/images/documents/NAS-BeachBooks2014-16_Full_Report.pdf.

Nassau Community College chose Amy Ellis Nutt's *Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family*, while State University of New York Oneonta selected Janet [Charles] Mock's *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More*.

Without limiting ourselves to one title, we predict that at least five colleges and universities will choose pro-transgender-activism works in 2017-2018.

New Predictions

We believe that the continuing ideological constraint and homogeneity of the common reading genre allows us to make several new predictions.

BOB DYLAN

Bob Dylan was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature too late in 2016 for publishers to have prepared books on Dylan or his music for their 2017 First Year Reading catalogues; however, we predict that there will be a great many books on Dylan among common readings in 2018-2019.

DONALD TRUMP

Donald Trump's election to the presidency was so unexpected that anti-Trump polemics will not be prepared in time for use in 2017-2018 common readings. We strongly suspect there will be a very large number in 2018-2019, and for as long as the Trump presidency continues.

Among such polemics, we expect there to be 1) works denouncing authoritarian populists; 2) works endorsing resistance and rebellion against authoritarian populists; and 3) works recounting sympathetically the assassination of authoritarian populists.

Common reading programs with a literary bent are likely to assign works that can be used to forward anti-Trump polemics, such as:

1. William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (c. 1599)
2. Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here* (1935)
3. Bertolt Brecht, *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941)
4. *Meet John Doe* (film, 1941)
5. *All the King's Men* (film, 1949)
6. Richard J. Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" (1964)
7. *Cabaret* (film, 1972)

8. Alan Moore, *V for Vendetta* (1982-89)
9. Mario Vargas Llosa, *The Feast of the Goat* (2000)
10. Philip Roth, *The Plot Against America* (2004)

Common reading programs of a less literary bent will assign contemporary works with overlapping messages, such as Nigel Jones' *Countdown to Valkyrie: The July Plot to Assassinate Hitler* (2009) and Steve Inskeep's *Jacksonland: President Andrew Jackson, Cherokee Chief John Ross, and a Great American Land Grab* (2016).

While at least 9 colleges and universities assigned Barack Obama's *Dreams of My Father* in the year 2009-10 alone,¹¹ at least another 9 colleges and universities assigned it in other years,¹² and at least a further 2 assigned *The Audacity of Hope*,¹³ we predict that no college or university in the United States will assign Donald Trump's *The Art of the Deal* as a common reading.

JOHNSON AND TAYLOR

While an increasing number of common reading programs will assign books such as Kate Harding's *Asking for It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture—and What We Can Do About It* (Tulane University, 2016-17) and Jon Krakauer's *Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town* (Jacksonville State University, 2016-17), we predict that no college or university in the United States will assign Robert David Johnson and Stuart Taylor's *The Campus Rape Frenzy: The Attack on Due Process at America's Universities* (2017) as a common reading.

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- 11 Albion College; Augustana College; Elmhurst College; Fayetteville State University; Ithaca College; LaGuardia Community College; Quinnipiac University; Southern Methodist University; University of Washington: <https://www.albion.edu/student-life/first-year-experience/common-reading-experience/past-cre-books>; <http://augustana.net/general-information/presidents-office/convocations-and-commencements/first-year-convocation-2009>; http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2009-09-02/news/0908310316_1_pondering-orientation-elmhurst-college/2; <http://www.uncfsu.edu/readingclub/2009-selection>; <http://www.ithaca.edu/news/releases/incoming-ithaca-college-students-to-discuss-barack-obamas-autobiography-15838/#.WN5ohYHyuM8>; <http://www.laguardia.edu/dreams/default.htm>; http://www.foxnews.com/projects/pdf/bks_project.pdf; <https://blog.smu.edu/parents/2009/08/18/common-reading-2009-dreams-from-my-father/>; <http://www.washington.edu/news/2009/01/22/president-obamas-dreams-from-my-father-named-common-book-for-2009/>.
 - 12 Boston College (2005-06); California State University – East Bay (unknown); Indiana University Southeast (2007-08); Middlesex Community College (2010-11); Pomona College (2008-09); Truman College (unknown); University of Illinois at Chicago (unknown); University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (unknown); Xavier University of Louisiana (unknown): <http://www.bc.edu/offices/fye/conversations.html> ; <https://www.ius.edu/common-experience/files/common-experience-brochure-2007-08.pdf>; <https://www.middlesex.mass.edu/wac/cbdreams.aspx>; <https://www.pomona.edu/news/2014/09/09-todays-la-times-story-first-year-common-readings-includes-pomona-college-and> ; <https://www.middlesex.mass.edu/wac/cbdreams.aspx>; <http://www.randomhouse.com/highschool/catalog/display.pperl?isbn=9781400082773>.
 - 13 Endicott College (unknown); New York Institute of Technology (2007-08): <http://homepages.gac.edu/~fister/onebook2007.html> ; <https://www.randomhouseacademic.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/2015FYERHCATALOG.pdf>.

Honorable Mentions

Every college that assigned a work written before 2000 is to be commended for assigning books that will introduce students to the broad expanses of human history. So too is every college that assigned more than one book. We wish to single out for honorable mention a number of institutions that made especially good common reading selections.

Institution	Author	Work
Florida College	Pericles	<i>Funeral Oration</i> (431BC)
Florida College	Abraham Lincoln	<i>Gettysburg Address</i> (1863)
Le Moyne College	Virginia Woolf	<i>A Room of One's Own</i> (1929)
Owensboro Community and Technical College	Mary Ann Taylor-Hall	<i>Come and Go, Molly Snow</i> (1995)
Princeton University	Danielle Allen	<i>Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality</i> (2014)
Texas Christian University	Quintus Tullius Cicero	<i>How to Win an Election</i> (64BC)
The King's College	Frederick Douglass	<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave</i> (1845)
University of Maine, Honors College	Richard Flanagan	<i>The Narrow Road to the Deep North</i> (2013)
University of South Alabama	Art Spiegelman	<i>The Complete Maus</i> (1991)
Utah Valley University	William Shakespeare	<i>The Winter's Tale</i> (1623)

The classic works on this list, such as Quintus Tullius Cicero's *How to Win an Election* or Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, are self-evidently worthy of honorable mention.

Some of the older selections fit the ideological constraints of the common reading genre—Douglass' *Narrative*, Woolf's *Room*—but do so using complex works of enduring power and beauty, which incontestably introduce students to college-level expectations. These programs deserve honorable mention for selecting excellent books, even if they have limited their choices to the progressive canon.

Of the more modern selections, *Come and Go, Molly Snow* and *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* are fine novels, *Maus* an equally fine graphic novel, and *Our Declaration* an exemplary work of nonfiction that brings the Declaration of Independence to life for a new generation of college students.

Among our honorable mentions, we would like to single out Florida College and the University of South Alabama for running especially laudable common reading programs.



Florida College chose two of the best common readings this year, Pericles' *Funeral Oration* (431BC) and Abraham Lincoln's *Gettysburg Address* (1863). Previous selections include Edwin Abbott Abbott's mathematical fantasia *Flatland* (1884), C. S. Lewis's *The Abolition of Man* (1943), the *Constitution*, and selections from the *Federalist* and the *Anti-Federalist Papers*.¹⁴ Florida College deserves acclaim both for the quality of its common readings this year and for the continuing high quality of its selections.

The University of South Alabama also chose one of the better selections for 2016-2017, Art Spiegelman's *The Complete Maus* (1991). The University of South Alabama integrated this choice into an impressive series of related programs—some already planned by neighboring institutions and some sponsored by the University to coordinate with the common reading. These included:

- An on-campus symposium on “The Holocaust in Memory and History” in the fall of 2016.¹⁵
- A thorough Library Guide, provided by the University of South Alabama's Marx Library.¹⁶
- Four podcasts, in which Common Read Selection Committee Faculty Chair Susan McCready interviewed
 - “Historian Dan Rogers ... about teaching the Holocaust, the relevance of history, Holocaust denial, and how we know what we know.”
 - “Donald Berry of the Gulf Coast Center for Holocaust and Human Rights Education ... [about] Holocaust education.”
 - “Patrick Shaw of the USA [University of South Alabama] English Department about what makes Art Spiegelman's *Maus* an innovative memoir of the Holocaust.”
 - “Kristina Busse, who talks about Holocaust literature and about her own experiences learning about Nazism and the Holocaust growing up in Germany in the 1970s and 80s.”¹⁷
- Events sponsored by local institutions, including:
 - The History Museum of Mobile's exhibit *Filming the Camps: From Hollywood to Nuremberg*.¹⁸

14 Brian Crispell to David Randall, November 1, 2016; Florida College, Common Reading, <http://www.floridacollege.edu/common-reading/>.

15 University of South Alabama, Holocaust Symposium Set for Campus, September 6, 2016, <http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/publicrelations/pressreleases/090616wam.html>.

16 University of South Alabama, Common Read/Common World:Maus: Home, <http://libguides.southalabama.edu/c.php?g=461718&p=3156522>.

17 University of South Alabama, Common Read Podcasts: <https://soundcloud.com/user-537636625>; <https://soundcloud.com/user-537636625/the-commons-podcast-for-the-common-read-at-usa>; <https://soundcloud.com/user-537636625/the-commons-episode-2-donald-berry>; <https://soundcloud.com/user-537636625/the-commons-episode-3-patrick-shaw>; <https://soundcloud.com/user-537636625/maus-kristina2-final-1>.

18 History Museum of Mobile, *Filming the Camps*, <http://www.museumofmobile.com/filming-the-camps>.

- The Birmingham Holocaust Education Center’s exhibit *Darkness into Life: Alabama Holocaust Survivors Through Photography and Art*.¹⁹
- The Mobile Area Jewish Federation’s Mobile Jewish Film Festival.²⁰
- The Gulf Coast Center for Holocaust and Human Rights Education’s screening of the Holocaust documentary *We Remember*.²¹

The University of South Alabama’s Common Read Program integrates a good common reading selection with programs of its own, programs provided by the broader university, and programs provided by the university’s neighboring institutions. It sets an example to its peers nationwide for good institutional practice.

19 Birmingham Holocaust Education Center, *Darkness into Life: Alabama Holocaust Survivors Through Photography and Art*, <http://bhamholocausteducation.org/darknessintolife.htm>.

20 Mobile Area Jewish Federation, Mobile Jewish Film Festival, <http://www.mobilejewishfederation.org/mobile-jewish-film-festival-2017/>.

21 University of South Alabama, 2016-17 Common Read/Common World Events, <http://www.southalabama.edu/departments/commonread/event.html>.

COMMON READING PROGRAMS

Common readings are not just the product of a progressive political culture in higher education. They are particularly the products of progressive advocates within these institutions, concentrated in “co-curricular” bureaucracies—First-Year Experience, Student Affairs, Office of Diversity, Office of Sustainability, Residential Life, and so on. They are also the product of mission statements that direct committees to choose books to form “community,” or meet other non-academic goals, rather than to focus on introducing students to college-level academic standards. The progressive politicization of common readings derives to a very considerable extent from this precise administrative background.

In this section we describe in greater detail the administrative background of common reading programs, their mission statements, the composition of selection committees, and how this administrative structure works to encourage the selection of homogeneously progressive works as common readings for students. We will also examine the way common readings are integrated into supplementary material (e.g., discussion guides) and companion programs so as to function as propaganda that encourages progressive activism among students.

Our analysis then turns to some characteristics of common reading programs that further weaken them: the lack of fiction among common reading selections, and the prevalence of non-academic assignments linked to common reading. We then describe how a system of voluntary adoption can improve common reading selections, and how some mission statements that call for common readings to include “local talent” do improve common reading selections. We also examine how this amalgamation of common reading with progressive propaganda increases costs for colleges and universities—and illustrate how much money colleges and universities could save by assigning better books.

Finally, a section of interviews with common reading committee personnel sketches how the work that common reading committees do appears from the inside. This section will give the reader a full account of the sincere desire of common reading administrators to do well by their students. These administrators are professional and well-intentioned, even if they work within mental and administrative structures that sharply limit the good that common reading programs can do for students. We include this section partly so that common reading administrators can speak for themselves, and partly to emphasize that our critiques are of the structures and ideological presuppositions of common reading programs, not of the good will of the administrators themselves.

Administrative Background

More and more colleges and universities have adopted common readings for incoming students over the last several decades. They have done this to give incoming students at least one text in common, and an introduction to college-level reading expectations. Neither goal was necessary

when students had core curricula to fill, and colleges only admitted students prepared to go to college—but higher education long ago abandoned core curricula and rigorous entry requirements. The very existence of the common reading program registers these twin failures.

The common reading genre shifted drastically in character, however, as a result of the reorientation by colleges and universities in the last generation toward fulfilling the “learning outcomes” required by national accreditation organizations. These organizations certify colleges and universities as eligible institutions where students may spend U.S. Department of Education Title IV grants and loans, and so their approval is vital to colleges and universities. Accreditors’ preferences have a strong effect on colleges’ and universities’ policies.

What accreditation organizations have wanted lately is evidence that colleges and universities are working to improve “student learning outcomes.” In 2003 the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions adopted in its *Principles for Good Practices* the recommendation that colleges and universities make student learning central to their mission. The Council also recommended that they come up with ways to document and assess how they have been improving student learning.²² Colleges, in other words, have to prove they are helping students by coming up with programs that can be documented and evaluated by university bureaucrats, so as to satisfy the bureaucrats of the Accrediting Commissions—or face the prospect of losing access to Title IV grants and loans.

Many colleges and universities have decided to institute or adapt freshman common reading programs to provide a program that will convince their accreditors that they are improving student learning outcomes—in this case, outcomes related to reading skills. (E.g., “Student reading activities will result in greater engagement with others and greater understanding of others’ positions” and “Student reading activities will result in greater discernment and critical/analytical judgment.”²³) So Troy University decided to comply with the recommendations of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) by producing a Quality Enhancement Plan, *Creating a Culture of Reading* (2009), which prominently featured a Common Reading Initiative. Its effectiveness could be assessed by counting the number of students who participated and administering post-reading surveys such as the National Survey of Student Engagement to the students.²⁴

22 Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, *Regional Accreditation and Student Learning: Principles for Good Practices*, pp. 3-4, <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/Regional%20Accreditation%20and%20Student%20Learning-Principles%20for%20Good%20Practice.pdf>.

23 Troy University, *Troy University Quality Enhancement Plan, Revised 2009: Creating a Culture of Reading*, <http://sacs.troy.edu/qep/TROY-Quality-Enhancement-Plan-Revised-2009.pdf>.

24 Troy University, *Troy University Quality Enhancement Plan, Revised 2009: Creating a Culture of Reading*, <http://sacs.troy.edu/qep/TROY-Quality-Enhancement-Plan-Revised-2009.pdf>.

Purdue University launched its common reading program in 2009 as part of its Student Access, Transition, and Success Programs (SATS), to fulfill the accreditation requirements of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCACS).²⁵ Ohio University's Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) cites the university's Common Reading Program to the Higher Learning Commission as evidence that it has "performance results for learning support processes."²⁶ Common reading programs cannot be understood apart from the need to provide quantifiable data of "educational improvement" to accreditation organizations.

At their best, common reading programs are genuinely intended to improve students' willingness and ability to read—although their exceedingly modest ambitions are registered by the language of Roger Williams University's Common Reading Program, which aims at the rudimentary goal of helping "students begin to see that they were part of a learning community in which people think, write, and talk about important ideas."²⁷ But they exist as programs run by campus bureaucracies to satisfy external accrediting bureaucracies, with the ultimate goal of keeping federal money flowing to colleges. Common reading programs are bureaucratic institutions in which student reading itself—and book selection focused on literary quality—are secondary to the need to provide assessable evidence of student reading.

Common reading programs are relatively cheap and undemanding ways for colleges and universities to "show willing" to their accreditors.

Mixed Mission Statements

Common Reading Programs were never likely to focus on reading good books, since they were created with other purposes in mind. The administrators who devised these programs then compounded the programs' lack of focus on good books because they decided to use them to satisfy more than one mission at once. Common readings were to forward both academic and non-academic goals. This is never a good idea: if you try to teach two things at once, you're not likely to do either well.²⁸ But colleges and universities around the country have decided that common reading programs should serve two masters.

Among the many non-academic goals the common reading programs serve are these:

- Boise State University selects "a book that includes themes of creative problem solving, diverse perspectives, and community."²⁹

25 Purdue University, *Reaching New Heights: Re-Accreditation Self-Study Report for the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools*, <http://www.purdue.edu/accreditation/2010/criterion/criterion3.php>.

26 Ohio University, *AQIP Systems Portfolio: June 2010*, p. 20, https://www.ohio.edu/provost/accreditation/upload/Systems-Portfolio-Entire-Document-v-4-Final_OU-Website.pdf.

27 Roger Williams University, Common Reading, <http://rwu.edu/campus-life/events-traditions/common-reading>.

28 John Maguire, "Memoir on the Origins of the Readable Writing Method," *Readable Writing*, <http://readablewriting.com/the-origins-of-the-readable-writing-method/>.

29 Boise State University, About, <https://academics.boisestate.edu/undergraduate/about-campus-read/>.

- Cleveland State University’s Common Reading Experience works to ‘foster student engagement.’³⁰
- Cosumnes River College’s One Book CRC Project wants a book that “develops a foundation for cultural pluralism, a rejection of previous personal prejudices, and knowledge of and comfort with others” and “has the potential to build a community by sharing the common experience of reading and discussion.” It is also supposed to support a student learning outcome to “Recognize the ethical dimensions of decisions and actions as well as demonstrate the ability to engage in the ethical reasoning necessary to exercise responsibility as an ethical individual, professional, local, and global citizen.”³¹
- Georgia State University uses its First-Year Book Program to “raise awareness and tolerance of cultural likenesses and differences” and to “create a sense of community.”³²
- John Hopkins University’s Common Read program aims to ‘build community’³³; so too does Rocky Mountain College’s Common Read Program.³⁴
- Kalamazoo College’s Summer Common Reading is supposed to “address coming of age issues” and “foster intercultural understanding.”³⁵
- Miami University uses its Summer Reading Program to state that Miami values “reading, listening, reflecting, talking, and learning” secondarily—“as characteristics of active, responsible citizenship.”³⁶
- The University of California, Los Angeles’ Common Book Program aims to “share and understand diverse perspectives in a respectful way”;³⁷ the University of North Carolina, Charlotte’s likewise aims to instill “understanding of diverse perspectives.”³⁸
- The University of Louisville’s Book-in-Common “promotes self-discovery and exploration of diverse ways of thinking and being.”³⁹

30 Cleveland State University, Common Reading Experience, <http://engagedscholarship.csuohio.edu/cr/>.

31 Cosumnes River College, About One Book CRC, <https://www.crc.losrios.edu/culture/onebook/about/>.

32 Georgia State University, “First-Year Book,” <http://success.students.gsu.edu/first-year-programs/first-year-book/>.

33 John Hopkins University, Common Read, <http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/orientation/common-read/>.

34 Rocky Mountain College, Common Read, <http://rocky.edu/academics/FirstYearExperience/CommonRead.php>.

35 Kalamazoo College, Summer Common Reading, <https://reason.kzoo.edu/fye/scr/>.

36 Miami University, Summer Reading, <https://miamioh.edu/student-life/orientation-and-transition/first-year-students/summer-orientation/summer-reading/index.html>.

37 University of California, Los Angeles, UCLA’s Common Book Program, <http://www.firstyearexperience.ucla.edu/ucla-common-book>.

38 University of North Carolina, Charlotte, Common Reading Experience, <http://ucol.uncc.edu/information-and-initiatives/freshmen/common-reading-experience>.

39 University of Louisville, Book-in-Common, <http://louisville.edu/firstyear/book-in-common>.

- The University of Mount Union’s Common Reading Program means “to build intellectual, social and co-curricular community among the students, faculty, and, staff of the University of Mount Union through a shared experience of reading, reflection and discussion of challenging ideas and questions that raise important social and cultural issues.”⁴⁰
- The University of South Carolina, Aiken’s First Year Reading Experience is supposed to “Establish an opportunity for first-year students to understand their responsibility as engaged learners in an academic community.”⁴¹
- Western Carolina University’s One Book “create[s] connections with peers, instructors, and community members, and relate universal themes to personal experience and identity.”⁴²

As we will discuss at greater length below, these non-academic goals also serve as euphemisms for the more politicized goals of common reading programs. When the University of the South states that its common reading program is supposed to “Model respectful intellectual engagement by having a diversity of viewpoints and create a safe space for dialogue around difficult issues,” *diversity* and *safe space* have distinctly political connotations.⁴³ But what should be emphasized here is that a very large number of common reading programs—probably a large majority—combine the intellectual goals of sparking interest in reading and preparing students for college-level reading with some other non-academic goal, such as building *community*, *diversity*, or *identity*. Because common reading mission statements have more than one goal, the incentive is to compromise on at least one of them. The mediocrity of common reading choices bears witness that selection committees usually make a priority of the non-academic goal.

Contrariwise, good mission statements tend to produce better books. We will discuss below Owensboro Community and Technical College, which includes “local talent” as part of its mission statement—and as a result has chosen a series of books that vary considerably from the staples of the common reading genre, and are frequently more challenging than those selected by their peers.

The negative goal of avoiding offense also encourages the selection of anodyne mediocrity. University of Maryland, Baltimore County’s New Student Book Experience states that while it recognizes “that all good texts raise issues, the Book Experience does not seek out texts likely to be overtly offensive to a significant portion of the university community.”⁴⁴ Eastern Illinois University wants its common reading discussions to take place in “a non-threatening atmosphere.”⁴⁵ The

40 University of Mount Union, Common Reading Program for First Year Students, <http://www.mountunion.edu/common-reading-program>.

41 University of South Carolina, Aiken, “Freshman Convocation and FYRE,” <http://www.usca.edu/csa/programs/first-year-experience/freshman-convocation-and-fyre.dot>.

42 Western Carolina University, *Academic Affairs: News and Reflections*, October 2016, <http://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/AANewsletter2016OCT.pdf>.

43 University of the South, Common Book, <http://www.sewanee.edu/resources/common-book/overview/>.

44 University of Maryland, Baltimore County, Goals and Criteria, <http://fye.umbc.edu/programs/nsbe/goals-and-criteria/>.

45 Eastern Illinois University, Welcome to Eastern Reads!, <http://castle.eiu.edu/~eiureads/>.

surest way to be inoffensive, however, is to be bland—and blandness is dull. A common reading selection committee prioritizing the inoffensive is also prioritizing the boring. Committees that don't risk offending students don't usually risk interesting them either.

North Carolina State University (NCSU) helpfully illustrates how little academic goals count in the book selection process, because it quantifies the selection criteria for its Common Reading Selection Committee. Out of a total of 40.5 points, only 3 are assigned to literary quality. “Accurate, respectful portrayals of diverse cultures” receives 4 points; “Connection to Institutional initiatives, strategic plan, and priorities” receives 5. Why did NCSU choose Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy*? That’s the sort of book you end up with when literary quality counts for only 7% of the score.⁴⁶

*Committees
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them either.*

Lowered Standards

The combination of academic and non-academic goals also facilitates lowering academic standards. The juvenile language of common reading programs exemplifies their expectation that incoming students are not intellectually mature.

Rowan University’s R U Reading Together common reading program phrases its non-academic goals in kindergarten language—“a great introduction to explore the STEP UP concept of Understanding and Appreciating Others.” STEP UP stands for Safe Choices; Think Healthy; Embrace the Rowan Spirit; Participate; Understand and Appreciate Others; and Preserve Resources. STEP UP is a slogan of Rowan’s Student Life department—and unsurprisingly, the common reading program barely acknowledges academic goals.⁴⁷

Fairfield University addresses its students in language that is either remarkably condescending or evidence that Fairfield admits large numbers of students utterly unprepared for college. For instance,

These readings are challenging and that is as it should be! If it were easy, it would hardly be worth your time and effort, right? And you are up for the challenge. You will likely encounter a word or two you haven’t seen before, and there is no shame in that. Don’t let that paralyze you and don’t skip it; take an active stance toward what you don’t know and look it up. Here is a link to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), available to all students through Fairfield University Library’s website. And, you will also likely encounter reference to historical events you may not

⁴⁶ North Carolina State University, Common Reading Program, <https://newstudents.dasa.ncsu.edu/commonreading/nominate/>.

⁴⁷ Rowan University: 2016-17: *Americanah*, <http://www.rowan.edu/commonreading/about/>; STEP UP, http://www.rowan.edu/studentaffairs/main_office/STEPUP/.

remember having learned about. For instance, while I suspect that at some point in high school you heard of the Peace of Westphalia, I also suspect it is possible you may not remember this having happened to you. Again, do not panic. Remain calm and look it up.⁴⁸

Common reading programs frequently seem to be addressing elementary school students rather than matriculating freshmen. To the extent that this does not register a faulty admissions policy, this is a predictable consequence of mixing academic goals with those of *building community*.

Politicized Interpretation of Non-Academic Goals

Mixed goals in mission statements don't just encourage mediocrity; they also open the door to politicized book choices. Let us return to North Carolina State University's announcement of its common reading:

Eileen Taylor, chair of the 2016 Common Reading Selection Committee, noted Stevenson's ability to highlight issues of mass incarceration and institutional injustice through various lenses, such as race and class, as well as the author's natural storytelling abilities as reasons for the committee's enthusiasm for this book. "Given that this may be our students' first exposure to institutional injustice," said Taylor, "we felt as though Stevenson handled these issues with care and this selection promotes the Common Reading Program's goal of active engagement with the community."⁴⁹

Miami University stretched its Summer Reading Program's commitment to "active, responsible citizenship" to choose a book that "focuses on innovation, mentoring, collaboration, diversity, and inclusion."⁵⁰ In other words, Miami selected propaganda in favor of illegal immigration—Joshua Davis' *Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream*, advertised as "a key inspiration to the DREAMers movement."⁵¹

Georgia State University likewise interpreted the mission to "raise awareness and tolerance of cultural likenesses and differences" and to "create a sense of community" as license to select another work of propaganda in favor of illegal immigration, Sonia Nazario's *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Journey to Reunite with His Mother*.⁵² (The tenor of *Enrique's Journey* may be judged by Nazario's website, which endorses Kids in Need of Defense, "a nonprofit

48 Fairfield University, Class of 2020 First Year Academic Gathering, <https://www.fairfield.edu/undergraduate/academics/resources/academic-calendar/convocation/>.

49 North Carolina State University: Justin Hammond, "Just Mercy Selected as 2016 Common Reading," February 2, 2016, <https://dasa.ncsu.edu/just-mercy-selected-as-2016-common-reading/>.

50 Miami University, Summer Reading, <https://miamioh.edu/student-life/orientation-and-transition/first-year-students/summer-orientation/summer-reading/index.html>.

51 Amazon.com, *Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream*, <https://www.amazon.com/Spare-Parts-Undocumented-Teenagers-American/dp/0374534985>.

52 Georgia State University, "First-Year Book," <http://success.students.gsu.edu/first-year-programs/first-year-book/>.

organization that was started in 2008 by Microsoft and Angelina Jolie to recruit pro bono attorneys to represent unaccompanied immigrant children in US immigration courts.”⁵³) Metropolitan State University, Denver, chooses books “on their ability to inspire action and community engagement.” Recent selections

have focused on homelessness (Steve Lopez’s *The Soloist* and Liz Murray’s *Breaking Night: A Memoir of Forgiveness, Survival, and My Journey from Homeless to Harvard*); immigration (*Enrique’s Journey* by Sonia Nazario and *Just Like Us* by Helen Thorpe); access to clean water (*Wine to Water* by Doc Hendley); poverty, crime, and life choices (*The Other Wes Moore* by Wes Moore); human trafficking (Carissa Phelps’ *Runaway Girl*) and food justice (Will Allen’s *The Good Food Revolution*).⁵⁴

Common reading committees routinely use non-academic goals in mission statements, no matter how anodyne, as a rationale to select mediocre progressive political propaganda.

Politicized Mission Statements

Many common reading program mission statements don’t just exploit the presence of non-academic goals as a way to insert progressive propaganda. The mission statements themselves are crafted explicitly to forward progressive political goals, such as *diversity* (affirmative action quotas and propaganda) and *multiculturalism* (hostility to American culture). As the table below indicates, where the common reading mission statements require progressive books, the choice of mediocre progressive propaganda is a feature, not a bug.

Institution	Mission Statement	Book Selection
City University of New York, Brooklyn College	advance the college’s commitment to incorporate principles of diversity and inclusion into the classroom and curriculum and promote peer-to-peer dialogue ⁵⁵	Ta-Nehisi Coates, <i>Between the World and Me</i>
Fashion Institute of Technology	The Common Read ... is an introduction to our academic expectations, inclusive culture, and the desire for meaningful dialog and global community building. ⁵⁶	Kelsey Timmerman, <i>Where Am I Wearing? A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i>
Florida Gulf Coast University	reinforces key learning values of the institution (such as civic engagement, ecological perspective, or diversity) ⁵⁷	Wes Moore, <i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i>

53 Enrique’s Journey, Kids in Need of Defense [KIND], <http://www.enriquesjourney.com/how-to-help/kind/>.

54 Metropolitan State University, Denver, About 1 Book 1 Project 2 Transform, <https://www.msudenver.edu/1book1project2transform/about1b1p2t/>.



Institution	Mission Statement	Book Selection
California State University, Sacramento	serve as a catalyst for considered conversations focusing on issues of social justice ⁵⁸	Wes Moore, <i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i>
Indiana University Northwest	Create awareness of and ongoing dialogue about diversity issues. Provide opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to explore and discuss relevant social justice issues. Increase the level of awareness among participants about social inequality. Encourage participants to use the knowledge they gain to work personally and professionally for positive social change. ⁵⁹	Rebecca Skloot, <i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i>
North Idaho College	This common read is developed and organized by the Common Read Ad Hoc Committee (Cardinal Reads) and supports the common theme adopted every two years by the Diversity Steering Committee. The Diversity Steering committee selects a campus-wide diversity theme to encourage diversity awareness for the NIC community. ⁶⁰	Bryan Stevenson, <i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i>
State University of New York, Oneonta	advances diversity by encouraging students to examine and better understand topics such as equity, inclusion, and personal history through many lenses. ⁶¹	Janet [Charles] Mock, <i>Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More</i>
Texas Women's University	The program will promote an awareness and appreciation for the richness that is brought by embracing all forms of diversity and multicultural perspectives. ⁶²	Sonia Sotomayor, <i>My Beloved World</i>

Institution	Mission Statement	Book Selection
The College of New Jersey	This year’s intellectual theme, “ Toward Just and Sustainable Communities, ” asks the TCNJ community to explore connections among social justice, sustainability, and community. ⁶³	Will Allen, <i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i>
Tuskegee University	Provide students an opportunity to understand diverse perspectives. ⁶⁴	Bryan Stevenson, <i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i>
University of California, Los Angeles	Share and understand diverse perspectives in a respectful way. ... Explore their role in creating a just society. ⁶⁵	Ta-Nehisi Coates, <i>Between the World and Me</i>
West Los Angeles College	Examine issues of social justice through medical, historical, sociological, ethical, racial, psychological, and economic perspectives. ⁶⁶	Michael Pollan, <i>In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto</i>

55 City University of New York, Brooklyn College, First College Year, <http://www.brooklyn.cuny.edu/web/academics/special-programs/first.php>.

56 Fashion Institute of Technology, Common Read Program, <https://www.fitnyc.edu/academic-advisement/common-read/>.

57 Florida Gulf Coast University, One Book One Campus Initiative, <http://megaslides.com/doc/8814697/one-book--one-campus-initiative>.

58 California State University, Sacramento, One Book Program, <http://www.csus.edu/onebook/>.

59 Indiana University Northwest, About the Program, <http://www.iun.edu/onebook/about-the-program/index.htm/>

60 North Idaho College, Cardinal Reads, <http://www.nic.edu/websites/default.aspx?dpt=38&pageId=6166>.

61 State University of New York, Oneonta, Janet Mock: 2016 Mills Distinguished Lecturer, <http://www.oneonta.edu/commonread/>.

62 Texas Women’s University, Book-in-Common, <https://www.twu.edu/pioneer-center/book-in-common/>.

63 The College of New Jersey, Summer Reading 2016, <https://welcomeweek.tenj.edu/summer-reading-2016/>.

64 Tuskegee University, Frequently Asked Questions, <http://www.tuskegee.edu/ylcre/faqs.aspx>.

65 University of California, Los Angeles, UCLA’s Common Book Program, <http://www.firstyearexperience.ucla.edu/ucla-common-book>.

66 West Los Angeles College, One College, One Book 2016/2017: Home, <http://libguides.wlac.edu/OneBook>.

Politicized Selection Motives

Politicized motives for choosing particular books complement politicized mission statements, and make the choice of mediocre progressive propaganda even more likely.

Institution	Selection Motive	Book Selection
Hampshire College	Justice is a value at the core of a Hampshire College education, and this year we have selected <i>Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work</i> to provide a lens into racial and economic justice. ⁶⁷	Edwidge Danticat, <i>Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work</i>
Loyola University, Chicago	With its themes of race, inequality, and justice, <i>Just Mercy</i> aligns with Loyola's mission and beliefs. ⁶⁸	Bryan Stevenson, <i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i>
Mount Holyoke College	We have an incredibly diverse community at Mount Holyoke, and an ongoing commitment to diversity ... It is important to develop the capacity to discuss the complexities of living in a society where racial injustice is still so prevalent. This book encourages us to be willing to raise questions for which there may not be clear or easy answers. ⁶⁹	Ta-Nehisi Coates, <i>Between the World and Me</i>
Pacific Lutheran University	<i>We Need New Names</i> portrays race and racial issues in two very different cultural settings, thus contributing to our campus conversation on three of PLU's core values: diversity, social justice, and sustainability (DJS). ⁷⁰	NoViolet Bulawayo, <i>We Need New Names</i>

Institution	Selection Motive	Book Selection
San Jose State University	As SJSU is a community dedicated to inclusiveness, and there have been some disturbing generalizations made about all Muslim Americans by some voices in the media recently ... we have selected a book reading activity to raise awareness about Islamophobia while having an open dialogue about what America stands for and what it means to be an American. ⁷¹	Anand Giridharadas, <i>The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas</i>
University of La Verne	A respect for diverse communities and the biodiversity of the planet. ⁷²	Claudia Rankine, <i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i>
University of South Florida	<i>The Other Wes Moore</i> is directly related to several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, which are being used to identify the global nature of the various experiences USF offers students. Some of these global themes include the importance of inclusive and equitable quality education for all people; sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, employment, and decent work for all; reducing inequality within and among countries; and making cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. The book specifically highlights the role of race/ethnicity, class, and immigration in U.S. culture, as well as the relationship between crime and poverty. We believe this book provides a positive way for students, faculty, and staff to explore these broader global issues together. ⁷³	Wes Moore, <i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i>
Washington State University	<i>I Am Malala</i> is about having a voice and working to establish social justice. ⁷⁴	Malala Yousafzai and Christina Lamb, <i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i>

The progressive politicization of common reading programs is constant; the rationales vary depending on circumstances. At Loyola University Chicago, where progressives apparently have already taken over the university, “With its themes of race, inequality, and justice, *Just Mercy* aligns with Loyola’s mission and beliefs.”⁷⁵ At Providence College, apparently not yet assimilated into the progressive complex, the common reading has “the goal of extending student perspectives beyond the typical PC [Providence College] educational and cultural experience”—and so Providence College also chose *I Am Malala*.⁷⁶ By one justification or another, the same mediocre progressive books get chosen.

Leading Questions, Language that Assumes an Answer

The politicization of common reading programs also manifests itself in the language on their websites—leading questions and language that assumes an answer. These questions and answers demonstrate the political progressivism that informs the common reading—and convey to the students that their discussions and essays ought to have progressive answers.

- The Fashion Institute of Technology provides tendentious discussion questions for Kelsey Timmerman’s *Where Am I Wearing? A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes*:
 1. Kelsey writes that child labor and sweatshops are just symptoms of the real problem. What is the real problem?
 2. After reading the book, what are your thoughts on child labor in developing countries?

67 Hampshire College, Common Reading for Fall 2016, <https://www.hampshire.edu/new-student-programs/common-reading-for-fall-2016/>.

68 Loyola University, Chicago, “‘Just Mercy’ is the 2016-17 First-Year Text,” <http://luc.edu/features/stories/archive/06-23-16-fye-book-story.shtml>.

69 Mount Holyoke College: Sasha Nyary, “Common Read: Between the World and Me,” March 29, 2016, <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/media/common-read-between-world-and-me-o>.

70 Pacific Lutheran University, Student Reading & Discussion Guide, <https://www.plu.edu/first-year/wp-content/uploads/sites/107/2016/04/common-readingdiscussionguide2016-1.pdf>.

71 San Jose State University, Spring 2016 Book – True American, <http://www.sjsu.edu/reading/books/true-american-murder-mercy/>.

72 University of La Verne, One Book, One University, <http://sites.laverne.edu/learning-communities/one-book-one-university/>.

73 University of South Florida, Common Reading Experience (CRE), <http://www.usf.edu/undergrad/cre/>.

74 Washington State University, “I Am Malala” Common Reading for 5 Campuses in 2016-17, <https://commonreading.wsu.edu/>.

75 Loyola University, Chicago, “‘Just Mercy’ is the 2016-17 First-Year Text,” <http://luc.edu/features/stories/archive/06-23-16-fye-book-story.shtml>.

76 Providence College, Common Reading Program, http://digitalcommons.providence.edu/common_reading/.

3. What does Kelsey mean when he states that he is now an “engaged consumer?”
4. What impact, if any, did reading *Where Am I Wearing?* have on you?⁷⁷

The phrasing does not encourage answers such as *selective reporting by economically illiterate journalists; a boon for humanity; virtue-signaling progressive; and none whatsoever*—and these answers should be just as encouraged in a college discussion as the opposite positions.

- Jacksonville State University feeds into the moral panic about campus rape by the way it presents its common reading:

Jacksonville State University is proud to be on the forefront of higher educational trends, so rather than shying away from this provocative and controversial topic [rape and sexual assault on campus], we plan to meet it head-on. We are dedicated to educating our young men and women so that they may have the safe, supportive, and positive college experience they all deserve; therefore, we are pleased to announce *Missoula* by Jon Krakauer as the 2016 Common Reading Program Book. ... “It’s a hard topic to read,” said Terry Casey, director of JSU Student Life and head of the JSU Reads selection committee. “I completely understand that, and the committee understood that, but we felt so strongly that it was a topic that needed to be addressed within the community.”⁷⁸

Jacksonville’s language would not encourage a student to open up a discussion of *Missoula* by referring to Heather Mac Donald’s “The Campus Rape Myth.”⁷⁹

- Knox College’s presentation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* turns common reading into a pro-immigration self-criticism session: “What is the ‘danger of a single story’ that Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns us about? ... Have you fallen victim to this ‘danger’ yourself? Be honest.” It adds a leading question about current foreign policy: “The U.S. has accepted very few Syrian refugees compared to other wealthy nations. Do you think we should accept more?” The unacceptability of *No* is highlighted by the failure to ask *Do you think we should accept less?*

Knox adds a further list of skewed questions and activities that emphasize the common reading program’s progressive bias:

77 Fashion Institute of Technology, Common Read Program, <https://www.fitnyc.edu/academic-advisement/common-read/>.

78 Jacksonville State University, JSU Takes Proactive Stance on Sexual Violence with Common Reading Selection, <http://www.jsu.edu/news/articles/2016/06/jsu-takes-proactive-stance-on-sexual-violence-with-common-reading-selection-.html>.

79 Heather Mac Donald, “The Campus Rape Myth,” *City Journal*, <https://www.city-journal.org/html/campus-rape-myth-13061.html>.

- While humans have a great capacity for compassion for others, they can also make migrants and refugees feel isolated and unwelcome. Worse yet, for those who have never been forced to relocate, it can be common to hold refugees responsible for their own predicaments, the so-called “blame game.” Do you see examples of the “blame game” at work?
- The author asks her students to engage in a simple exercise about identity. You can learn from doing it yourself. Complete the sentence, “I am _____.” How many answers can you write down in 60 seconds?
- Look over your list of items; some of them (maybe most of them) will place you in or identify you with a social group or category. As the author notes, our social identities can place us in “dominant” or “subordinate” social positions. What does she mean by this distinction?
- As you look at your list, are there some identities that place you in dominant groups? Are there some that place you in a subordinate group? The author states that most people are likely to find themselves in some of each. Is that true for you too?⁸⁰

No student subjected to these questions could fail to discern Knox College’s preferred progressive catechism.

- Rowan University describes Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* with blatantly leading language as “A beautifully written exploration of themes we encounter daily – identity, race, immigration, relative privilege, social and economic justice.”⁸¹ Rowan’s students hardly need to read the book themselves, as they already know what it’s about, and what to admire.
- Saint Michael’s College gives a heavy hint that Loung Ung’s *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers* “reflects the recurring phenomenon of displacements caused by war and oppressive political regimes, such as we currently see in the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis—among others. The book may perhaps make you think of a particular refugee population in your own community.”⁸²
- Skidmore College’s Questions to Ponder about Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me* include “What have been the formative experiences of your own adolescence so far? Have they been connected to race? gender? class? religion? sexual orientation? something else?”⁸³ The questions foreground progressive identitarian ideology.

80 Knox College, Summer Common Reading, <http://www.knox.edu/new-students/learning-at-knox/summer-common-reading>.

81 Rowan University: 2016-17: *Americanah*, <http://www.rowan.edu/commonreading/about/>.

82 Saint Michael’s College, First-Year Seminar, <https://smcvt.edu/Academics/Majors-Minors-and-Curriculum/Liberal-Studies-Curriculum/First-Year-Seminar.aspx?p=1>.

83 Skidmore College, Questions to Ponder, https://skidmore.edu/fye/summer_reading/2016/questions2016/index.php.

- State University of New York, Oneonta describes Janet [Charles] Mock’s *Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More* as “about her journey of transitioning to her truest self as a high school and college student.”⁸⁴ The language would discourage a student from discussing (for example) the book’s value in illustrating how progressive ideology encouraged a mentally ill man to engage in self-mutilation.
- The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) asks about Will Allen’s *The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities*, “To what extent do you think this movement can succeed in creating revolutionary changes, both in cities and in your own community?” TCNJ does not ask *whether* the movement should succeed. TCNJ also asks “How does Allen’s storytelling illuminate the connections between race, food, and just and sustainable communities?” The question assumes progressive definitions and valuations of *just* and *sustainable*.⁸⁵
- The University of Alaska, Anchorage (UAA) states that “Everyone must ‘negotiate’ and shape their identity as they mature, age, and adapt to fate and circumstance. Together, these books offer timeless and relevant themes of individual and collective identity in America—themes that continue to be important to our communities, state, and nation.” UAA assumes the importance of *identity* and the power of *fate*.⁸⁶

Common readings selected to “inspire” students are common readings at cross-purposes with the heart of a college education.

Kansas State University’s suggested prompt for its associated essay contest illustrates the pedagogical problem with such leading language, beyond its simple politicization: “How has [Joshua Davis’] *Spare Parts* inspired you inside and outside the classroom?”⁸⁷ A central purpose of college-level reading is to learn how to provide a thoughtful critique of a book. Common readings selected to “inspire” students are common readings at cross-purposes with the heart of a college education.

Obscured Political Commitments

Some common reading programs obscure their political commitments within a nest of web-linked references. The University of Cincinnati provides a particularly clear example.

84 State University of New York, Oneonta, Janet Mock: 2016 Mills Distinguished Lecturer, <http://www.oneonta.edu/commonread/>.

85 The College of New Jersey, Summer Reading 2016, <https://welcomeweek.tcnj.edu/summer-reading-2016/>.

86 University of Alaska, Anchorage, Join the Conversation, <https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/institutional-effectiveness/departments/books-of-the-year/>.

87 Kansas State University, Awards, <http://www.k-state.edu/ksbn/award.html>.

To begin with, the University of Cincinnati (UC) states relatively innocuously that “Each summer, incoming students are asked to read a book that explores what it means to be an engaged member of the Bearcat community.” At the bottom of this webpage, the reader learns further that “The **goals** of the UC Common Read Program are to ... introduce UC values as expressed by the Bearcat Bond and Just Community Principles.” The student is invited to “uphold the Bearcat Bond,” which includes the affirmation that “As a member of the University of Cincinnati, I will uphold the principles for a Just Community and the values of respect, responsibility, and inclusiveness.”⁸⁸

But what is the Bearcat Bond, and what are principles for a Just Community? If you follow the provided web-link, you will find the Bearcat Bond listed under UC’s Office of Equity & Inclusion.⁸⁹ A further link takes you to the Just Community Principles, also within the Office of Equity & Inclusion, which state that “In embracing our roles within this learning community, we subscribe to the defining purposes, traditions and diversity of the University of Cincinnati.”⁹⁰

But what does “diversity” mean? Another web-link takes you to the Diversity Definition of the Office of Equity & Inclusion, which states that UC

recognizes a very broad and inclusive concept of diversity that includes commonly recognized considerations such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability status, socioeconomic status, gender identity and expression, sexual identity, sexual orientation, religion, and regional or national origin. Going forward, we emphasize that UC’s concept of diversity will retain the capacity to grow with our understanding.⁹¹

This is already a long way from being “an engaged member of the Bearcat community,” but the Office of Equity & Inclusion also includes a link to the *University of Cincinnati Diversity Plan 2011-2016*—which includes policies of racial discrimination in recruitment, admissions, retention, faculty hiring, faculty tenuring, and university purchases, to be done in the name of diversity and affirmative action.⁹² The last step is not quite explicit, but the Common Reading Program is embedded in affirmations of diversity, and diversity at the University of Cincinnati means the racial discrimination of affirmative action.

None of this follows obviously from UC’s 2016 choice for a common reading, Matt Richtel’s *A Deadly Wandering*. Yet the Common Reading Program does encourage students to take a pledge following their reading—in itself, a peculiar thing to be associated with reading a book for college. The pledge begins innocuously enough: “I pledge to limit my technology distractions while driving, walking,

88 University of Cincinnati, Goals and the Bearcat Bond, <https://www.uc.edu/fye/FYCommonReading/faqs.html>.

89 University of Cincinnati, Bearcat Bond, <http://www.uc.edu/inclusion/priorities/bearcat-bond.html>.

90 University of Cincinnati, Just Community Principles, <http://www.uc.edu/inclusion/priorities/just-community-principles.html>.

91 University of Cincinnati, Diversity Definition, <http://www.uc.edu/inclusion/priorities/diversity-definition.html>.

92 University of Cincinnati, *University of Cincinnati Diversity Plan 2011-2016*, <http://www.uc.edu/content/dam/uc/diversity/docs/5787-Diversity-Report-2011-2016.pdf>.

and academic and work pursuits so I can focus my attention on engaging in relationships and activities that will support my learning, teaching or professional life.” But that innocuous pledge is immediately followed with a second sentence: “I further pledge to uphold the Bearcat Bond and Just Community Principles.”⁹³

That second pledge is not as casual as it appears. And it has nothing to do with free inquiry or academic excellence.

Associated Materials

As this exploration of obscured political commitments at the University of Cincinnati indicates, a great many politicizations of common reading programs are not immediately visible in their mission statements or summary web-pages. They are embedded rather in associated materials such as essay questions, discussion questions, and discussion guides. The political effects are no different, but it is worth examining them separately, because they illustrate that the obscure apparatus of a common reading program can be as influential as a mission statement.

- Evergreen State College’s “Tips on Reading this Book” exhorts students to “make Greener history together!”⁹⁴
- Humboldt State University’s Essay Writing Contents provides three prompts, two of which encourage progressive answers:
 - Prompt 1: What can Andrea Wulf’s *Invention of Nature* tell us about issues of positionality, cultural representation, power, and ideology? ...
 - Prompt 3: Construct a counter-narrative that uses the title “Invention of Nature.” Challenging Eurocentric narratives that foreground a single knowledge-maker, tell a story about how human beings understand, relate to, or “invent” nature.⁹⁵
- Kingsborough Community College’s common reading program, KCC Reads, provides a link to a subprogram called “99 Voices: A KCC Social Justice Collective.” 99 Voices “seeks to foster campus community and to effect positive change in U.S. social life through convening social justice symposia. The work of the group is organized around issues of anti-black racism and institutional and structural violence, particularly as these issues impact students of the college.”⁹⁶

93 University of Cincinnati, UC Common Read, <https://www.uc.edu/fye/FYCommonReading.html>.

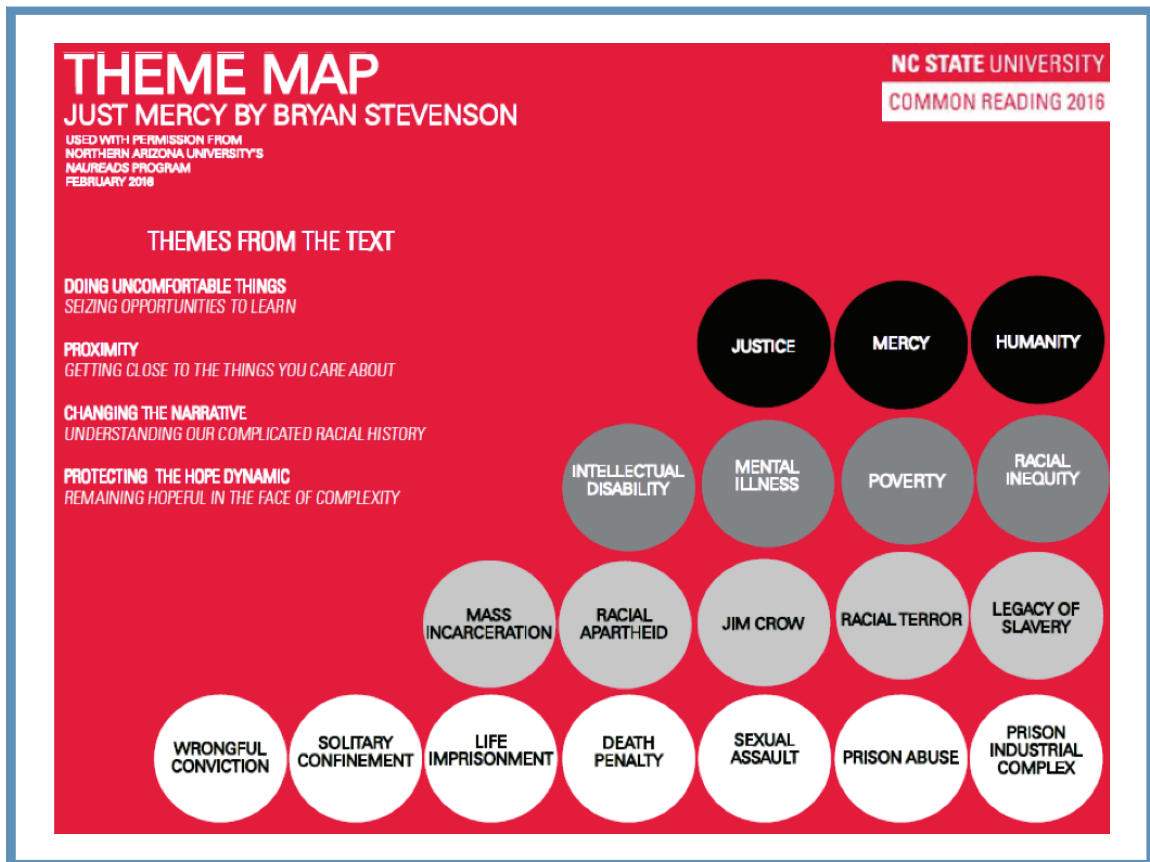
94 Evergreen State College, “Tips on Reading this Book,” <http://evergreen.edu/events/orientation/docs/2016CommonReadBookmark.pdf>.

95 Humboldt State University, Book of the Year 2016-17 Essay Writing Contest, <http://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/bookoftheyear/>.

96 Kingsborough Community College: KCC Reads, <http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/kccreads/Pages/currentbook.aspx/>; 99 Voices: A KCC Social Justice Collective, <http://www.kbcc.cuny.edu/kccreads/Pages/studbk.aspx>.

- Mississippi University for Women’s discussion questions include “Jacqueline Woodson is a major voice in the campaign for more publication of diverse books. Do you feel *Brown Girl Dreaming* is a book that promotes diversity and if so, why? Do you think it’s important for people who don’t necessarily identify with Jacqueline’s specific experience to read this book? Why or why not?”⁹⁷

NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY, COMMON READING 2016, THEME MAP⁹⁸



- North Carolina State University’s Guide for Students lists “Resources ... available to you if you need to debrief while reading,” including the Counseling Center, Women’s Center, GLBT Center, Multicultural Students Affairs, and Diversity Coordinators.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Mississippi University for Women, Discussion Starters & Topics, <http://www.muw.edu/read/topics>.

⁹⁸ North Carolina State University, Theme Map, <https://newstudents.dasa.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2015/10/Just-Mercy-One-Page-Theme-Map-1.pdf>.

⁹⁹ North Carolina State University, *Just Mercy: A Guide for Students*, <https://newstudents.dasa.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2015/10/2016-Common-Reading-Study-Guide-for-Students.pdf>.

North Carolina State University’s discussion guide of Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy* was written by Rachel Hudak—who “is a project manager for anti-death penalty advocate Sister Helen Prejean and the national coordinator of the [anti-death penalty group¹⁰⁰] Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project.” The discussion guide includes many tendentious questions, such as “Do you agree with Stevenson that punishments for children are ‘intense and reactionary?’”¹⁰¹

North Carolina’s Theme Map, reproduced above, casually associates bland ideals (justice, mercy, humanity) with terms associated with progressive ideology and its associated political agenda (racial inequity, prison industrial complex). The Theme Map provides no argument to connect the concepts it lists, but only asserts, by placing them near to one another on the page, that they are related to one another. The Theme Map provides no prompt to allow students to doubt the connections it makes.

- Pacific Lutheran University’s discussion guide includes primers on progressive etiquette such as
 - What does it mean to assimilate? Does cultural assimilation always mean the erasure of a person’s prior identity?...
 - When addressed to an immigrant, what other questions is “Where are you from?” conveying?

PLU’s discussion guide also includes a leading query about current events: “What do the news stories about the undrinkable water in Flint, Michigan suggest about how the environment and people in Flint are valued?”¹⁰²

- Tulane University’s Discussion Materials for Kate Harding’s *Asking for It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture—and What We Can Do About It* assumes the existence of “rape culture” when it asks “How does the book illustrate that rape culture hurts everyone—not just victims, and not just women?” The links to Additional Resources do not include Heather Mac Donald’s *The Campus Rape Myth*, or any other source arguing and providing evidence that “rape culture” is a nonexistent product of moral panic.¹⁰³

100 The Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project, About Us, <http://www.dmwstp.org/about-us/>.

101 North Carolina State University, Freshman Year Reading/Common Reading Guide, <https://newstudents.dasa.ncsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/26/2015/10/Just-Mercy-Discussion-Guide-Courtesy-of-Penguin-Random-House.pdf>.

102 Pacific Lutheran University, Student Reading & Discussion Guide, <https://www.plu.edu/first-year/wp-content/uploads/sites/107/2016/04/common-readingdiscussionguide2016-1.pdf>.

103 Tulane University, Discussion Materials, <http://www2.tulane.edu/reading/resources.cfm>; Heather Mac Donald, “The Campus Rape Myth,” *City Journal*, <https://www.city-journal.org/html/campus-rape-myth-13061.html>.

- University of Alaska, Anchorage’s common reading program provides a Teaching Tip designed to divide students into mutually antagonistic tribes:

“Identity Groups”: A simple exercise to get everyone thinking together about their cultural, class, ethnic, religious, gender, and other identities.

- Before Class: Prepare a list of potential identity groups. Include large, broad groups as well as small, distinctive groups.
 - Call Out the Groups: Invite members to stand, and invite everyone to notice who is in the group and who is not.
 - Think about the Groups. Have participants pair off and discuss what’s great and what’s hard about being in their particular groups, and what they want others never to do, say, or think about their group again.
 - Open Discussion: Bring the group make together, and invite people to share.¹⁰⁴
- The University of Delaware’s Essay Contest asks students to “Discuss how you see the similarities and differences in the perception and treatment of Japanese Americans following the attack on Pearl Harbor, and of Muslim Americans following the attacks of September 11, 2001, and current events related to ISIS. How does the treatment of Japanese Americans then inform the way you think about Muslim Americans today?”¹⁰⁵
 - The University of Oregon’s Reflection Guide informs students that Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me* is about:
 - Race as the child of racism, not the father
 - Resilience in the face of racism
 - The “American Dream,” including its myths, privileges, and prejudices
 - The power of education for growth and awareness
 - The irreplaceable value of the body, individual lives, our collective resources.

Having told students what the book is about, the Reflection Guide than informs them how to conduct their discussion:

- Speak from your own lived experience.
- Ask permission to ask questions; not everyone may want to share.

104 University of Alaska, Anchorage, Join the Conversation, <https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/institutional-effectiveness/departments/books-of-the-year/>.

105 University of Delaware, 2016 Common Reader Essay Contest, <http://www.commonreader.fye.udel.edu/news/2016-common-reader-essay-contest/>.

- Respect each other’s boundaries.
- Invite respectful feedback.
- Be aware that your experience is unique and valid.
- Remember that everyone’s lived experience is unique and valid.¹⁰⁶

No discussion of intellectual interest could possibly take place with these restrictions.

The University of Oregon also includes Reading Resources such as *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*,¹⁰⁷ Teaching Resources such as *Writing for Change* (which exposes “bias in language”),¹⁰⁸ and Campus Resources such as the authorized informers of the Bias Education and Response Team.¹⁰⁹

- Washington University at St. Louis’s Reader’s Guide to Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me* requires students to write a 250-word response to one of the three following questions:
 1. Ta-Nehisi Coates often refers to a certain group of Americans as those “who believe that they are white.” What concept is Coates conveying with this phrase and for what end does he use it?
 2. What does Coates mean when he speaks about the “Dream” and those who are living in it?
 3. What reductions of a person to their culture (be it in language, appearance, or practice) are you familiar with? What reductions did you learn about in *Between the World and Me*? From your experience so far, how might a student at WashU be subject to a similar reduction?

Washington University’s associated writing contest invites students “to write your own letter to the person of your choosing concerning any lessons, experiences, or struggles you have encountered around difference and/or inequality.”¹¹⁰

106 University of Oregon, A Reflection Guide to *Between the World and Me*, <https://blogs.uoregon.edu/commonreading/files/2012/07/ReflectionGuideBTWamx1-1qeja8.pdf>.

107 University of Oregon, Reading Resources, <http://commonreading.uoregon.edu/current-book-btwam/reading/>; Peggy McIntosh, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*, <https://www.deanza.edu/faculty/lewisjulie/White%20Privilege%20Unpacking%20the%20Invisible%20Knapsack.pdf>.

108 University of Oregon, Teaching Resources, <http://commonreading.uoregon.edu/current-book-btwam/teaching/TeachingTolerance>, <http://www.tolerance.org/kit/writing-change/>.

109 University of Oregon, Campus Resources, <http://commonreading.uoregon.edu/current-book-btwam/campus/>; University of Oregon, Bias Education and Response Team, <http://dos.uoregon.edu/bias>.

110 Washington University in Saint Louis, A Reader’s Guide, <http://firstyear.wustl.edu/ProgramsAndEvents/Documents/2016%20FYRP%20reader%27s%20guide.pdf>.

- Webster University informs faculty that “We have an associated activity “Beads of Privilege” that can be used with both of these readings.”¹¹¹ “Beads of Privilege” is meant to be used as a “Privilege Exercise” that “seeks to highlight the fact that everyone has SOME privilege, even as some people have more privilege than others. By illuminating our various privileges as individuals, we can recognize ways that we can use our privileges individually and collectively to work for social justice.”¹¹²
- Western Washington University provides links on how to have “Courageous Conversations”; the *Handbook for Facilitating Difficult Conversations in the Classroom* includes resources such as *Teaching While White*, *Racial Microaggressions and Difficult Dialogues on Race in the Classroom*, and *Implicit Bias*.¹¹³

Western Washington’s common reading program also provides a list of Campus Resources that overlaps heavily with the list of progressive administrative nodes on campus. These include the Center for Education, Equity, and Diversity; Consultation and Sexual Assault Support; DisAbility Resources; Ethnic Student Center; LGBTQ Advocacy; President’s Task Force for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Prevention and Wellness Services; Queer Resource Center; and Sexual Violence.¹¹⁴

There are two rays of light in this long list of associated materials that act as progressive political catechism:

- Washington State University, Vancouver supported Susan E. Eaton’s *Integration Nation: Immigrants, Refugees, and America at Its Best* with an Additional Online Resources page. This page included links to a fair number of pro-immigration non-profit organizations, such as the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights and the Refugee Women’s Alliance—and one link to the Center for Immigration Studies (CIS), which favors reducing future levels of immigration.¹¹⁵ It is possible that the link was provided without knowing the policy preferences of the CIS; WSU-Vancouver is to be commended, however, for providing a supplement to its common reading program that allowed for the possibility of a policy debate on the topic.

111 Webster University, Diversity and Inclusion: Common Readings on Racial Inequalities and Social Justice, <http://libguides.webster.edu/diversity/CommonReadings>.

112 Privilege Exercise, <http://www.differencematters.info/uploads/pdf/privilege-beads-exercise.pdf>.

113 Western Washington University, Courageous Conversations, <https://wp.wvu.edu/westernreads/courageous-conversations/>; John D. Vogelsang and Sophia McGee, *Handbook for Facilitating Difficult Conversations in the Classroom*, <https://www.qc.cuny.edu/Academics/Centers/Democratic/Documents/Handbook%20for%20Facilitating%20Difficult%20Conversations2.pdf>.

114 Western Washington University, Teaching & Campus Resources, <https://wp.wvu.edu/westernreads/teaching-resources/>.

115 Washington State University, Vancouver, Common Reading 2016-2017: *Integration Nation*: Additional Online Resources, <http://libguides.vancouver.wsu.edu/c.php?g=529717&p=3621821>.

- Northwestern University’s discussion guides for Nate Silver’s *The Signal and The Noise: Why Most Predictions Fail — But Some Don’t* on the whole preserve an even-handed tone that supports discussion without presuming the answers. The discussion guide on Weather and Climate is a partial exception, as questions such as “What is the difference between a healthy skepticism towards climate predictions and the type of skepticism that can be dangerous?” presume a concept that should be anathema to a university, *dangerous skepticism*.¹¹⁶ Yet Northwestern’s willingness to acknowledge that there is such a thing as *healthy skepticism towards climate predictions* decisively separates it from the vast majority of its peers—to its great credit.

Committee Composition

The make-up of the common reading selection committees reinforces the skew toward producing progressive propaganda.

Many of these committees are heavily staffed by administrators rather than professors.

- At Regis College, the nine members of the FYE Common Reading Committee included three assistant professors, one instructor, and five administrators—the Director of Residence Life, the Resident Director, the Dean of Student Affairs, the Director of the Library (an administrative position), and the Writing Center Coordinator.¹¹⁷
- At the University of South Carolina, the Selection Committee included a Deputy Provost, a Director of the First-Year Reading Experience, a Senior Fellow of the National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, a Residence Life Coordinator, a Graduate Assistant for Curriculum and Administration—and one lone Associate Professor of English.¹¹⁸
- University of Massachusetts, Amherst’s 12-member Common Read Committee includes 5 representatives from Residential Learning Communities, one from Residence Education, and one from Residential Academic Programs.¹¹⁹
- Of the 24 members of the University of Richmond’s selection committee, 16 members are administrators. These 16 members include representatives from the Dean’s Office (Richmond College), the Dean’s Office (Westhampton College), the Bonner Center for Civic Engagement (two representatives), Outreach Education and Development, University Communications, the Office of the Chaplaincy, the Office of Living-Learning, Boatwright Memorial Library,

116 Northwestern University, Weather & Climate Discussion Guide, <http://www.northwestern.edu/onebook/Documents/DiscussionGuide-WeatherandClimate.pdf>.

117 Regis College, Common Reading Announcement, <http://www.regiscollege.edu/student-life/fye-common-reading.cfm>.

118 University of South Carolina, 2016 Selection Committee, <http://www.sc.edu/fyre/aboutus/selectioncommittee.shtml>.

119 University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Common Read Committee, <http://www.umass.edu/studentlife/commonread/committee>.

the Office of Common Ground, Student and External Affairs, Undergraduate Student Services, Modlin Center for the Arts (Assistant Director—a managerial, not creative, role), the Curriculum Materials Center of the Education Department, the Center for Student Involvement, and (for unspecified reasons) Dining Retail Operations.¹²⁰

- The University of Tennessee, Chattanooga’s 27-member Read2Achieve committee includes representatives from “Academic Affairs, Student Development, Orientation, Housing, Admissions, Student Success, Library, Development, Athletic Training, and (as a second representative from Athletics) Athletics Advising.”¹²¹

Some books are selected largely or entirely by components of the “co-curricular” bureaucracy.

- At Penn State, University Park, the common reading co-chairs were the “Associate Vice President and Associate Dean for Undergraduate Education” and the “Special Assistant to the Vice President of Student Affairs;” the common reading program as a whole is “Administered by Undergraduate Education, Student Affairs, the University Libraries and the Office for Student Orientation and Transition Programs.”¹²²
- At Boise State University, “The Campus Read program is overseen by the Provost’s Office in partnership with New Student Programs.”¹²³
- At the University of Iowa, the common reading is sponsored by the Center for Human Rights, and co-sponsors include the Office of Outreach & Engagement and the Chief Diversity Office.¹²⁴
- At Monroe Community College, “The Common Read Program is sponsored by The Office of Student Life and Leadership Development, Academic Services, and First Year Experience and Title III: Building a Culture of Engagement & Success.”¹²⁵
- University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee’s Common Reading Experience is “co-sponsored by the Student Success Center and the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning.”¹²⁶

120 University of Richmond, About One Book, One Richmond, <http://chaplaincy.richmond.edu/programs/one-book/about.html>.

121 University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, Read2Achieve book for 2016, <http://www.utc.edu/read-achieve/read2achieve-book-2016.php>.

122 “‘The Circle’ chosen as Penn State Reads 2016-17 common text,” *Penn State News*, November 5, 2015, “<http://news.psu.edu/story/379221/2015/11/05/academics/%E2%80%98circle%E2%80%99-chosen-penn-state-reads-2016-17-common-text>”

123 Boise State University, About, <https://academics.boisestate.edu/undergraduate/about-campus-read/>.

124 University of Iowa, One Community, One Book 2016, <https://uicr.uiowa.edu/what-we-do/one-community-one-book/ocob-2016/>.

125 Monroe Community College, Joshua Davis: *Spare Parts*, [http://www.monroecc.edu/webdbs/studtrib.nsf/0/41ff18082cfa53378525802e00539b45/\\$FILE/common%20read%20SPARE%20PARTS.PDF](http://www.monroecc.edu/webdbs/studtrib.nsf/0/41ff18082cfa53378525802e00539b45/$FILE/common%20read%20SPARE%20PARTS.PDF).

126 University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Fear of a Black President, <http://uwm.edu/studentssuccess/2016-17-common-read-selection/>.

“Co-curricular” administrators frequently have a preponderant say in common reading selections, and, even when they are a minority, presumably have an effective veto on books that contravene progressive strictures. Northwestern University’s One Book Steering Committee of 47 includes an Associate Provost of Diversity & Inclusion, an Associate Director of the Center for Civic Engagement, a Director of New Student & Parent Programs, and an Interim Director of Residential Services—a sufficient leaven to veto any choice that contradicts progressive catechism outright.¹²⁷ The almost universal skew toward mediocre progressive propaganda in the common reading selection process receives some reinforcement from the professoriate, but it is substantially a consequence of the takeover of the selection committees by “co-curricular” administrators.

These administrators, it is worth emphasizing, rarely have the professional training or vocation to discover what the best books are, to select good books appropriate for incoming freshmen, or to teach freshmen how to discuss books critically. (Unless they began their careers as regular faculty in departments such as English, and switched later into the “co-curricular” career track.) Good books will only emerge occasionally, by accident, from a selection committee dominated by members professionally dedicated to non-academic goals.

Committee Size

The committees are also so large that they encourage lowest-common-denominator choices, rather than the more individual choices that might emerge from smaller committees. The University of Michigan, Flint and Lansing Community College each have 11 members on their common reading committees;¹²⁸ Eastern Mennonite University, North Idaho College, and University of Massachusetts, Amherst each have 12;¹²⁹ Western Carolina has 14;¹³⁰ Duke University has 15;¹³¹ University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee has 16;¹³² California State University, Sacramento has 20;¹³³ California State University, Northridge and the University of Richmond each have 24;¹³⁴ University

127 Northwestern University, Steering Committee, <http://www.northwestern.edu/onebook/about/steering-committee.html>.

128 University of Michigan, Flint, About Common Read, <https://www.umflint.edu/commonread/about-common-read/>; Lansing Community College, One Book One LCC, <http://www.lcc.edu/library/about/events/onebook/>.

129 Eastern Mennonite University, Walt Wiltschek, “EMU’s Common Read selection ‘Memory of Water’ addresses drought, climate change and hidden knowledge,” EMU News, September 2, 2016, <http://emu.edu/nw/news/2016/09/emus-common-read-selection-memory-water-addresses-drought-climate-change-hidden-knowledge/>; North Idaho College, Cardinal Reads, <http://www.nic.edu/websites/default.aspx?dpt=38&pageId=6242>; University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Common Read Committee, <http://www.umass.edu/studentlife/commonread/committee>.

130 Western Carolina University, Selection Committee: One Book 2016, http://www.wcu.edu/WebFiles/PDFs/OneBook_SelectionCommittee_2016.pdf.

131 Bryan Roth, “How Duke Picks Summer Reading from 400 Books,” *DukeToday*, May 1, 2016, <https://today.duke.edu/2016/05/pickingsummerreading>.

132 University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee, Fear of a Black President, <http://uwm.edu/studentssuccess/2016-17-common-read-selection/>.

133 California State University, Sacramento, One Book Selection Committee Members, <http://www.csus.edu/onebook/contact.html#selection>.

134 California State University, Northridge, Who Chose *So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed?*, <http://www.csun.edu/undergraduate-studies/academic-first-year-experiences/who-chose-so-youve-been-publicly-shamed>; University of Richmond, About One Book, One Richmond, <http://chaplaincy.richmond.edu/programs/one-book/about.html>.

of Tennessee, Chattanooga has 27.¹³⁵ Northwestern University has an astonishing 47 people who must agree on a common reading assignment.¹³⁶ Committees so large are not only geared to produce mush but also a substantial waste of university time and resources. Universities—which should express their serious commitment to common reading by dedicating a greater proportion of the time of fewer people—have better things to do with their employees’ and students’ time than to put 47 of them onto a common reading selection committee.

Activism Goals

Common readings don’t just support progressivism as a vague political point of view; they also support actual programs of progressive action, and, in a constant drumbeat, the concept of *activism*. Common readings are intended to do the reverse of introducing incoming students to disengaged inquiry and the life of the mind. They are meant rather to create students who are committed to progressive activism from day one.

Some colleges and universities euphemize this goal. Siena Heights University’s associated essay asks students to describe “your purpose and passion in life and how it moves you to positive action every day.”¹³⁷ University of Maryland, Baltimore County champions Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn’s *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* because “The book is a powerful call to moral action.”¹³⁸

University of California, Los Angeles is more open: students should use their common reading as a prompt to “Explore their role in creating a just society” and “Consider critical action steps that can be taken in response to their Common Book experience.”¹³⁹ University of Richmond likewise wishes to “Encourage participants to use the knowledge they gain to work personally and professionally for positive social change.”¹⁴⁰ Nassau Community College praises *Becoming Nicole* as a story about “a courageous community of transgender activists determined to make their voices heard.”¹⁴¹

135 University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, Read2Achieve book for 2016, <http://www.utc.edu/read-achieve/read2achieve-book-2016.php>.

136 Northwestern University, Steering Committee, <http://www.northwestern.edu/onebook/about/steering-committee.html>.

137 Siena Heights University, Summer Assignment, <http://fye.sienaheights.edu/summer-assignment-2016.html>.

138 University of Maryland, Baltimore County, New Student Book Experience (NSBE), <http://fye.umbc.edu/programs/nsbe/>.

139 University of California, Los Angeles, UCLA’s Common Book Program, <http://www.firstyearexperience.ucla.edu/ucla-common-book>.

140 University of Richmond, About One Book, One Richmond, <http://chaplaincy.richmond.edu/programs/one-book/about.html>.

141 Nassau Community College, Common Reading, https://www.ncc.edu/studentlife/first_year_experience/common_reading.shtml.

Other colleges and universities make their activism goals explicit:

- Ohio State University states that *The Other Wes Moore* is supposed to “prompt you to reflect” on the euphemistic goals of *overcoming obstacles*, *decision-making*, and *perseverance*; the progressive catechisms of *privilege* and *racial inequality*—and, not least, upon *community activism*.¹⁴²
- San Jose State University similarly associates its common reading, *The True American*, with a lecture by Morehshin Allahyari, “a new media artist, activist, educator, and occasional curator,” who “will speak about the intersections of art, activism, jihad, and technocapitalism.”¹⁴³
- Western Washington University associates its common reading, Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me*, with the lecture “Rise Up: An Activist Conversation”: “A joint event of the Justice Speaks and Western Reads series, this event will explore the contours of intergenerational movement-building and its relationship to art and protest.”¹⁴⁴
- Lehigh University encourages students who “love this theme and ... love the books” to “consider signing up for Food for Thought or SustainabLEHIGH.” Food for Thought lets students “hear from local food activists,” while SustainabLEHIGH will “provide you with a strong foundation for future leadership in environmental sustainability initiatives at Lehigh.”¹⁴⁵

Common reading programs’ association with action and activism, rather than inquiry into truth, takes various forms.

PLEDGES

Several colleges and universities associate common reading with pledges. West Los Angeles College associates Michael Pollan’s *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto* with an invitation to

Join your fellow Westies in the Fed Up Sugar Challenge! ... Sound too challenging? Not sure you can do it? Come to a Fed Up support group meeting! Talk about any challenges you experience giving up sugar, how it feels to be off sugar and hear how other members of the West community handle being sugar-free.¹⁴⁶

The University of Cincinnati likewise associates Matt Richtel’s *A Deadly Wandering* with an invitation to take a Pledge to Limit Technology Distractions.¹⁴⁷

142 Ohio State University, Buckeye Book Community, <https://fye.osu.edu/bbc.html>.

143 San Jose State University, Spring 2016 Book - True American, <http://www.sjsu.edu/reading/books/true-american-murder-mercy/>.

144 Western Washington University, 2016-2017 Western Reads Book Selection, <https://wp.wwu.edu/westernreads/>.

145 Lehigh University: Class of 2020, <http://studentaffairs.lehigh.edu/content/class-2020>; Fall Preclusion, <http://studentaffairs.lehigh.edu/node/239#SustainabLEHIGH>.

146 West Los Angeles College, One College, One Book 2016/2017: Home, <http://libguides.wlac.edu/c.php?g=550726&p=3780916>.

147 University of Cincinnati, UC Common Read, <https://www.uc.edu/fye/FYCommonReading.html>.

These pledges appear relatively innocuous, but they associate common reading with swearing allegiance to an activist program, rather than to uncommitted discussion and inquiry. It must be very difficult for a student to criticize either book when the university is encouraging students to pledge themselves to the book's values.

CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, SERVICE-LEARNING, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Several colleges associate the common reading with “co-curricular activities” (Rowan University) or “co-curricular experiences” (University of South Florida).¹⁴⁸ Washburn University's iRead Mission Statement declares that the common reading program is meant to help “Merge curricular and co-curricular components of college.”¹⁴⁹

Other colleges associate the common reading with service-learning and civic engagement—which, as the NAS detailed in *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics* (2017), are allied nationwide movements that aim to redirect student impulses to volunteer and to act as good citizens into progressive propaganda, free labor for progressive nonprofit organizations, and vocational training as community organizers.¹⁵⁰

Colleges that explicitly associate the common reading with service-learning include:

- Florida Gulf Coast University's common reading mission statement associates its common reading program with “inclusion of service-learning activities.”¹⁵¹
- Otterbein University's criteria for common book selection include “It provides potential for hands-on experiences or service learning.”¹⁵²
- Pellissippi State Community College's page on Related Library Resources includes a section of web links “In Relation to Service-Learning.”¹⁵³
- Tuskegee University states that “All persons (faculty, staff, and students) that are interested in assisting with the YLCRE [Year-Long Common Reading Experience] Initiative are welcome to assist with the ongoing YLCRE Activities or the Service Learning Project.”¹⁵⁴

148 Rowan University, 2016-17: *Americanah*, <http://www.rowan.edu/commonreading/about/>; University of South Florida, Common Reading Experience (CRE), <http://www.usf.edu/undergrad/cre/>.

149 Washburn University, iRead Mission Statement, <http://www.washburn.edu/academics/center-student-success/iread/iread-mission.html>.

150 David Randall, *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics* (New York: National Association of Scholars, 2017), https://www.nas.org/images/documents/NAS_makingCitizens_fullReport.pdf.

151 Florida Gulf Coast University, One Book One Campus Initiative, <http://megaslides.com/doc/8814697/one-book--one-campus-initiative>.

152 Otterbein University, Common Book Criteria, <http://otterbein.libguides.com/c.php?g=441554&p=3010466>.

153 Pellissippi State Community College, Common Book 2016-2017: An Illustrated Book of Bad Arguments: Related Library Resources, <http://lib.pstcc.edu/c.php?g=472401&p=3231643>.

154 Tuskegee University, YLCRE Community Involvement, http://www.tuskegee.edu/ylcre/ylcre_involvement_opportunity.aspx.

- University of Alaska, Anchorage’s common reading program identifies “Critical Service Learning as a Tool for Identity Exploration” (a publication of the progressive Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U)) as a “Topic of Relevance” for the common reading’s theme.¹⁵⁵ The linked publication by the AAC&U defines “critical service-learning” as intended to “interrogate systems and structures of inequality, question the distribution of power, and seek to develop authentic relationships among students, faculty, and community partners. ... Students ... come to reconstruct their identities, challenge their assumptions, and reframe what the distribution of power means both for them and for those they meet through service.”¹⁵⁶
- University of Tennessee, Chattanooga lists among the benefits of its common reading program that “Programming, guest speakers, and service-oriented and social activities based on the content of the book combine allow [sic] the students to come away with a sense of unity and commitment to their studies, their peers, and their community.”¹⁵⁷
- Valdosta State University’s original proposal for a common reading program made it part of a larger Quality Enhancement Plan aiming to provide “service learning opportunities.”¹⁵⁸

University of Nebraska, Omaha’s (UNO) common reading program illustrates nicely that the subordination of common reading to service-learning lacks any fundamental intellectual justification. UNO’s common reading was Matt Richtel’s *A Deadly Wandering*, about the dangers of driving while texting. The associated service project is “Keep Omaha Beautiful on the Keystone Trail.”¹⁵⁹

Colleges and universities that associate common reading with *civic engagement*, *community engagement*, and other cognate phrases include:

- Bluffton University’s common reading is part of its “civic engagement theme.”¹⁶⁰
- Castleton University’s common reading directs students to “relevant programs”:
 - Global Studies (major, minor, certificate)
 - Study abroad

155 University of Alaska, Anchorage, Books of the Year, <https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/institutional-effectiveness/departments/books-of-the-year/>.

156 David M. Donahue and Tania D. Mitchell, “Critical Service Learning as a Tool for Identity Exploration,” <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/critical-service-learning-tool-identity-exploration>.

157 University of Tennessee, Chattanooga, About Read2Achieve, <http://www.utc.edu/read-achieve/about-read2achieve.php>.

158 Valdosta State University, Executive Summary: Investigating Our Community within Our World, http://www.valdosta.edu/administration/sacs/qep/documents/QEPProposalforCommonReader_000.pdf.

159 University of Nebraska, Omaha, The Common Reader Experience, <http://www.unomaha.edu/academic-and-student-affairs/academic-affairs/common-reader.php>.

160 Bluffton University, Convocation, <http://www.bluffton.edu/news/0816convocation.html>.

- Community engagement (service learning, civic engagement courses, volunteer opportunities)
- “Inclusive excellence” (support for learning around diversity and for international students)¹⁶¹
- Collin College’s common reading program is co-sponsored by the Center for Scholarly and Civic Engagement (CSCE).¹⁶² The CSCE in turn supports “Service Learning, co-curricular academic programming, Leadership Development, Civic Engagement and Community Outreach.”¹⁶³
- Cosumnes River College’s common reading program supports the goal of “Campus and Community Engagement.”¹⁶⁴
- Metropolitan State University, Denver’s common reading project “1B/1P/2T ,” run by the Civic Engagement Program, encourages students to “volunteer with a service project related to the book’s theme ... We hope that participation in ‘obligatory’ service through 1B/1P/2T spurs people on to continued volunteerism with the community.”¹⁶⁵
- State University of New York, Brockport states that “The summer reading project is a valued experience at The College at Brockport and continues to be part of our involvement in the American Democracy Project for Civic Engagement, a national, multi-campus initiative that seeks to foster informed civic engagement in the United States.”¹⁶⁶
- Texas A&M, San Antonio’s common reading is meant to support “civic responsibility,” defined as “active participation in the public life of a community in an informed, committed, and constructive manner, with a focus on the common good,” and meant to honor A&M-San Antonio’s embrace of “an inclusive environment that inspires learning, fosters social development, and provides transformative experiential learning opportunities.”¹⁶⁷
- University of La Verne’s common reading program supports “Engaged community service.”¹⁶⁸

161 Castleton University, In the Sea There Are Crocodiles: Home, http://libguides.castleton.edu/in_the_sea.

162 Collin College, Book in Common, <http://www.collin.edu/academics/bookincommon/>.

163 Collin College, Center for Scholarly and Civic Engagement, <https://www.collin.edu/academics/csce/>.

164 Cosumnes River College, About One Book CRC, <https://www.crc.losrios.edu/culture/onebook/about>.

165 Metropolitan State University, Denver: Civic Engagement Program, <http://msudenver.edu/civicengagementprogram/>;
About 1 Book 1 Project 2 Transform, <https://www.msudenver.edu/1book1project2transform/about1b1p2t/>.

166 State University of New York, Brockport, Summer Reading Program, https://www.brockport.edu/academics/summer_reading/.

167 Texas A&M, San Antonio, Common Experience 2016 - “Every Interaction Matters: Choose, Act, Impact”, <http://www.tamusa.edu/university-college/1st-year-experience/Common-Experience-2016.html>.

168 University of La Verne, One Book, One University, <http://sites.laverne.edu/learning-communities/one-book-one-university/>.

- University of the South’s common reading program cites civic engagement among associated campus resources—along with Multi-Cultural Affairs, Student Life, Wellness Center, and Center for Teaching.¹⁶⁹
- Washburn University’s common reading is meant to “Advocate the goals of the Washburn Transformational Experience”; these include “community service.”¹⁷⁰

COURSES

Colleges and universities also associate the common reading with lists of related courses, which skew distinctly progressive. Brown University’s list of related courses includes *Immigrant Social Movements: Bridging Theory and Practice* and *Global Justice*;¹⁷¹ while the University of the South’s list includes *Collaborative Leadership and Social Change* and *The Politics of LGBT Rights*.¹⁷²

SUPPORT OF OUTSIDE PROGRAMS

Many colleges and universities associate their common readings with support for external activist organizations—usually ones promoted by the author of the common reading. Every endorsement of an outside organization separates the common reading further from the fundamental purpose of college—to support disengaged inquiry, with unknown conclusions.

- Berry College, which assigned Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy*, provides a link to Stevenson’s Equal Justice Initiative—“committed to ending mass incarceration and excessive punishment in the United States, to challenging racial and economic injustice, and to protecting basic human rights for the most vulnerable people in American society.”¹⁷³ So does North Carolina State University.¹⁷⁴
- Florida Memorial University selected *Freedom: Stories Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, a book of short stories published by Amnesty International.¹⁷⁵

169 University of the South, Campus Resources, <http://www.sewanee.edu/resources/common-book/campus-resources/>.

170 Washburn University: iRead Mission Statement, <http://www.washburn.edu/academics/center-student-success/iread/iread-mission.html>; Washburn Transformational Experience (WTE), <http://www.washburn.edu/academics/wte/index.html>.

171 Brown University, Related Courses, <https://library.brown.edu/create/firstreading2016/related-courses/>.

172 University of the South, Campus Resources, <http://www.sewanee.edu/resources/common-book/campus-resources/>.

173 Berry College, Summer Reading Program, <http://www.berry.edu/academics/freshman/reading/>; Equal Justice Initiative, About EJI, <http://eji.org/about-eji>.

174 North Carolina State University, For Faculty and Staff, <https://newstudents.dasa.ncsu.edu/commonreading/faculty/>.

175 Florida Memorial University, Florida Memorial University 2016-2017 Common Reading Initiative, <http://www.fmuniv.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/freedom.pdf>.

- St. John’s University, which assigned Wes Moore’s *The Other Wes Moore*, provides a link to Moore’s BridgeEDU—“a suite of wraparound services and an experiential co-curriculum that works in harmony with our university partners.”¹⁷⁶
- University of South Florida assigned Wes Moore’s *The Other Wes Moore* by way of endorsement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.¹⁷⁷
- Vassar College provides links to environmental advocacy organizations including Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, Hudson River Watershed Alliance, Riverkeeper, and Scenic Hudson.¹⁷⁸

The Lack of Fiction

Common reading committees’ focus on memoir and other forms of nonfiction actually undermines some of the original goals of the common reading program. Common reading programs arose partly as a response to a larger national discussion about the decline of literacy among Americans, and about that decline’s ill effects on America’s civic health. Cosumnes River College’s One Book CRC Project, for example, came about because Cosumnes professor Maureen Moore read the National Endowment for the Arts report *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (2007). Moore decided that a common reading would help foster reading at Cosumnes.¹⁷⁹

But *To Read or Not to Read* recommended something important that the common reading programs largely fail to provide: fiction.

To Read or Not to Read generally based its argument for encouraging reading on the equation that “Good readers make good citizens.” *To Read* based this generalization on a further specification: “literary readers” were not only “more than 3 times as likely as non-readers to visit museums, attend plays or concerts, and create artworks of their own” and “more likely to play sports, attend sporting events, or do outdoor activities” but also “more than twice as likely as non-readers to volunteer or do charity work.” “Literary readers” were readers of fiction—novels, short stories, plays, and poetry. *To Read* quoted C. S. Lewis on what literary reading provided—empathy with others.

Literary experience heals the wound, without undermining the privilege, of individuality. There are mass emotions which heal the wound; but they destroy the privilege....But in reading great literature I become a thousand men and yet remain myself....Here, as in worship, in love, in moral action, and in knowing, I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.

176 St. John’s University, Freshman Read Book Guides: 2016: *The Other Wes Moore*, <http://campusguides.stjohns.edu/sjufrb/2016>; BridgeEDU, About, <http://bridgeedu.com/>.

177 University of South Florida, Common Reading Experience (CRED), <http://www.usf.edu/undergrad/cre/>.

178 Vassar College, Common Reading – Four Fish, <http://libguides.vassar.edu/c.php?g=510423&p=3489053>.

179 C. S. Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism* (Cambridge, 2012), pp. 140-41; Cosumnes River College, About One Book CRC, <https://www.crc.losrios.edu/culture/onebook/about/>.

Writing essays practices students in the skills of rational persuasion, and shapes their character toward the equally important civic virtue, openness to being rationally persuaded by others. Common readings, if they are genuinely to introduce students to college-level academic expectations and collegiate civic virtues, ought to be tied to an academic essay.

To Read tentatively identified the practice of active empathy via literary reading with the habits of mind necessary for civic activity—“civic engagement” in the original sense, and not as a euphemism for progressive politics. Moreover, *To Read* emphasized that it was literary reading, not college attendance, that was associated with civic activity.¹⁸⁰

Yet common reading programs skew away from literary fiction. Two hundred sixty-one out of 359 common readings in 2016–2017, 73%, were in the three genres of Biography, Nonfiction, and Memoir—and common reading selections in these genres were overwhelmingly of literarily mediocre modern exhortations to progressive activism, not literary exemplars such as Plutarch’s *Lives* (biography), Michel de Montaigne’s *An Apology for Raymond Sebond* (nonfiction), or Vladimir Nabokov’s *Speak, Memory* (memoir).

Fiction—what Lionel Shriver calls “a vital vehicle for empathy”—is a small minority of common readings. (And among the choices of fiction, works such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Americanah* and Emmi Itäranta’s *Memory of Water* frequently are chosen because they support progressive propaganda rather than for their literary quality.¹⁸¹) The alternative to fiction, of course, is memoir. As Shriver puts it, “If we have permission to write only about our own personal experience, there is no fiction, but only memoir.” Memoir is the genre of choice of common reading programs—and it is almost certainly

no coincidence that common readings frequently underwrite the identity-politics movement, the political correlate of the modern memoir genre’s turn away from fiction’s empathy toward the inward gaze of the solipsistic self.¹⁸²

180 National Endowment for the Arts, *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (2007), https://www.crc.losrios.edu/files/onebook/NEA_Reading_Report.pdf, pp. 8–9, 18, 46, 90.

181 E.g., Rowan University, 2016–17: *Americanah*, <http://www.rowan.edu/commonreading/about/>; Eastern Mennonite University, Walt Wiltschek, “EMU’s Common Read selection ‘Memory of Water’ addresses drought, climate change and hidden knowledge,” *EMU News*, September 2, 2016, <http://emu.edu/now/news/2016/09/emus-common-read-selection-memory-water-addresses-drought-climate-change-hidden-knowledge/>.

182 Lionel Shriver, “Will the Left Survive the Millennials?,” *New York Times*, Sept. 23, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/23/opinion/will-the-left-survive-the-millennials.html?smid=tw-share&_r=1.

Common reading programs attempt to create “civically engaged” citizens while avoiding assigning the literary genres that the National Endowment of the Arts identified as necessary to create the empathy upon which “civic engagement” relies. (“Civic engagement” in the original sense, not as a euphemism for “acting to forward progressive policies.”) Even if we accept that common reading should aim to build community, and allied goals, the common reading genre fails in that ambition. If common reading programs truly aim to create good citizens, they should assign pleasurable literary fiction that creates empathy, not mediocre propagandistic memoirs that foster solipsistic identity politics.

Non-Academic Assignments

Colleges and universities further weaken the common readings’ ability to ‘introduce students to college expectations’ by allowing students to hand in non-academic assignments on the common readings. Too few colleges and universities connect the common reading to any assignment at all, but those who do all too often allow students to hand in something other than the bread-and-butter of college academics: the essay, a formal exercise in academic writing, through which a student learns to make a lucid, sophisticated, and persuasive argument that is supported by evidence rather than by feeling or assertion. The essay is at the heart of both the intellectual and the civic skills that colleges and universities can provide: writing essays practices students in the skills of rational persuasion, and shapes their character toward the equally important civic virtue, openness to being rationally persuaded by others. Common readings, if they are genuinely to introduce students to college-level academic expectations and collegiate civic virtues, ought to be tied to an academic essay.

Yet far too many colleges and universities instead allow or specifically assign non-academic writing—the solipsistic, identitarian response to the common reading—or a piece of “creative art” that is often entirely nonverbal. The assignments that depart from the formal academic essay include:

- Colorado Mountain College: “Art and Creative Writing Contest.”¹⁸³
- Indiana University Southeast: “All IU Southeast students are eligible to submit an interpretation of the theme “Making Choices: Defining Who You Are” using any one of the following genres: Essay, Poetry, Two Dimensional Art Piece, Photography, Research Paper.”¹⁸⁴
- Kansas State University: “Students are invited to submit their experience with Joshua Davis’s *Spare Parts*. Your experience can be shared through a non-fiction essay, creative writing, music, video, visual art, performance art, or some other medium.”¹⁸⁵

183 Colorado Mountain College, Common Reader, <http://coloradomtn.edu/commonreader/>.

184 Indiana University Southeast, Essay Competition, <https://www.ius.edu/common-experience/essay-competition.php>.

185 Kansas State University, Awards, <http://www.k-state.edu/ksbn/award.html>.

- Lackawanna College: “**Poetry Contest.** This contest focuses on writing a poem because you want to capture a feeling that you experienced by reading *I Am Malala*. Just write whatever feels right. Only you experienced the feeling that you want to express, so why not share those feelings through poetry.”¹⁸⁶
- Northern Kentucky University: “Students may submit *any original* artwork or writing project. This includes reflections, poetry, speeches, short videos (<5 minutes long), photography, large-scale art, spoken word (audio or video files), etc. Use your imagination and creativity!”¹⁸⁷
- University of Arizona: “You are invited to think of specific ways in which you have been seen or unseen and creatively express that experience. Your submission may be created in written format, spoken word, video, photography, art piece, music or any other creative medium that can be submitted electronically.”¹⁸⁸

Where these assignments are associated with contests, the winners appear to be selected for their ability to reproduce progressive political attitudes more than for their aesthetic qualities. At Colorado Mountain College, the winning work of fiction concludes with the peroration that “it doesn’t matter that I want to become an American citizen, it doesn’t matter that I’ve gone through terrible hardships, it doesn’t matter that I speak wonderful English. All that matters to the American people is that I’m Undocumented.”¹⁸⁹

Unsurprisingly, contests keyed to books that spout progressive banalities elicit progressive banalities.

Better Choices, Voluntary Common Readings, and Faculty “Buy-In”

The National Association of Scholars previously has endorsed mandatory common readings, on the grounds that students ignore voluntary common reading. If a book was truly supposed to be a common experience, and a statement of the values and expectations of a college, we believed that it ought to be required—and linked to a college-level written assignment.

We have reconsidered this recommendation in light of our deepening knowledge of the administrative background of common reading programs. Now that we are aware of how deeply the “co-curricular” bureaucracies have embedded themselves in the selection of common readings, we are afraid that the recommendation for a mandatory selection will simply increase the power of the “co-curricular” bureaucracies vis-à-vis the regular faculty, and further weaken students’ awareness that the point of their education is the curriculum, not the “co-curriculum.” A mandatory common

186 Lackawanna College, LC Reads, https://portal.lackawanna.edu/ICS/Campus_Life/Campus_Groups/LC_READS/Public_Page.jnz?portlet=About_This_Group.

187 Northern Kentucky University, Book Connection Art & Essay Contest, <https://firstyear.nku.edu/bookconnection/contest.html>.

188 University of Arizona, Honors College, Get Involved & Contest, <http://www2.honors.arizona.edu/get-involved-contest?destination=node/664>.

189 Colorado Mountain College, 2016 Fall Creative Writing Winners, http://coloradomtn.edu/partnerships/common_reader/2016-winners/.

reading would be an excellent thing if selected solely by faculty and solely to introduce students to college-level academic expectations—and we still endorse a mandatory common reading, if those preconditions are met. Where they are not, we instead endorse voluntary common readings.

Voluntary common readings have the immediate benefit that they allow students to choose not to read mediocre progressive propaganda, and not to be inducted into a program of progressive activism. The fewer students given the false impression that progressive activism is identical with either community or a college education, the better.

A system of voluntary common readings, when combined with faculty choice to incorporate common readings in their courses—faculty “buy-in”—also provides an incentive to improve the quality of common readings. Professors, after all, are professionally trained to select good books that will provoke thought in their students; a book that has to receive the assent of a significant body of professors is likely to be better on average than a book selected by “co-curricular” administrators.

Professorial taste is not a panacea—common reading selection committees will produce some lemons no matter how you select the selectors. **But we now recommend as an immediate, practical reform that common reading programs adopt a system of voluntary common readings, which gives substantial weight to faculty “buy-in” as a principle of selection.**

Local Selections

Common reading programs that emphasize books associated with the college itself, whether by school alumni, professors, or local writers, make more varied selections—and often better ones.

The University of Mary Washington chose a book written by an alumna, Kristen Green’s *Something Must Be Done About Prince Edward County: A Family, a Virginia Town, a Civil Rights Battle*.¹⁹⁰ Green’s book fits the common reading genre’ progressive predilections—but it was assigned by no other common reading programs in 2016, and it tells Mary Washington students more about the history of their state. These virtues put Mary Washington a significant notch above the 24 colleges and universities that chose Bryan Stevenson’s *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption*, the 19 that chose Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me*, and the 10 that chose Wes Moore’s *The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates*.

Owensboro Community and Technical College includes “local talent” as part of its mission statement—and the result has been a series of books that vary considerably from the staples of the common reading genre, and are frequently more challenging than those selected by their peers.

190 University of Mary Washington, Common Read, <http://academics.umw.edu/fye/common-read/>.

OWENSBORO COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL COLLEGE,
COMMON READINGS, SPRING 2004 – FALL 2016¹⁹¹

Fall 2016: <i>Come and Go, Molly Snow</i> by Mary Ann Taylor-Hall (novel - KY writer)
Spring 2016: <i>The Art of Racing in the Rain</i> by Garth Stein (novel)
Fall 2015: <i>A Companion for Owls: Being the Commonplace Book of D. Boone Long Hunter, Back Woodsman, &c.</i> by Maurice Manning (poetry - KY writer)
Spring 2015: <i>Orphan Train</i> by Christina Baker Kline (novel)
Fall 2014: <i>Folks, This Ain't Normal</i> by Joel Salatin (nonfiction)
Spring 2014: <i>A Parchment of Leaves</i> by Silas House (novel - KY writer) - along with our 10-Year anniversary anthology of 6 former Common Reading authors
Fall 2013: <i>The Namesake</i> by Jhumpa Lahiri (novel)
Spring 2013: <i>Across a Hundred Mountains</i> by Reyna Grande (novel)
Fall 2012: <i>The Most They Ever Had</i> by Rick Bragg (memoir/essays)
Spring 2012: <i>The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian</i> by Sherman Alexie (novel)
Fall 2011: <i>September 11, 2001: American Writers Respond</i> (anthology)
Spring 2011: <i>Catalpa</i> by George Ella Lyon (poetry - KY writer)
Fall 2010: <i>Maus: My Father Bleeds History (Vol. 1)</i> by Art Spiegelman (graphic novel)
Spring 2010: <i>Mothering Mother: A Daughter's Humorous and Heartbreaking Memoir</i> by Carol O'Dell (memoir)
Fall 2009: <i>House of Abraham: Lincoln and the Todds, a Family Divided by War</i> by Stephen Berry (non-fiction - KY theme)
Spring 2009: <i>In Country</i> by Bobbie Ann Mason (novel - KY writer)
Fall 2008: <i>Dismal Rock</i> by Davis McCombs (poetry - KY theme)
Spring 2008: <i>The Joy Luck Club</i> by Amy Tan (novel) - (as part of Owensboro's The Big Read project)
Fall 2007: <i>Buffalo Dance: The Journey of York</i> by Frank X Walker (poetry - KY writer)
Spring 2007: <i>Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books</i> by Azar Nafisi (memoir/essay)
Fall 2006: <i>The Hidden Wound</i> by Wendell Berry (essay / memoir - KY writer)
Spring 2006: <i>Fahrenheit 451</i> by Ray Bradbury (novel)
Fall 2005: <i>Rafting Rise</i> by Joe Survant (poetry - KY writer)
Spring 2005: <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> by Zora Neale Hurston (novel)
Fall 2004: <i>A Parchment of Leaves</i> by Silas House (novel - KY writer)
Spring 2004: <i>Brave New World</i> by Aldous Huxley (novel)

¹⁹¹ Owensboro Community and Technical College, Previous Common Readings, http://www.octc.kctcs.edu/en/Academics/Common_Reading/Previous_Common_Readings.aspx.

This is a good common reading list—and the good effect that comes from introducing students to fine works of Kentucky writing seems to have a spillover effect. The non-local selections also include gems such as Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. Owensboro’s history of common reading selections compares favorably with those of most of its peers—and we believe its mission statement’s inclusion of “local talent” has played a large, necessary role in giving Owensboro’s common reading program a very high batting average.

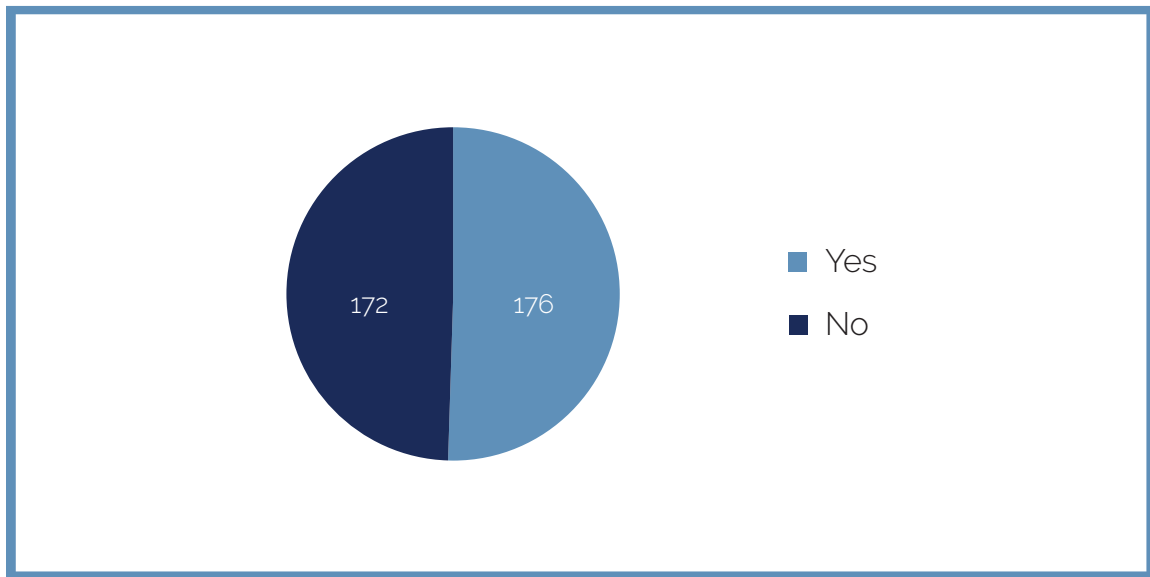
We also note that “local talent” usually comes with a lower speaking fee than the authors of books whose speakers are in national demand. Mission statements that focus on *local talent* are also likely to lower costs—which should not have to be a factor in choosing books, but ought to be taken into account.

Budgetary Implications

Mission statements that require contemporary, “relevant” books, on the theory that these are more likely to spark student interest, increase costs. Publishers, after all, sell books within copyright at a premium. The formal and informal desires for common readings that act as progressive propaganda reinforce the selection bias toward modern books, since there is a premium for timeliness in propaganda. The corresponding desire to bring living authors to campus further increases expenses, since authors usually require speaking fees. Common book programs, as they are currently constituted, generally have to assume the direct costs of both a copyright premium and an author visit, as well as the ancillary administrative costs associated with coordinating an author visit. Contemporary relevance comes at a price.

AUTHOR APPEARANCES

Authors appear at slightly more than half of the 348 colleges and universities — 176 institutions.



Common reading programs as a rule do not publicize their budgetary information. Emory University’s Integrity Project, however, was kind enough to share with us the information that it budgets \$20,000 annually to purchase books for students.¹⁹² For 2016-17, this would have gone to purchase 1,371 copies¹⁹³ of *I Am Malala*—which is available for \$12.66/copy in paperback and \$9.99/copy in Kindle.¹⁹⁴ This is a retail price, and Emory’s Integrity Project “worked directly with our campus bookstore and the publisher to get a deal on the books, which cut costs significantly.”¹⁹⁵

Emory did not share the cost of the associated lecture fee. However, we know that the university invited as its speaker in Fall 2016 Shiza Shahid, cofounder of the Malala Fund,¹⁹⁶ whose advertised speaking fee is \$20,001-\$30,000.¹⁹⁷ We imagine the Integrity Project also negotiated to secure as low a fee as possible, and perhaps lower than the listed booking fee range. Nevertheless, we believe that a cautious cost estimate for Emory’s common reading program would be \$40,000.

¹⁹² Emily Lorino to David Randall, March 3, 2016.

¹⁹³ Emory University, Fast Facts: Admission Profile, <http://apply.emory.edu/discover/fastfacts.php>.

¹⁹⁴ Amazon.com, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban*, https://www.amazon.com/Am-Malala-Stood-Education-Taliban/dp/0316322423/ref=tmm_pap_swatch_o?_encoding=UTF8&qid=&sr=

¹⁹⁵ Emily Lorino to David Randall, March 3, 2016.

¹⁹⁶ Emory News Center, “Photos: Emory Integrity Project welcomes Malala Fund co-founder,” http://news.emory.edu/stories/2016/10/er_shahid_integrity_project/campus.html.

¹⁹⁷ All American Speakers, Shiza Shahid Biography, <https://www.allamericanspeakers.com/speakers/Shiza-Shahid/394359>.

Speaker fees can be much higher. Ta-Nehisi Coates received \$41,500 to speak at the University of Oregon, for a speech associated with Oregon’s assigned common reading, Coates’ *Between the World and Me*. He received a further \$30,000 from Oregon State University for speaking there.¹⁹⁸ Coates’ books were the common readings at 21 different institutions in 2016-2017 (19 assignments of *Between the World and Me*, 1 assignment of “Fear of a Black President”; 1 assignment of *The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood*); he may have earned as much as ca. \$700,000 from the common reading circuit in 2016-2017.

Speaker fees vary too widely to make an estimate of average costs. Book costs, however, may be estimated. We have looked at the prices of the books advertised in First-Year Book Catalogues by several major publishers, and multiplied book costs by 1,000 for a hypothetical freshman class of 1,000.

FIRST YEAR BOOK COSTS

Publisher Catalogue	Number of Books	Average Cost	Cost x 1,000
HarperCollins, <i>Books for the First-Year Student</i>	148	\$17.06	\$17,060
Knopf Doubleday Group, <i>First-Year & Common Reading 2017</i>	75	\$16.56	\$16,560
Macmillan, <i>Books for the First-Year Experience</i>	60	\$20.46	\$20,460
Penguin, <i>Books for First-Year Experience & Common Reading Programs</i>	206	\$19.15	\$19,150
Random House Academic, <i>2016 First-Year & Common Reading</i>	195	\$13.35	\$13,350

We presume these costs can be lowered by bulk purchases and by individual negotiation by the common reading committees. One common reading administrator stated that discounts of 50% or more are often available from publishers on bulk orders of several thousand books. We also presume that some of these costs refer to the hardcover price, and not the paperback or ebook price. (Where multiple formats were offered, we selected the cheapest possibility in the catalogue.) Actual average costs are probably a bit lower than the figures given here.

198 Cooper Green, “Why Ta-Nehisi Coates’ \$41,500 UO speech ended early,” *Daily Emerald*, March 10, 2017, <http://www.dailyemerald.com/2017/03/10/ta-nehisi-coates-41500-uo-speech-ended-early/>, <http://www.dailyemerald.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Coates-UO-FE-reviewed-1.pdf>; <http://www.dailyemerald.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Coates-Contract-181318-00590296.pdf>.

199 HarperCollins, *Books for the First-Year Student*, http://files.harpercollins.com/OMM/FIRSTYEARSTUDENT_FINALCATALOG.pdf; Knopf Doubleday Group, *First-Year & Common Reading 2017*, <https://www.randomhouseacademic.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Knopf-FYE-2017-Catalog-Final.pdf>; Macmillan, *Books for the First-Year Experience*, <https://macmillanfyebooks.files.wordpress.com/2016/10/macmillans-2017-fye-catalog.pdf>; Penguin, *Books for First-Year Experience & Common Reading Programs*, <http://www.penguin.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/FYE-2017-Catalog.pdf>; Random House Academic, *2016 First-Year & Common Reading*, <https://www.randomhouseacademic.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/RHAFYE2016CatalogFinal.pdf>.

By way of comparison, we have calculated the costs for our core list of 80 Recommended Books. (See **Appendix IV: 80 Recommended Books Appropriate For Any College Common Reading Program: Presses and Costs.**) The average price of the books on our list is \$8.59; the total average cost to buy 1,000 copies for an incoming freshman class would be \$8,595. (Costs of many of our recommended books could be lowered even further by assigning free electronic copies from Project Gutenberg, Google Books, or other such sources.) This price is already a significant discount on the cheapest of the common reading publishers (Random House Academic, average price \$13.35)—and we did not make our selections on the basis of cost. Selections tailored to include only books that were out of copyright, for example, would probably have an average cost of no more than \$5.00.

Common reading programs that avoid bringing speakers to campus would also avoid having to pay the very high fees that speakers command—which, in the case of Emory, appear to be more than the costs of the books themselves. Common Reading Programs could substitute a series of lectures by professors or other local experts, compensate the speakers handsomely, and still spend much less than they do for speakers now.

Moreover, they could avoid mishaps that occasionally afflict speakers on the national circuit. Ta-Nehisi Coates ended his February 3, 2017 speech at the University of Oregon 35 minutes early, without engaging in question-and-answers with the audience. He may simply have been exhausted, since “the talk was Coates’ fifth in five days.” Such mishaps may be expected as characteristic results of selecting books written by speakers on the common reading lecture circuit: according to Mealoha McFadden, director of university events at the University of Oregon, “Speakers have that type of schedule all the time.”²⁰⁰ If such mishaps are a characteristic consequence of choosing books by speakers on the common reading lecture circuit, a college or university might serve its students better by not selecting books that require them to bring such speakers to the campus in the first place.

Our cautious estimate is that common reading programs, as currently set up, on average cost \$25,000/year, not including staff time. We believe a revision of common reading programs along the lines of our recommendations would reduce average cost to \$15,000/year, not including staff time—a cost savings of 40%.

We believe that the significant financial advantages of our recommended reforms should render them even more attractive to colleges and universities for whom budgetary considerations are a priority.

Interviews

We have interviewed 3 administrators of different common reading programs. We edited these interviews for space, and shifted around the order of the interview questions. Much of the material is a close paraphrase of the actual words of the profilees—true in spirit, if not a verbatim rendition.

²⁰⁰ Cooper Green, “Why Ta-Nehisi Coates’ \$41,500 UO speech ended early,” *Daily Emerald*, March 10, 2017, <http://www.dailyemerald.com/2017/03/10/ta-nehisi-coates-41500-u0-speech-ended-early/>.

As noted above, we include this section in good measure to let common reading personnel speak for themselves. Our critiques of common reading programs should be read alongside the self-understanding of the officials profiled below. We wish to emphasize once again that our critiques respectfully acknowledge the good will and professional dedication of common reading administrators in general—and, in particular, the kindness and courtesy of those administrators below who agreed to be interviewed for this report.

Several further administrators of common reading programs sent in written replies to a series of e-mailed questions. These are reproduced in full in **Appendix V: Common Reading Program Administrators Speak**.

Any errors in this section are NAS's, and not the profilees'.

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY (TEXAS), TWISTER MARQUISS, DIRECTOR OF COMMON READING PROGRAM

2016-17 COMMON EXPERIENCE THEME: A CENTURY OF CONFLICT: DIALOGUES ON THE U.S. EXPERIENCE OF WAR SINCE 1917

2016-17 COMMON READING: KARL MARLANTES, *WHAT IT IS LIKE TO GO TO WAR* (2011)

Texas State University's Common Reading Program is part of the larger Common Experience and is also affiliated directly with the University Seminar Program, which helps incoming students to transition into college. Twister Marquiss, a fiction writer who teaches in the English Department, has directed the Common Reading Program for the last several years—and is about to become director of the entire Common Experience, “a yearlong conversation on a theme that includes the entire campus and extends into the community.”

Marquiss emphasizes that the Common Reading Program is rooted in each year's Common Experience theme. At Texas State, the Common Experience starts with a proposal for a theme, and then the Common Reading selection committee chooses a related book. Marquiss thinks the theme-first structure makes the common reading more effective. It also governs book selection. The formal goal of the Common Reading Program is “to prepare students for discussion of the year's theme with these aims: introduce the Common Experience, encourage participation in the intellectual life of the campus, and foster a sense of community among students, faculty, and staff.” Practically speaking, the Common Reading Program wants to find a book that fits the theme.

There are about 21 people on the Common Reading selection committee. Marquiss recalls that a committee member from the Department of English likened the committee to a democracy, improved by the large number of voices. The Common Reading selection committee always tries to have someone from the College of Education. The committee includes the Associate Dean for Academic Programs in University College, the Director of Lower-Division Studies in English, and representatives for the upcoming year's theme. For selection of the 2017-2018 book on the upcoming theme on justice, representatives included the university's Attorney for Students, faculty from sociology, health administration (an ex-military prosecutor), the Center for Diversity and

Gender Studies, journalism, philosophy, history, University Seminar, general studies, political science, biology, English—and graduate students and undergraduates. It also includes members from student affairs. On the whole, Marquiss thinks the large committee size improves the book choice, by the complementary multiplicity of perspectives it brings.

The Common Reading Program tries to get voluntary “buy in” of the book by professors for classes beyond University Seminar—and Marquiss and his colleagues work hard to put out the word that the common reading is available for use. They distribute it to graduate student TAs in English, they go to the Council of Academic Deans, they go to the Council of Academic Chairs, they spread the word any way they can. But the largest integration is with the University Seminar classes—these require the common reading as part of their syllabi. University Seminar is an enormous institution at Texas State. Marquiss says there are about 250 sections for approximately 5,500 freshmen.

Texas State hasn’t chosen many works of fiction as common readings, but Marquiss doesn’t think that’s deliberate. A lot of finalists were works of fiction. It so happened that some of the works of fiction were by professors at Texas State, and that actually worked against them, since the committee tries to avoid the appearance of impropriety. Then too, some themes don’t lend themselves to fiction. In fact, the only local author was Texas State alum Tomás Rivera—and Rivera’s legacy was the theme that year!

There’s limited assessment of the Common Reading Program. Marquiss says the University Seminar course evaluation questionnaire provides information from a lot of respondents, but fairly little from each one. Last fall the Common Reading Program partnered with a University of South Florida doctoral candidate in Education, Kali Morgan, who administered a far more detailed evaluation for student engagement. This was very useful. For instance, it revealed that students who read more of the Common Reading are more likely to go to the associated events. But the best of assessments still depends on student response—and Marquiss notes that students who don’t read the book aren’t likely to complete the assessment either. On the whole, though, the assessments make it seem that Texas State has pretty good student interest, compared with peer institutions, with lots of students each year voluntarily telling their friends that the book is good and worth reading.

The Common Reading Program isn’t solely responsible for speaker and symposia costs, which are shared among a great many administrative and departmental co-sponsors. The Common Reading Program provides books for 5,500 students, and for significant numbers of faculty as well.

Marquiss is proud of Texas State University’s Common Reading Program. The change he most wants to see is that the common readings get used even more widely on campus.



THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON (OHIO), NINO COLLA, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, NEW STUDENT ORIENTATION**2016-17 COMMON READING: COMMON READING SUSPENDED**

The University of Akron's Office of New Student Orientation runs the university's Common Reading Program. Nino Colla, who was an undergraduate double-majoring in Communication and Mass Media News at the University of Akron himself, has run the Common Reading Program since 2014. Rather, although Akron suspended the Common Reading during the 2016-2017 school year, Colla plans to revive it when the Office's budget isn't so tight. Some of his plans for future changes to the common reading program have finances in mind—for example, making the author also be the first-year speaker.

Colla states that the goals of the common reading program include encouraging students to read beyond textbooks; creating a foundation for students to explore value and ethics; fostering tolerance and awareness of varying cultures; preparing students for academic work; and creating community. He also wants to create co-curricular opportunities with campus partners. For example, in 2015 he was able to tie David Sheff's *Beautiful Boy*, a memoir about addiction, to the campus' alcohol awareness week.

But the central point of a common reading is to unite students—and to give students a book they read because it is genuinely interesting and not just because it's required. Colla doesn't like the idea of a required written assignment because he wants students to read the book just because it sparks their interest.

Colla does think that the combination of curricular and co-curricular goals in the common reading program is somewhat awkward. The Office of New Student Orientation, and hence the Common Reading Program, is fundamentally non-academic. Both focus on retention by bringing students in to the university, making students feel at home, and preparing them for success. Committee members from English and Composition sometimes don't entirely understand what the Common Reading is for, and try to suggest books that don't work with the Program's goals. While Colla welcomes faculty participation, especially if it encourages professors to adopt the common reading in their classes, he believes a successful program needs to decide if it is curricular or co-curricular: "A good program has to fall in line with one or the other."

The selection committee usually starts with about 20 people, although it contracts to about 8 active members during the later stages of the selection process. There are a lot of English and Composition faculty on the committee—as well as members from sociology, psychology, the School of Communication, First Year Seminar, Residence Life and Housing, Honor's College, Multicultural Development, and the library. Colla says that it's good to have representatives from parts of the university that have a lot of contact with first-year students—lots of freshmen take sociology and psychology, and Residence Life and Housing has a lot of contact with incoming freshmen. However, the large size of the committee does lead to more compromises on book choices. When you have to fulfill everyone's goals, you have to compromise somewhere.

The Common Reading program usually selects memoirs. Colla says that the primary reason is because you can bring a memoirist in to speak, and because a memoir resonates better with students. The one time Akron did choose a novel for the Common Reading, it went over well with the English Department, since it was better written. But students aren't eager to read fiction, and Colla wants to choose books that students are eager to read.

Colla and the selection committee generally make their selections from publishers' brochures. It's the easiest way to get an idea of what books are available—and categorized by genre, themes, and areas. It is easy to find options. Besides, you can hear authors associated with publishers at conferences, and that's very useful for determining if an author will resonate with students.

It's difficult to assess how well a common reading program works—"If you ever find out how, let me know," says Colla with a laugh. If the common reading author comes to speak, you can measure attendance at a speech—but that doesn't tell you if the students actually read the book. When Piper Chapman came to speak about *Orange Is the New Black*, a number of students asked her questions about the TV series, not the book! Questionnaires provide more assessment metrics, but students aren't very diligent about filling them out. Another reason to combine the common reading program with the first-year weekend is that Colla can hand out assessment questionnaires during the weekend, and hope to get a better response rate.

The most costly part of the common reading program is the author's speaking fee—Akron's program does not buy the books for students.

What does Colla most want from the common reading program? Tactically, he wants to integrate it into the first-weekend program. More broadly, he wants to make the book a part of students' common identity.

WEST VIRGINIA UNIVERSITY (WEST VIRGINIA), SUSAN JENNINGS LANTZ, CHAIR OF THE WVU CAMPUS READ, DIRECTOR OF THE BUSINESS LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR IN MARKETING

2016-17 COMMON READING: BRYAN STEVENSON, *JUST MERCY: A STORY OF JUSTICE AND REDEMPTION*

West Virginia University's (WVU) common reading program is new—just in its third year. Its structure is still changing as they figure out what work bests, but right now it's run by the Campus Read committee—responsible to the Provost, who has final approval over book selection, but largely running itself. The chair right now is Susan Jennings Lantz—a PhD in English, a professor of Marketing, and an administrator with long experience at WVU.

Lantz is enthusiastic about what the Campus Read has been able to do. They've made connections with all sorts of groups connected with the university, and not just incoming freshmen—the 4-H Camp associated with the university, people in the community engaged in life-long learning, Office of Service Learning, Honors College the Appalachian Book Project (which sends books to prison

libraries), the Education Department, Parents Club, the West Virginia Innocence Project (which works to exonerate prisoners they believe to have been wrongly convicted), and they've managed to live-stream associated events to WVU's branch campuses. The Campus Read has also connected with all sorts of classes. *Just Mercy*'s been discussed in sociology, economics, and literature classes, in the law school, and even in a design class, by a professor who designs prisons.

The program has a mission statement—help intellectual discussion, help students find an intellectual home on campus, and so on—but Lantz honestly doesn't think the statement much affects book discussion. The committee basically looks for a story the campus can celebrate, which has synergies with students and campus programs, and which furthers a conversation on campus of some intellectual merit. Lantz thinks *Just Mercy* did that very well—that it worked with everything from discussions of prison design to literature-class comparison with *To Kill A Mockingbird* to the economics and philosophical implications of capital punishment. “Furthering the conversation” counts as the basic goal, whatever the exact wording of the mission statement.

The Selection Committee has about 25 people—students, staff (including someone from procurement), a few librarians, and faculty from departments including first-year seminar, sociology, STEM, business (Lantz herself), and several English professors. In effect, anyone who wants to join is welcome. Generally, people who love to read and talk about books decide to join the committee. The size is a bit unwieldy—but they benefit from the wider range of viewpoints. Besides, the more people on the committee, the more people who spread the word about the Campus Read around campus. Having the head of freshman orientation on the committee led to having all the freshman guides (students helping new students get oriented to college) read and mention the book—and having a student peer speak well about the book really made students more likely to read the book.

The Campus Read isn't focusing on fiction anymore, much to Lantz's personal regret. She was the driving force behind assigning Max Brooks' novel *World War Z: An Oral History of the Zombie War* the first year—but it wasn't quite as successful as she hoped. Not every First Year Seminar instructor is trained to teach fiction, and tastes in fiction are much more variable than tastes in non-fiction. She's going to continue to nominate fiction, but she suspects nonfiction will do well going forward, because it has a broader appeal.

And works by local authors or with local interest? Lantz says that they keep their eye out on the genre of Appalachian writing—and next year's selection has a large number of associations with West Virginia University and West Virginia, as well as ways to connect with lots of different student interests in WVU. She explains cogently what these are—but *Beach Books* cannot publish these since the decision hasn't been formally announced yet. But we can say that WVU certainly has local interest in mind in its book selection process. Indeed, Lantz has Mountain State pride in mind—Lantz wants out-of-state students who come to WVU to know something about West Virginia's history, and what the state can be proud of having accomplished.

How does Campus Read get the word out about the book? They call up professors who teach related subjects and say, *We can provide you a copy of this book to look at. Can you use it?* Once they know it's out there and being used as the Campus Read, a significant number will use it. Lantz says they may even give students a writing assignment—an essay in a literature class, a journal entry in a First Year Seminar. But there isn't one common assignment handed out to everyone. Practically speaking, a common assignment increases the likelihood that the responses will be unoriginal—not plagiarized, but discussed by students who will then all write on the same topic. Lantz thinks it's better to have varied assignments on a common reading.

WVU is still working on its assessment procedures. They do hand out surveys, but response rate remains an issue. But it's a new program—Lantz is confident they'll have this in hand as they go forward.

Lantz doesn't think the committee needs to worry about preventing the common reading from imposing a particular political belief on students. The committee is composed of educated professionals, it's open to all, and they invite diversity of thought.

What does Lantz like most about the Campus Read program? That it's not just limited to freshmen, but reaches out to all 30,000 people on campus. If they didn't do that, they'd never have known that you could connect *Just Mercy* to a course on prison design, or a literature class on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. She likes that it's more of a community conversation.

And what would Lantz change about the program if she could? A ten million dollar grant and 40 hours in the day would always be nice, but she really is very happy with the Campus Read as it is. She knows that *critical thinking* and *deeper learning* are buzz words—but she also thinks they mean something, that WVU's common reading is helping their students to practice those skills, and that by doing so it is doing something very worthwhile.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The NAS has been providing recommendations for several years on how to improve common reading selections. We are lengthening our recommendations considerably this year, and including a series of recommendations for precise administrative changes to the structure of common reading programs. We intend for these lengthened, revised recommendations to provide an actionable blueprint to improve the structure of common reading programs. These are intended for a variety of interested audiences, but particularly for faculty, university administrators, and university donors.

General Selection Principles

1. Seek books that encapsulate intellectual diversity, not books that preach one message.
2. Seek books that stretch students' minds: neither too short nor too long; neither too simple nor too complex; but sufficient to challenge and delight a young adult's inquiring mind.
3. Seek books that see man in his moral complexity, and balance between Pollyanna optimism and cynical contempt.
4. Seek works of fiction that combine beauty of language, intellectual complexity, and moral seriousness.
5. Seek works of nonfiction that combine elegance, lucid argument, and respectful awareness that their readers should not be preached at, but persuaded.
6. Seek challenging books in preference to inoffensive ones.
7. Seek out important books from earlier eras.
8. Consult peers who read widely and well and who are intimately acquainted with good books.
9. Consult outside sources, such as the National Association of Scholars' list of Recommended Books (see **Appendix III: Recommended Books for College Common Reading**) or Modern Library's list of 100 Best Novels and 100 Best Nonfiction.²⁰¹
10. Avoid books chosen for their subject matter, or books chosen to be inspirational; books chosen on those grounds are usually dull, often poorly written, and seldom distinguished.
11. Avoid books that appear in First-Year Experience catalogs.
12. Seek out books that will lift up the institution's academic standards and contribute to its intellectual reputation.

²⁰¹ Modern Library, "Top 100," <http://www.modernlibrary.com/top-100/>.

Mission Statements

Common reading programs' mission statements should be altered to include some or all of the following elements:

1. **Academic Outcomes Only:** Common reading programs should divest themselves of all non-academic goals and focus exclusively on preparing students for college-level academic work. All other goals should be excised—especially goals that euphemize progressive politics, such as *civic engagement, community building, contemporary relevance, diversity, environmental justice, food justice, global citizenship, inclusion, multiculturalism* and *social justice*.
2. **Academic Assessments Only:** Common reading programs should focus exclusively on assessing their success at preparing students for college-level academic work. Non-academic goals cannot be meaningfully assessed; neither can programs with multiple academic and non-academic goals. All non-academic goals should be removed from common reading programs.
3. **Selection Criterion: Full-Length Books:** Common reading programs should commit to selecting at least one full-length book, with a minimum of 50,000 words of college-level prose (the length of *The Great Gatsby*) or 5,000 words of prosodically sophisticated poetry. Common readings should convey to students that a minimum expectation of a college student is the ability to read a full-length book in a timely fashion, and discuss it intelligently.
 - Graphic novels may be substituted only if they combine high levels of literary and artistic sophistication, and if the common reading program is prepared to support a college-level discussion of their purely visual characteristics.
4. **Selection Criterion: Older Works:** Common reading programs should require, or give strong preference to: 1) books written before 1923, and hence in the public domain; 2) books written by dead authors; and/or 3) books published at least 20 years in the past. These books should be selected partly for their lower cost, partly for their enduring quality, and partly to introduce students to the mental world beyond contemporary America.
5. **Selection Criterion: Intellectual Complexity:** Common reading programs should commit to selecting intellectually complex books, appropriate for college-level discussion. As a rule of thumb, common reading programs should avoid books commonly assigned in high schools, or books aimed at a young adult audience. Common readings should distinguish college-level education from high-school education, and welcome students to the world of adult thought.

6. **Selection Criterion: Literary Quality:** Common reading programs should require books that exemplify beautiful writing, and are not merely efficient conveyors of information. Common readings should convey colleges' and universities' commitment to developing students' aesthetic capacities, to appreciate beauty and to judge it intelligently.
7. **Selection Criterion: Fiction:** Common reading programs should give strong preference to works of fiction. Common readings should seek to develop literary readers, whose imaginative empathy contributes to the habits of good citizenship.
8. **Selection Criterion: Translations:** Common reading programs should give preference to works in translation. Colleges and universities should aim to introduce students to the broader world, and not be parochially reliant on English-language works and American authors.
9. **Selection Criterion: Mature Protagonists:** Common reading programs should give preference to works of fiction with mature protagonists. Students already know what it is like to be young; they should learn what it is like to be an adult.
10. **Selection Criterion: Local Subject Matter:** Common reading programs should give preference to works by alumni, works about the institution, and works about the institution's locality or state. Common readings should articulate the institution's distinctive identity, as a particular institution in a particular locale, and differentiate its students from their peers nationwide.
 - Common reading programs should be cautious about assigning works by college administrators, college professors, or personal acquaintances of the selection committee's members. While such works do provide local differentiation, their selection may give the appearance of improper diversion of college resources. This mission statement preference should be executed so as to minimize potential conflicts of interest, and to provide full transparency about all relationships that might be perceived as a conflict of interest.
11. **Selection Criterion: Common American Character:** Common reading programs should give preference to books that emphasize what Americans share in common rather than to books that emphasize what divides them. Common reading programs should also give preference to books that articulate an intelligent appreciation of American history, American culture, and American freedom. Common readings should serve to differentiate American college students from their peers worldwide, and to inculcate a thoughtful love of their country.
 - If they are all adopted, the Selection Criteria of Translations, Mature Protagonists, Local Subject Matter, and Common American Character should be harmonized as much as possible. Where they conflict, the order of priority should be Common American Character, Local Subject Matter, Mature Protagonists, and Translations.

Faculty Management I: Make Common Readings Curricular

Many current flaws in common reading programs derive from their management by “co-curricular” administrators. We recommend a combination of administrative reforms, all of which are intended to shift the management of common reading programs from the “co-curricular” bureaucracy to the faculty. The common experience of a common reading should be curricular, not “co-curricular.”

1. **Committees of Professors:** Common reading committees should be staffed exclusively by professors and librarians. No “co-curricular” administrators, no other academic administrators, and no students should be members of these committees.
 - All committee members should be widely read and committed to reading.
 - Librarians on common reading committees should be specialists in the humanities.
 - “Co-curricular” administrators and other academic administrators are sometimes given courtesy appointments as professors. Likewise, professors who have moved into university administration retain their membership in their home departments. No professors whose primary duties are administrative should be members of common reading committees.
2. **Management by Regular Disciplinary Departments:** A majority of common reading committee members should be professors in regular disciplinary departments that specialize in teaching students how to read books (e.g., English, French, History, Philosophy). Composition professors, interdisciplinary professors, and librarians may be appointed to common reading committees, but they should never comprise a majority.
3. **Tenured Professors as Committee Chairs:** Common reading committees should select tenured professors as their chairs. This choice conveys the seriousness with which the institution as a whole, and the faculty in particular, regard common readings. The choice of a tenured professor will also bring intellectual authority and administrative expertise to the common reading selection process.
 - As many committee members as possible should be tenured professors, so as to add further authority and expertise to common readings.
4. **Small Committees:** Common reading selection committees should consist of no more than 5 members, each of whom takes responsibility for a major portion of the committee’s work. Each committee member should model good academic practice for his students by reading all nominated books slowly and carefully. Smaller committee size will allow for a more efficient use of faculty time. Smaller committee size will also produce more interesting selections, since it will reduce the lowest-common-denominator effect that afflicts large common reading committees.

- Common reading committees should have shortlists of no more than 5 books, so as to allow committee members the time to read each book carefully.
5. **Consultation with Composition Departments:** While professors in regular disciplinary programs should select common readings, composition (writing) professors and instructors ought to be consulted during book selection. Common readings will have much greater effect if they are adopted by writing instructors in introductory composition classes, so common reading committees should give substantial weight to writing instructors' preferences.
 6. **Appointment of Student Discussion Leaders:** Where common reading discussions are not led by faculty, committee members should choose discussion leaders from senior Literature majors, Literature graduate students, or equivalently trained students, properly compensated for their time. These students, as they lead discussions focused on critiques of the common reading's literary content and aesthetic quality, will model the academic skills that incoming freshman should aspire to acquire.
 - At present, common reading programs frequently assign student discussion leaders from the student clienteles of "co-curricular" or interdisciplinary programs oriented toward "social justice." This staffing decision reinforces the co-curricular, progressive stamp on common reading programs. Common reading committees, as a matter of informal policy, should avoid appointing discussion leaders from these student clienteles.
 7. **Selection of Academic Speakers:** Common reading committees should select professors, or other figures whose interests are primarily intellectual, to speak at lectures, symposia, and other events linked to the common reading. Both external speakers and speakers who are faculty of the institution should receive monetary compensation for their time.
 - Colleges and universities often invite common reading authors to be their convocation speakers. We believe it would be a good idea to have an academic figure associated with the common reading to be a convocation speaker, but we understand that the choice of convocation speaker is not primarily the responsibility of the common reading committee. If the institution chooses to have a convocation speaker who is more inspirational than academic, the speaker should only be associated with the common reading if the reading itself meets the selection criteria we have listed above.
 8. **Composition of Associated Materials:** Common reading committees should model academic standards by composing their own discussion guides, essay prompts, and other associated materials. Committees should not purchase or copy these associated materials from publishers, interested non-profit organizations, or any other external source. These associated materials should focus exclusively on academic discussion.

9. **Voluntary Professorial Adoption:** Common reading committees should select books that professors throughout the institution will voluntarily integrate into their syllabi. A book which can elicit widespread “buy-in” by the faculty is more likely to be a good book.
10. **Professorial Recompense:** Our recommendations will impose heavy responsibilities on the professors who serve on common reading committees, as relatively small numbers of them will have to assume responsibility for duties previously carried out by salaried academic administrators. Professors should be recompensed for this institutional service, both to ensure that the service is no burden and as a sign of the importance the institution assigns to common reading. All committee members should have their teaching load (or equivalent library duties) reduced by at least 1 course a year, and perhaps 1 course a semester.
 - The institution should pay for this faculty recompense by reducing the number of “co-curricular” administrators. Since “co-curricular” administrators will no longer be responsible for common reading programs, the reduction of their responsibilities should naturally be followed by a reduction in their budgets.
 - Colleges and universities would benefit by a general redirection of authority and budgets from the administration to the faculty. The transfer of common reading programs from “co-curricular” administrators to the faculty can serve as a model for future such transfers of authority and budgets.

Faculty Management II: Curricular and “Co-Curricular” Common Readings

Colleges and universities instituting a common reading program can set it up as curricular with minimum fuss. Changing a common reading program from “co-curricular” to curricular must be more difficult. While we earnestly recommend to the “co-curricular” administrators currently running common reading programs that they hand over their program to the faculty, we don’t realistically expect them to do so, absent strong outside pressure.

We therefore suggest a compromise: colleges and universities that already have a “co-curricular” common reading should have *two* common readings, one curricular and one “co-curricular.” The “co-curricular” common reading would be a variant of the current common reading, with no academic goals whatsoever, and would be operated entirely by the “co-curricular” bureaucracy. The curricular common reading would be run by the faculty, along the lines of our recommendations above, and would be integrated into first-year courses, with writing assignments, faculty symposia, and so on. This curricular common reading would have academic goals only.

Given the reality of limited budgets and scarce student time, we think colleges and universities that can only afford one common reading should give priority to a curricular common reading. But if resources permit, and colleges and universities are convinced they should retain a “co-curricular” common reading, then we recommend that they implement a curricular common reading alongside the “co-curricular” one.

Program Structure

Common reading programs also should be reformed by a series of measures not directly related to establishing faculty management.

1. **Disciplinary Alternation:** Common reading programs charged with selecting *multidisciplinary* books should avoid choosing one book that serves as a mediocre compromise among competing disciplines—middlebrow narrations of an inspirational episode in the history of science, and the like. Colleges instead should set up a regular disciplinary alternation, in which successive common readings focus on different disciplines. E.g., a college could set up a four-year sequence of books focusing on the natural sciences, classic literature, American history, and twentieth-century literature in translation.²⁰²
 - Common reading programs will generally enrich students' introduction to college-level academic standards if they assign multiple books. They can also satisfy the charge to be multidisciplinary by assigning several books each year, each specializing in one discipline.
2. **Voluntary Readings:** Utah Valley University offers a classical alternative in addition to its regular selection. In 2016-17, for example, Utah Valley University encouraged students to go beyond their regular common reading, Daniel James Brown's *The Boys in the Boat*, and read William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* as well.²⁰³ Common reading programs should imitate Utah Valley University and adopt more advanced books as voluntary common readings.
3. **Discussion Goals:** Common reading discussions should aim to elicit thoughtful critique of the text and lively disagreement among students.
4. **Writing Requirements:** Common reading programs should introduce students to college-level writing expectations. Common readings should be integrated with academic writing assignments—ideally graded, as part of a regular class.
 - Common reading writing assignments should also exercise students' library research skills.
5. **Divorce from Activism:** Common readings should not promote pledges, service-learning, civic engagement, activism of any kind, or classes, programs, events, or “yearly themes” devoted to any of these activities. Common reading, and all ancillary components of common reading programs, should promote curricular thought rather than extra-curricular action.

²⁰² I thank Helaine Smith for the excellent idea of disciplinary alternation in common readings.

²⁰³ Utah Valley University, Freshman Reading Program, <https://www.uvu.edu/firstyear/freshmanreading/>.

6. **Divorce from Sponsoring Administrative Sub-units:** Common reading programs should cut all ties to sponsoring administrative subunits within the university, such as Offices of Diversity, Sustainability, or Civic Engagement.
7. **Reduce or Cap Speaker Fees:** All funds previously dedicated to speaker fees should be transferred toward subsidizing common reading book purchases for students.
8. **Fiscal Transparency:** Common reading programs should be fiscally transparent, and publicize all costs on their websites—including speaker fees, staff costs, and administrative overhead. This will allow public oversight that will inhibit inefficient procedures, and also provide information that allows for a continuous cycle of improvement in the administration of common reading programs. Fiscal transparency will also reassure donors to common reading programs that their money is well spent.

Donors

Common reading programs often depend on special subsidies from outside donors. We direct the following recommendations to donors considering supporting common reading programs.

1. **Condition Support:** Donors should not fund common reading programs that select mediocre progressive propaganda. Donors should make funding of common reading programs dependent upon colleges and universities adopting the mission statements and administrative structures recommended above.
2. **Require Documentation:** Donors should require common reading programs to inform them about teaching guides, lecture selections, and all other ancillary materials, and not just the name of the selected book. Colleges and universities can and do teach a good book as progressive propaganda; donors should make sure this is not allowed.
3. **Time-Limit Funding:** Donors should provide temporary funding for common reading programs, and never endow them. Academic administrators cannot be trusted to select proper books if they are given funds irrevocably—and even some faculty may be tempted to select mediocre progressive propaganda. Donors should provide revocable funding, conditional upon colleges and universities selecting suitable books.
4. **Thematic Support:** Donors should fund common readings linked to themes that promote better reading choices, such as Classical Learning, Intellectual Diversity, or Institutions of American Liberty.

Institutions of Higher Education

Common reading programs offer mediocre books partly because of their subordination to progressive ideologues in the “co-curricular” bureaucracy. Yet they are also a sincere response to an unfortunate situation: colleges and universities now admit a large number of students who are *not* prepared to read a college-level book. The personnel of common reading programs are in



an unhappy position: they cannot assign a sophisticated book and expect that the entire class of incoming freshmen will be capable of reading it. They are charged with an impossible task and they must make some compromise to square the circle. We do not approve of the too-frequent decision to compromise on the intellectual quality of the books they choose as common readings, but we are sympathetic to well-meaning people forced to choose between second-best alternatives.

Colleges and universities as a whole must also change their policies so as to make common readings useful components of the education they offer. We make only one recommendation:

1. Tighten college admission standards so as to select a student body with the capacity and desire to read a challenging book.

Common reading programs cannot expect to succeed without this essential support from their institutions as a whole.

Some Arguments for the Status Quo

We wish to close by presenting some arguments for the common reading *status quo*, drawn from our interviews with common reading program administrators. We hold by our recommendations, but we think that our suggested reforms should be implemented with these objections in mind.

- Larger committees are good because every committee member becomes an advocate spreading the word about the common reading throughout the campus.
- Larger committees are good because they are quintessentially democratic as they bring in a multiplicity of diverse voices.
- Having students on committees helps give a sense of what students will actually read.
- The costs of a common reading speaker fee don't matter so much, since the college would have an invited speaker anyway.
- Taste in fiction varies so much that you're better off having nonfiction, since it will appeal to more students.

We will make explicit replies to these arguments in our next *Beach Books*. But we would rather not end this report with critique—but by letting the people who devote their time to common reading programs have the last word.

APPENDIX I: COMMON READING SELECTIONS 2016-2017: FULL LIST BY INSTITUTION NAME

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Adelphi University (NY)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Albion College (MI)	<i>High Price: A Neuroscientist's Journey of Self-Discovery That Challenges Everything You Know About Drugs and Society</i> Hart, Carl 2013	Memoir Drugs Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>
Alvernia University (PA)	<i>Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide</i> Kristof, Nicholas and Sheryl WuDunn 2008	Nonfiction Feminism/ Sex Discrimination/Women Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African theme</i> <i>Asian theme</i>
Amarillo College (TX)	<i>Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet: A Novel</i> Ford, Jamie 2009	Novel Emigration/Exile War <i>Asian American theme</i>
American University (DC)	<i>S Street Rising: Crack, Murder, and Redemption in DC</i> Castaneda, Ruben 2014	Memoir Crime and Punishment Drugs <i>African American theme</i> <i>Hispanic theme</i>
Appalachian State University (NC)	<i>So You've Been Publicly Shamed</i> Ronson, Jon 2015	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology
Aquinas College (MI)	<i>About Our Voices: A Collection of Wisdom from Aquinas TRIO Students</i> Aquinas TRIO Students 2013	Memoir Career Advice/Success Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Arcadia University (PA)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Arizona State University, New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences (AZ)	<i>Ready Player One</i> Cline, Ernest 2011	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/ Science Fiction
Assumption College (MA)	<i>Losing My Cool: Love, Literature and a Black Man's Escape from the Crowd</i> Williams, Thomas Chatterton 2010	Memoir Artists' Lives/Arts Education <i>African American theme</i>
Auburn University (AL)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Auburn University at Montgomery (AL)	<i>The Dinner</i> Koch, Herman 2009	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>European theme</i>
Augustana College (IL)	<i>The Fire Next Time</i> Baldwin, James 1962	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
Austin Peay State University (TN)	<i>Where Am I Eating: An Adventure Through the Global Food Economy</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2013	Nonfiction Food Globalization/World
Avila University (MO)	<i>While the World Watched: A Bombing Survivor Comes of Age During the Civil Rights Movement</i> McKinstry, Carolyn Maull 2011	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Ball State University (IN)	<i>The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas</i> Giridharadas, Anand 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>Muslim American theme</i>
Barton College (NC)	<i>Life Is Not an Accident: A Memoir of Reinvention</i> Williams, Jay 2016	Memoir Disability/Disease/Mental Health Sports <i>African American theme</i>
Bates College (ME)	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Bay State College (MA)	<i>Life is Good: How to Live with Purpose and Enjoy the Ride</i> Jacobs, Bert and John Jacobs 2014	Memoir Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help
Baylor University (TX)	<i>The Road to Character</i> Brooks, David 2015	Nonfiction Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Bellarmine University (KY)	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>
Bellevue College (WA)	<i>The Martian</i> Weir, Andy 2011	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction <i>Film/TV version exists</i>
Berry College (GA)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Bluffton University (OH)	<i>Spark: How Creativity Works</i> Burstein, Julie 2011	Memoir Artists' Lives/Arts
Boise State University (ID)	<i>The Road to Character</i> Brooks, David 2015	Nonfiction Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Bowling Green State University, Honors College (OH)	<i>A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas</i> Berger, Warren 2014	Nonfiction Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help
Boston College (MA)	<i>A Chance in the World</i> Pemberton, Steve 2012	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African American theme</i>
Brenau University (GA)	<i>The Greenwich Village 1913: Suffrage, Labor, and the New Woman</i> Treacy, Mary Jane 2015	Role Playing Game Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women Social Activism/ Humanitarianism

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Brookhaven College, Community (TX)	<i>Midnight in Mexico: A Reporter's Journey Through a Country's Descent into Darkness</i> Corchado, Alfredo 2013	Memoir Crime and Punishment Drugs <i>Latin American theme</i>
Brown University (RI)	<i>My Beloved World</i> Sotomayor, Sonia 2013	Memoir Career Advice/Success <i>Latin American theme</i>
Bucknell University (PA)	<i>Loving Day: A Novel</i> Johnson, Mat 2015	Novel Ethnic Identity Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African American theme</i>
Bunker Hill Community College (MA)	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>
Butler University (IN)	<i>Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2008	Nonfiction Globalization/World Poverty
Butte College (CA)	<i>My Life on the Road</i> Steinem, Gloria 2015	Memoir Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women
Cabarrus College of Health Sciences (NC)	<i>Josie's Story: A Mother's Inspiring Crusade to Make Medical Care Safe</i> King, Sorrel 2009	Memoir Medicine/Mortality
Cabarrus College of Health Sciences (NC)	<i>StrengthsFinder 2.0</i> Rath, Tom 2007	Skills Assessment Career Advice/Success
California State Polytechnic University, Pomona (CA)	<i>Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance</i> Duckworth, Angela 2016	Nonfiction Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help Career Advice/Success
California Lutheran University (CA)	<i>Six Degrees</i> Lynas, Mark 2008	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
California Lutheran University (CA)	<i>31 Hours</i> Hamilton, Masha 2009	Novel Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality War <i>Islamic World theme</i>
California State University, Chico (CA)	<i>My Life on the Road</i> Steinem, Gloria 2015	Memoir Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women
California State University, East Bay (CA)	<i>Illegal: Reflections of an Undocumented Immigrant</i> N., José Ángel 2014	Memoir Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i>
California State University, Los Angeles (CA)	<i>Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion</i> Boyle, Gregory 2009	Memoir Crime and Punishment Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Latin American theme</i>
California State University, Maritime (CA)	<i>The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics</i> Brown, Daniel James 2013	Nonfiction Sports
California State University, Northridge (CA)	<i>So You've Been Publicly Shamed</i> Ronson, Jon 2015	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology
California State University, Sacramento (CA)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
California State University, San Marcos (CA)	<i>Sal Si Puedes [Escape if You Can]: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution</i> Matthiessen, Peter 1969	Biography Ethnic Identity Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>Hispanic theme</i>
Carroll College (MT)	<i>All the Light We Cannot See</i> Doerr, Anthony 2014	Novel Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes War <i>European theme</i>
Case Western Reserve University (OH)	<i>All the Light We Cannot See</i> Doerr, Anthony 2014	Novel Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes War <i>European theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Catawba College (NC)	<i>Stepping Out</i> Sedaris, David 2014	Essay Media/Science/Technology
Chaffey College (CA)	<i>Rowell, Rainbow</i> Eleanor & Park 2013	Novel Ethnic Identity Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i> <i>Young Adult</i>
Clemson University (SC)	<i>One Amazing Thing</i> Divakaruni, Chitra 2010	Novel Disasters Ethnic Identity <i>South Asian theme</i>
Coastal Carolina University (SC)	<i>Find Me Unafraid: Love, Loss, and Hope in an African Slum</i> Odede, Kenney and Jessica Posner 2015	Memoir Education Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African theme</i>
College of Charleston (SC)	<i>The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas</i> Giridharadas, Anand 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>Muslim American theme</i>
College of William and Mary (VA)	<i>Island of the Colorblind</i> Sacks, Oliver 1997	Memoir Disability/Disease/Mental Health <i>Pacific Islander theme</i>
College of Wooster (OH)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Collin College (TX)	<i>The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story</i> Ackerman, Diane 2007	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes <i>European theme</i>
Colorado College (CO)	<i>Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us</i> Steele, Claude 2010	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help
Colorado Mountain College (CO)	<i>The Distance Between Us</i> Grande, Reyna 2012	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Columbia University (NY)	<i>The Iliad (Books 1-6)</i> Homer 800 BC?	Epic Poem War <i>European theme</i>
Community College of Baltimore County (MD)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Concordia College (MN)	<i>The Butterfly Mosque: A Young American Woman's Journey to Love and Islam</i> Wilson, G. Willow 2010	Memoir Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Connecticut College (CT)	<i>Silent Spring</i> Carson, Rachel 1962	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature
Corning Community College (NY)	<i>Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By in America</i> Ehrenreich, Barbara 2001	Nonfiction America/Americans Poverty
Cosumnes River College (CA)	<i>Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder</i> Louv, Richard 2005	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Cuesta College (CA)	<i>The Barbarian Nurseries</i> Tobar, Héctor 2011	Novel Ethnic Identity Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i>
Cumberland University (TN)	<i>The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead</i> Callahan, David 2004	Nonfiction America/Americans Career Advice/Success
CUNY Baruch College (NY)	<i>Everything I Never Told You</i> Ng, Celeste 2014	Novel Ethnic Identity Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Asian American theme</i>
CUNY Brooklyn College (NY)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
CUNY Kingsborough Community College (NY)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
CUNY Queensborough Community College (NY)	<i>Handbook for an Unpredictable Life: How I Survived Sister Renata and My Crazy Mother, and Still Came Out Smiling (with Great Hair)</i> Perez, Rosie 2014	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Hispanic theme
Curry College (MA)	<i>Cycle of Hope: My Journey from Paralysis to Possibility</i> Tricia Downing 2010	Memoir Disability/Disease/Mental Health Sports
Cuyahoga Community College (OH)	<i>So You've Been Publicly Shamed</i> Ronson, Jon 2015	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology
Davenport University (MI)	<i>Grit To Great: How Perseverance, Passion, and Pluck Take You from Ordinary to Extraordinary</i> Thaler, Linda Kaplan and Robin Koval 2015	Nonfiction Career Advice/Success
Davidson College (NC)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment African American theme
Delaware County Community College (PA)	<i>Butterfly Boy: Memories of a Chicano Mariposa</i> González, Rigoberto 2006	Memoir Ethnic Identity Sexual Identity Hispanic theme Protagonist Under 18
Duke University (NC)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment African American theme
East Carolina University (NC)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment African American theme
Eastern Illinois University (IL)	<i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i> Otsuka, Julie 2002	Novel Emigration/Exile Imprisonment/Internment Asian American theme

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Eastern Mennonite University (VA)	<i>Memory of Water: A Novel</i> Itäranta, Emmi 2014	Novel Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Eastfield College (TX)	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>
Eckerd College (FL)	<i>The Thing With Feathers: The Surprising Lives of Birds and What They Reveal About Being Human</i> Strycker, Noah 2014	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature
Elms College (College of Our Lady of the Elms) (MA)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Elon University (NC)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Emory University (GA)	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzi, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Endicott College (MA)	<i>“They Say, I Say”: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing (Third Edition)</i> Graff, Gerald and Cathy Birkenstein 2014	Nonfiction Career Advice/Success
Eureka College (IL)	<i>The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</i> Haddon, Mark 2003	Novel Disability/Disease/Mental Health Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Evergreen State College (WA)	<i>The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future</i> Oreskes, Naomi and Eric Conway 2014	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature
Fairfield University (CT)	Four assignments.	Multiple Assignments Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Immigration <i>African American theme</i> <i>Latin American theme</i>
Fashion Institute of Technology (NY)	<i>Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2008	Nonfiction Globalization/World Poverty
Fayetteville State University (NC)	<i>Buck: A Memoir</i> Asante, M. K. 2013	Memoir Drugs Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Fisk University (TN)	<i>Five Dollars and a Pork Chop Sandwich: Vote Buying and the Corruption of Democracy</i> Berry, Mary Frances 2016	Nonfiction Politics Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
Florida College (FL)	<i>Gettysburg Address</i> Lincoln, Abraham 1863	Speech War
Florida College (FL)	<i>Funeral Oration</i> Pericles 431 BC	Speech War
Florida Gulf Coast University (FL)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Florida International University (FL)	<i>In Order to Live - A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom</i> Park, Yeonmi with Maryanne Vollers 2015	Memoir Emigration/Exile Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes <i>Asian theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Florida Memorial University (FL)	<i>Freedom: Stories Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i> Amnesty International 2011	Short Stories Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
Fordham University, Fordham College at Rose Hill (NY)	<i>The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything</i> Martin, James 2010	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Fort Lewis College (CO)	<i>Apocalyptic Planet: Field Guide to the Future of the Earth</i> Childs, Craig 2012	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Apocalyptic/Dystopian/ Science Fiction
Framingham State University (MA)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment African American theme
Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering (MA)	<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 2013	Novel Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Immigration <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>
George Mason University (VA)	<i>Wild Ones: A Sometimes Dismaying, Weirdly Reassuring Story About Looking at People Looking at Animals in America</i> Mooallem, Jon 2013	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature
Georgetown University (DC)	<i>The Hired Man</i> Forna, Aminatta 2013	Novel Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes War <i>European theme</i>
Georgia College (GA)	<i>This I Believe: The Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2006	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Georgia Institute of Technology (GA)	Eleven+ assignments.	Multiple Assignments Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Georgia State University (GA)	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Goucher College (MD)	<i>Parable of the Sower</i> Butler, Octavia E. 1993	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>African American theme</i>
Grand Valley State University (MI)	<i>The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas</i> Giridharadas, Anand 2014	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>Muslim American theme</i>
Gustavus Adolphus College (MN)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Hamline University (MN)	<i>\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America</i> Shaefer, H. Luke and Kathryn Edin 2015	Nonfiction Poverty
Hampshire College (MA)	<i>Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work</i> Danticat, Edwidge 2010	Memoir Artists' Lives/Arts Immigration <i>African American theme</i> <i>African Diaspora theme</i>
Hartwick College (NY)	<i>Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World</i> Hendley, Doc 2012	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African theme</i>
High Point University (NC)	<i>The American Way of Eating: Undercover at Walmart, Applebee's, Farm Fields and the Dinner Table</i> McMillan, Tracy 2012	Nonfiction Food Poverty
Hiram College (OH)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Hofstra University (NY)	<i>Are We Are All Scientific Experts Now?</i> Collins, Harry 2014	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology
Holy Names University (CA)	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzai, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Hood College (MD)	<i>Positive</i> Rawl, Paige 2014	Memoir Disability/Disease/Mental Health <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Howard Community College (MD)	<i>Saving the Places We Love: Paths to Environmental Stewardship</i> Tillman, Ned 2014	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
Humboldt State University (CA)	<i>The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World</i> Wulf, Andrea 2015	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Media/Science/Technology <i>Latin American theme</i>
Illinois College (IL)	<i>Hamilton</i> Miranda, Lin Manuel 2015	Musical America/Americans Immigration <i>African American theme</i>
Illinois Wesleyan University (IL)	<i>The Underground Girls of Kabul: In Search of a Hidden Resistance in Afghanistan</i> Nordberg, Jenny 2014	Nonfiction Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Indiana University East (IN)	<i>A Chance in the World</i> Pemberton, Steve 2012	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African American theme</i>
Indiana University, Bloomington, Kelley School of Business (IN)	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>
Indiana University, Northwest (IN)	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Indiana University, Southeast (IN)	<i>The Terrorist's Son: A Story of Choice</i> Ebrahim, Zak and Jeff Giles 2014	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation War <i>Muslim American theme</i>
Jacksonville State University (FL)	<i>Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town</i> Krakauer, Jon 2015	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women
Johns Hopkins University (MD)	<i>\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America</i> Shaefer, H. Luke and Kathryn Edin 2015	Nonfiction Poverty
Johnson State College (VT)	<i>Tribe: On Homecoming & Belonging</i> Junger, Sebastian 2016	Nonfiction Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help War
Juniata College (PA)	<i>Station Eleven</i> Mandel, Emily St. John 2015	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction Disability/Disease/Mental Health
Kalamazoo College (MI)	<i>The Turner House</i> Flournoy, Angela 2015	Novel America/Americans Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>African American theme</i>
Kansas State University (KS)	<i>Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream</i> Davis, Joshua 2014	Nonfiction Immigration Media/Science/Technology <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Kent State University (OH)	<i>The Work: My Search for a Life That Matters</i> Moore, Wes 2015	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African American theme</i>
Kentucky Wesleyan College (KY)	<i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i> Otsuka, Julie 2002	Novel Imprisonment/Internment Emigration/Exile <i>Asian American theme</i>
Knox College (IL)	Four assignments.	Multiple Assignments Emigration/Exile Ethnic Identity <i>African theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Lackawanna College (PA)	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzai, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Lafayette College (PA)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
LaGrange College (GA)	<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
Lansing Community College (MI)	<i>Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit</i> Estabrook, Barry 2011	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Food
Lasell College (MA)	<i>Boston Globe</i> (6 month online subscription) 2016	Newspaper
Le Moyne College (NY)	<i>A Room of One's Own</i> Woolf, Virginia 1929	Nonfiction Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women
Lebanon Valley College (PA)	<i>Brain on Fire: My Month of Madness</i> Cahalan, Susannah 2012	Memoir Disability/Disease/Mental Health
Lehigh University (PA)	<i>Stealing Buddha's Dinner</i> Nguyen, Bich Minh 2007	Memoir Food Immigration <i>Asian American theme</i>
Lehigh University (PA)	<i>The Dorito Effect</i> Schatzker, Mark 2015	Nonfiction Food Media/Science/Technology
Linfield College (OR)	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction
Lock Haven University (PA)	<i>Make the Impossible Possible: One Man's Crusade to Inspire Others to Dream Bigger and Achieve the Extraordinary</i> Strickland, Bill 2007	Nonfiction Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African American theme</i>

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Lone Star College Kingwood (TX)	<i>The Invention of Wings</i> Kidd, Sue Monk 2014	Novel Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>African American theme</i>
Loyola Marymount University (CA)	<i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> Ozeki, Ruth 2013	Novel Emigration/Exile Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Asian American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Loyola University Chicago (IL)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Luther College (IA)	<i>We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves</i> Fowler, Karen Joy 2013	Novel Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Family Dysfunction/Separation
Lynchburg College (VA)	<i>Fahrenheit 451</i> Bradbury, Ray 1953	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes <i>Film/TV version exists</i>
Marietta College (OH)	<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Marist College (NY)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MA)	<i>Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age</i> Turkle, Sherry 2015	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology
MassBay Community College (MA)	<i>Rise of the Rocket Girls: The Women Who Propelled Us, from Missiles to the Moon to Mars</i> Holt, Nathalia 2016	Nonfiction Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women Media/Science/Technology
Meredith College (NC)	<i>Dimestore: A Writer's Life</i> Smith, Lee 2016	Memoir Artists' Lives/Arts

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Metropolitan State University of Denver (CO)	<i>Three Little Words: A Memoir</i> Rhodes-Courter, Ashley 2007	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Young Adult</i>
Miami University (OH)	<i>Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream</i> Davis, Joshua 2014	Nonfiction Immigration Media/Science/Technology <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Michigan State University (MI)	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Michigan State University (MI)	<i>City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp</i> Rawlence, Ben 2016	Nonfiction Emigration/Exile <i>African theme</i>
Michigan Technological University (MI)	<i>The Postmortal</i> Magary, Drew 2011	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction Medicine/Mortality
Middle Tennessee State University (TN)	<i>For Love of Country: What Our Veterans Can Teach Us About Citizenship, Heroism, and Sacrifice</i> Schultz, Howard and Rajiv Chandrasekaran 2014	Nonfiction Social Activism/ Humanitarianism War
Millersville University (PA)	<i>Disgraced: A Play</i> Akhtar, Ayad 2012	Play Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Muslim American theme</i>
Mills College (CA)	<i>Immigrant Voices: 21st Century Voices</i> Obejas, Achy, and Megan Bayles 2014	Short Stories Immigration
Minnesota State University, Mankato (MN)	<i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i> Otsuka, Julie 2002	Novel Emigration/Exile Imprisonment/Internment <i>Asian American theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Mississippi State University (MS)	<i>Three Little Words: A Memoir</i> Rhodes-Courter, Ashley 2008	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Protagonist Under 18</i> <i>Young Adult</i>
Mississippi University for Women (MS)	<i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i> Woodson, Jacqueline 2014	Memoir Poems Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i> <i>Young Adult</i>
Missouri State University (MO)	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Monroe Community College (NY)	<i>Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream</i> Davis, Joshua 2014	Nonfiction Immigration Media/Science/Technology <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Montana State University (MT)	<i>The Work: My Search for a Life That Matters</i> Moore, Wes 2015	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African American theme</i>
Moravian College (PA)	<i>The Story of Stuff</i> Leonard, Annie 2011	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature
Mount Holyoke College (MA)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Nassau Community College (NY)	<i>Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family</i> Nutt, Amy Ellis 2015	Nonfiction Sexual Identity
New York University (Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development) (NY)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Norfolk State University (VA)	<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 2013	Novel Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Immigration <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
North Carolina State University (NC)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
North Central College (IL)	<i>A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas</i> Berger, Warren 2014	Nonfiction Career Advice/Success Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help
North Idaho College (ID)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Northeastern University (MA)	<i>Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness</i> Kidder, Tracy 2000	Biography Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes Immigration <i>African theme</i>
Northern Arizona University (AZ)	<i>The Underground Girls of Kabul: In Search of a Hidden Resistance in Afghanistan</i> Nordberg, Jenny 2014	Nonfiction Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Northern Illinois University (IL)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Northern Kentucky University (KY)	<i>Where Am I Eating: An Adventure Through the Global Food Economy</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2013	Nonfiction Food Globalization/World
Northern State University (Honors Program) (SD)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Northwestern University (IL)	<i>The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail –but Some Don’t</i> Silver, Nate 2012	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help
Occidental College (CA)	<i>Chávez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story</i> Normark, Don 1999	Nonfiction Ethnic Identity <i>Hispanic theme</i>

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Ohio Northern University (OH)	<i>Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2008	Nonfiction Globalization/World Poverty
Ohio State University (OH)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Oklahoma City University (OK)	<i>The Prince of Los Cucuyos: A Miami Childhood</i> Blanco, Richard 2014	Memoir Artists' Lives/Arts Sexual Identity <i>Latin American theme</i>
Otterbein University (OH)	<i>Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats</i> Iversen, Kristen 2012	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Media/Science/Technology
Owensboro Community and Technical College (KY)	<i>The Art of Racing in the Rain</i> Stein, Garth 2008	Novel Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Disability/Disease/Mental Health
Owensboro Community and Technical College (KY)	<i>Come and Go, Molly Snow</i> Taylor-Hall, Mary Ann 1995	Novel Artists' Lives/Arts Medicine/Mortality
Pace University (NY)	<i>This I Believe: Life Lessons</i> Gediman, Dan and Mary Jo Gediman 2011	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
Pacific Lutheran University (WA)	<i>We Need New Names</i> Bulawayo, NoViolet 2013	Novel Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes Immigration <i>African theme</i>
Pellissippi State Community College (TN)	<i>An Illustrated Book of Bad Arguments</i> Almossawi, Ali 2014	Nonfiction Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help <i>Young Adult</i>
Pennsylvania State University, Abington (PA)	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Pennsylvania State University, Altoona (PA)	<i>The Ocean at the End of the Lane</i> Gaiman, Neil 2013	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction
Pennsylvania State University, Berks (PA)	<i>Living College Life in the Front Row</i> Vroman, Jon 2011	Nonfiction Career Advice/Success
Pennsylvania State University, Brandywine (PA)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Pennsylvania State University, New Kensington (PA)	<i>Flight 93: The Story, the Aftermath, and the Legacy of American Courage on 9/11</i> McMillan, Tom 2014	Nonfiction Disasters War
Pennsylvania State University, University Park (PA)	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction
Piedmont Virginia Community College (VA)	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction
Pomona College (CA)	<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
Princeton University (NJ)	<i>Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality</i> Allen, Danielle 2014	Nonfiction America/Americans Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Providence College (RI)	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzai, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Queens University of Charlotte (NC)	<i>The Barbarian Nurseries</i> Tobar, Héctor 2011	Novel Ethnic Identity Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Latin American theme</i>
Ramapo College (NJ)	<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Regis College, Boston (MA)	<i>Everything I Never Told You</i> Ng, Celeste 2014	Novel Ethnic Identity Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Asian American theme</i>
Rhode Island College (RI)	<i>The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains</i> Carr, Nicholas 2010	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology
Rider University (NJ)	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Rocky Mountain College (MT)	<i>Life After Death</i> Echols, Damian 2012	Memoir Crime and Punishment Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
Roger Williams University (RI)	<i>Ellis</i> JR 2015	Film Ethnic Identity Immigration
Rowan University (NJ)	<i>Americanah</i> Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi 2013	Novel Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Immigration <i>African theme</i> <i>African American theme</i>
Rutgers University, Douglass Residential College (NJ)	<i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i> Otsuka, Julie 2002	Novel Emigration/Exile Imprisonment/Internment <i>Asian American theme</i>
Rutgers University, School of Arts and Science Honors Program (NJ)	<i>Station Eleven</i> Mandel, Emily St. John 2015	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction Disability/Disease/Mental Health
Sacred Heart University (CT)	<i>Behind the Beautiful Forevers: Life, Death, and Hope in a Mumbai Undercity</i> Boo, Katherine 2012	Nonfiction Poverty <i>Asian theme</i>
Saint Louis University (MO)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>

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Saint Mary's College of California (CA)	<i>Breakfast at Sally's: One Homeless Man's Inspirational Journey</i> LeMieux, Richard 2008	Memoir Disability/Disease/Mental Health
Saint Michael's College (VT)	<i>First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers</i> Ung, Lung 2000	Memoir Emigration/Exile Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes <i>Asian theme</i>
Salem State University (MA)	<i>How Does It Feel To Be A Problem? Being Young and Arab in America</i> Bayoumi, Moustafa 2008	Biography Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>Muslim American theme</i>
Salisbury University (MD)	<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Immigration Sports <i>Muslim American theme</i>
Sam Houston State University (TX)	<i>An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth</i> Hadfield, Chris 2013	Memoir Career Advice/Success Media/Science/Technology
San Jose State University (CA)	<i>The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas</i> Giridharadas, Anand 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>Muslim American theme</i>
Santa Clara University (CA)	Three assignments.	Multiple Assignments Career Advice/Success Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help
Seton Hall University (NJ)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Shepherd University (WV)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Siena College (NY)	<i>The Circle</i> Eggers, Dave 2013	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Siena Heights University (MI)	<i>My Orange Duffel Bag: A Journey to Radical Change</i> Bracken, Sam 2012	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Poverty <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Sierra Nevada College (NV)	<i>Into The Beautiful North</i> Urrea, Luis Alberto 2009	Novel Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i>
Skidmore College (NY)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Smith College (MA)	<i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> Ozeki, Ruth 2013	Novel Emigration/Exile Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>Asian American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
South Dakota State University (Van D. and Barbara B. Fishback Honors College) (SD)	<i>Boy Meets Depression: Or Life Sucks and Then You Live</i> Breel, Kevin 2015	Memoir Disability/Disease/Mental Health <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
Southern Methodist University (TX)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Springfield College (MA)	<i>The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2008	Memoir Poverty <i>African American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
St. Bonaventure University (NY)	<i>The Boys in the Bunkhouse: Servitude and Salvation in the Heartland</i> Barry, Dan 2016	Nonfiction Disability/Disease/Mental Health Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
St. Cloud State University (MN)	<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>

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St. Edward's University (TX)	<i>Where Am I Eating: An Adventure Through the Global Food Economy</i> Timmerman, Kelsey 2013	Nonfiction Food Globalization/World
St. John's University (NY)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
Stanford University (CA)	<i>A Paradise Built In Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster</i> Solnit, Rebecca 2010	Nonfiction Disasters Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality
Stanford University (CA)	<i>We Need New Names</i> Bulawayo, NoViolet 2013	Novel Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes Immigration <i>African theme</i>
Stanford University (CA)	<i>We the Animals</i> Torres, Justin 2011	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Hispanic theme</i>
Stony Brook University (NY)	<i>The Book of Unknown Americans</i> Henriquez, Cristina 2014	Novel Disability/Disease/Mental Health Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i>
SUNY Brockport (NY)	<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i> Atwood, Margaret 1985	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/ Science Fiction Feminism/ Sex Discrimination/Women
SUNY New Paltz (NY)	Twelve+ assignments.	Multiple Assignments Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help
SUNY Old Westbury (NY)	<i>A Question of Freedom: A Memoir of Learning, Survival, and Coming of Age in Prison</i> Betts, Dwayne 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>

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SUNY Oneonta (NY)	<i>Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More</i> Mock, Janet 2014	Memoir Sexual Identity African American theme Pacific Islander theme
SUNY Oswego (NY)	<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Immigration Sports Muslim American theme
Susquehanna University (PA)	Fifteen+ assignments.	Multiple Assignments
Tennessee Tech University (TN)	<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality NPR theme
Texas A & M University (TX)	<i>Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis</i> Putnam, Robert 2015	Nonfiction America/Americans Poverty
Texas A & M University, San Antonio (TX)	<i>The Butterfly Effect: How Your Life Matters</i> Andrews, Andy 2010	Nonfiction Career Advice/Success War
Texas A & M University, Texarkana (TX)	<i>Everyone Is African: How Science Explodes the Myth of Race</i> Fairbanks, Daniel J. 2015	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology African theme
Texas A & M University, Texarkana (TX)	<i>White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era</i> Steele, Shelby 2006	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery African American theme
Texas Christian University (TX)	<i>How to Win an Election</i> Quintus Tullius Cicero 64 BC	Nonfiction Politics
Texas State University (TX)	<i>What It Is Like to Go to War</i> Marlantes, Karl 2011	Memoir War
Texas Woman's University (TX)	<i>My Beloved World</i> Sotomayor, Sonia 2013	Memoir Career Advice/Success Latin American theme

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The Citadel (SC)	<i>We Were Soldiers Once... And Young</i> Moore, Harold G., and Joseph L. Galloway 1992	Nonfiction War
The College of New Jersey (NJ)	<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>
The King's College (NY)	<i>Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave</i> Douglass, Frederick 1845	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
Thomas College (ME)	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzai, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Feminism/Sex Discrimination/Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Trinity University (TX)	<i>Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us</i> Moss, Michael 2013	Nonfiction Food Media/Science/Technology
Tufts University (MA)	<i>Lives in Limbo: Undocumented and Coming of Age in America</i> Gonzales, Roberto B. 2015	Nonfiction Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i>
Tulane University (LA)	<i>Asking for It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture—and What We Can Do About It</i> Harding, Kate 2015	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment Feminism/Sex Discrimination/Women
Tuskegee University (AL)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of Alabama, Honors College (AL)	<i>A Land More Kind Than Home</i> Cash, Wiley 2012	Novel Religion/Philosophy/Spirituality
University of Alaska, Anchorage (AK)	<i>The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother</i> McBride, James 1995	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
University of Alaska, Anchorage (AK)	<i>Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet: A Novel</i> Ford, Jamie 2009	Novel Emigration/Exile War <i>Asian American theme</i>
University of Arizona (Honors College) (AZ)	<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
University of Arkansas (AR)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of California, Berkeley (CA)	Twenty options.	Multiple Choices
University of California, Los Angeles (CA)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of California, Merced (CA)	<i>The West Without Water: What Past Floods, Droughts, and Other Climatic Clues Tell Us About Tomorrow</i> Ingram, B. Lynn and France Malamud-Roam 2013	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature
University of California, Santa Barbara (CA)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of Central Florida (FL)	<i>Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference</i> St. John, Warren 2009	Biography Immigration Sports <i>Muslim American theme</i>
University of Cincinnati (OH)	<i>A Deadly Wandering: A Tale of Tragedy and Redemption in the Age of Attention</i> Richtel, Matt 2014	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology Social Activism/ Humanitarianism

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
University of Connecticut (CT)	<i>Sacred Ground</i> Patel, Eboo 2012	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>Muslim American theme</i>
University of Delaware (DE)	<i>When the Emperor Was Divine</i> Otsuka, Julie 2002	Novel Emigration/Exile Imprisonment/Internment <i>Asian American theme</i>
University of Florida (FL)	<i>A Higher Standard: Leadership Strategies from America's First Female Four-Star General</i> Dunwoody, Ann 2015	Memoir Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women War
University of Houston, Downtown (TX)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
University of Houston, Victoria (TX)	<i>The Martian</i> Weir, Andy 2011	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction <i>Film/TV version exists</i>
University of Idaho (ID)	<i>The Soul of an Octopus: A Surprising Exploration into the Wonder of Consciousness</i> Montgomery, Sy 2015	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature
University of Illinois, Urbana- Champaign (IL)	<i>If You Feel Too Much: Thoughts on Things Found and Lost and Hoped For</i> Tworkowski, Jamie 2015	Nonfiction Disability/Disease/Mental Health Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
University of Iowa (IA)	<i>Without You, There Is No Us: My Time with the Sons of North Korea's Elite</i> Kim, Suki 2014	Memoir Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes <i>Asian theme</i>
University of Kansas (KS)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of Kentucky (KY)	<i>Orphan Train</i> Kline, Christina Baker 2013	Novel Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>Native American theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
University of La Verne (CA)	<i>Citizen: An American Lyric</i> Rankine, Claudia 2014	Poetry Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
University of Louisiana, Monroe (LA)	<i>This I Believe II: More Personal Philosophies of Remarkable Men and Women</i> Allison, Jay and Dan Gediman 2008	Nonfiction Religion/Philosophy/ Spirituality <i>NPR theme</i>
University of Louisville (KY)	<i>Hidden America: From Coal Miners to Cowboys, an Extraordinary Exploration of the Unseen People Who Make This Country Work</i> Laskas, Jeanne Marie 2012	Nonfiction America/Americans
University of Maine, Honors College (ME)	<i>The Narrow Road to the Deep North</i> Flanagan, Richard 2013	Novel Imprisonment/Internment War <i>Australian theme</i> <i>Asian theme</i>
University of Mary Washington (VA)	<i>Something Must Be Done About Prince Edward County: A Family, a Virginia Town, a Civil Rights Battle</i> Green, Kristen 2015	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
University of Maryland, Baltimore County (MD)	<i>Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City</i> Pietila, Antero 2010	Nonfiction America/Americans Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery
University of Maryland, College Park (MD)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of Massachusetts, Amherst (MA)	<i>Make Your Home Among Strangers</i> Crucet, Jennine Capó 2015	Novel Education Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i>
University of Michigan (Engineering) (MI)	<i>Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream</i> Davis, Joshua 2014	Nonfiction Immigration Media/Science/Technology <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
University of Michigan, Flint (MI)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of Minnesota, College of Education and Human Development (MN)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of Mississippi (MS)	<i>Ten Little Indians</i> Alexie, Sherman 2003	Short Stories Ethnic Identity <i>Native American theme</i>
University of Montana, Missoula (MT)	<i>The Work: My Search for a Life That Matters</i> Moore, Wes 2015	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African American theme</i>
University of Mount Olive (NC)	<i>The Postmortal</i> Magary, Drew 2011	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction Medicine/Mortality
University of Mount Union (OH)	<i>The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven</i> Alexie, Sherman 1993	Short Stories Ethnic Identity <i>Native American theme</i>
University of Nebraska Omaha (NE)	<i>A Deadly Wandering: A Tale of Tragedy and Redemption in the Age of Attention</i> Richtel, Matt 2014	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
University of New Mexico (NM)	<i>A Cup of Water Under My Bed</i> Hernandez, Daisy 2014	Memoir Sexual Identity Ethnic Identity <i>Hispanic theme</i>
University of New Orleans (LA)	<i>Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother</i> Nazario, Sonia 2006	Biography Family Dysfunction/Separation Immigration <i>Latin American theme</i> <i>Protagonist Under 18</i>
University of North Carolina, Asheville (NC)	<i>How to Fly a Horse: The Secret History of Creation, Invention, and Discovery</i> Ashton, Kevin 2015	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill (NC)	<i>Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End</i> Gawande, Atul 2014	Nonfiction Medicine/Mortality
University of North Carolina, Charlotte (NC)	<i>Find Me Unafraid: Love, Loss, and Hope in an African Slum</i> Odede, Kenney and Jessica Posner 2015	Memoir Education Social Activism/ Humanitarianism <i>African theme</i>
University of North Carolina, Greensboro (NC)	<i>Looking for Palestine: Growing Up Confused In An Arab-American Family</i> Said, Najla 2013	Memoir Ethnic Identity <i>Islamic World theme</i>
University of North Carolina, Pembroke (NC)	<i>Nowhere Else on Earth</i> Humphreys, Josephine 2000	Novel Ethnic Identity War <i>Native American theme</i>
University of North Carolina, Wilmington (NC)	<i>Little Bee: A Novel</i> Cleave, Chris 2008	Novel Immigration <i>African theme</i>
University of Oregon (OR)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of Pennsylvania (PA)	<i>Citizen Kane</i> Welles, Orson 1941	Film America/Americans Media/Science/Technology
University of Portland (OR)	<i>The Moor's Account</i> Lalami, Laila 2014	Novel Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>Islamic World theme</i> <i>Latin American theme</i>
University of Richmond (VA)	<i>Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City</i> Desmond, Matthew 2016	Nonfiction Poverty
University of South Alabama (AL)	<i>The Complete Maus</i> Spiegelman, Art 1991	Biography Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/ Oppressive Regimes Family Dysfunction/Separation <i>European theme</i> <i>Graphic</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
University of South Carolina (SC)	<i>The Measure of Our Success: A Letter to My Children and Yours</i> Edelman, Marian Wright 1992	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery <i>African American theme</i>
University of South Carolina, Aiken (SC)	<i>Anatomy of Injustice: A Murder Case Gone Wrong</i> Bonner, Raymond 2012	Nonfiction Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of South Carolina, Upstate (SC)	<i>In Defense of a Liberal Education</i> Zakaria, Fareed 2015	Nonfiction Education
University of South Florida (FL)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>
University of Tennessee, Chattanooga (TN)	<i>The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks</i> Skloot, Rebecca 2010	Biography Media/Science/Technology Medicine/Mortality <i>African American theme</i>
University of Tennessee, Knoxville (TN)	<i>Leaving Orbit: Notes from the Last Days of American Spaceflight</i> Dean, Margaret Lazarus 2015	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology
University of Texas, Austin (TX)	Fifty-seven options.	Multiple Choices
University of the South (TN)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
University of Vermont (VT)	<i>The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History</i> Kolbert, Elizabeth 2014	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature
University of Virginia (School of Engineering & Applied Science) (VA)	<i>Leaving Orbit: Notes from the Last Days of American Spaceflight</i> Dean, Margaret Lazarus 2015	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology
University of Wisconsin, Madison (WI)	<i>Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City</i> Desmond, Matthew 2016	Nonfiction Poverty

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee (WI)	<i>Fear of a Black President</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2012	Essay Ethnic Identity <i>African American theme</i>
Utah State University (UT)	<i>How We Got to Now: Six Innovations That Made the Modern World</i> Johnson, Steven 2014	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology
Utah Valley University (UT)	<i>The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics</i> Brown, Daniel James 2013	Nonfiction Sports
Utah Valley University (UT)	<i>The Winter's Tale</i> Shakespeare, William 1623	Play Family Dysfunction/Separation
Vanderbilt University (TN)	<i>Strong Inside</i> Maraniss, Andrew 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Sports <i>African American theme</i>
Vassar College (NY)	<i>Four Fish: The Future of the Last Wild Food</i> Greenberg, Paul 2010	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature
Ventura College (CA)	<i>The Martian</i> Weir, Andy 2011	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction <i>Film/TV version exists</i>
Villanova University (PA)	<i>The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History</i> Kolbert, Elizabeth 2014	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature
Virginia Commonwealth University (VA)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (VA)	<i>The Heart and the Fist: The Education of a Humanitarian, the Making of a Navy SEAL</i> Greitens, Eric 2011	Memoir Social Activism/ Humanitarianism War
Wake Forest University (NC)	Thirty-one options.	Multiple Choices

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
Wallace State Community College (AL)	<i>The Art of Racing in the Rain</i> Stein, Garth 2008	Novel Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature Disability/Disease/Mental Health
Wartburg College (IA)	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzai, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Washburn University (KS)	<i>A Highly Unlikely Scenario, or a Neetsa Pizza Employee's Guide to Saving the World</i> Cantor, Rachel 2014	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction Food
Washington Adventist University (MD)	<i>Grit To Great: How Perseverance, Passion, and Pluck Take You from Ordinary to Extraordinary</i> Thaler, Linda Kaplan and Robin Koval 2015	Nonfiction Career Advice/Success Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help
Washington State University (WA)	<i>I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by the Taliban</i> Yousafzai, Malala and Christina Lamb 2013	Memoir Education Feminism/Sex Discrimination/ Women <i>Islamic World theme</i>
Washington State University Vancouver (WA)	<i>Integration Nation: Immigrants, Refugees, and America at Its Best</i> Eaton, Susan 2016	Nonfiction Immigration
Washington University in St. Louis (MO)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Webster University (MO)	Three assignments.	Multiple Assignments Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery
Wesleyan University (CT)	<i>The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness</i> Alexander, Michelle 2009	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
West Los Angeles College (CA)	<i>In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto</i> Pollan, Michael 2008	Nonfiction Social Activism/ Humanitarianism Food
West Virginia University (WV)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Western Carolina University (NC)	<i>The Bright Continent: Breaking Rules and Making Change in Modern Africa</i> Olopade, Dayo 2014	Nonfiction Globalization/World <i>African theme</i>
Western Michigan University (MI)	<i>Station Eleven</i> Mandel, Emily St. John 2015	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction Disability/Disease/Mental Health
Western New England University (MA)	<i>Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption</i> Stevenson, Bryan 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Western Washington University (WA)	<i>Between the World and Me</i> Coates, Ta-Nehisi 2015	Memoir Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>African American theme</i>
Westfield State University (MA)	<i>The Good Food Revolution: Growing Healthy Food, People, and Communities</i> Allen, Will 2012	Memoir Food <i>African American theme</i>
Westminster College (honors program) (PA)	<i>Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends on It</i> Leslie, Ian 2014	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help
Whitman College (WA)	<i>The Empathy Exams</i> Jamison, Leslie 2014	Nonfiction Medicine/Mortality Pursuit of Happiness/ Psychology/Self-Help
William Paterson University (NJ)	<i>The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates</i> Moore, Wes 2010	Memoir Crime and Punishment Poverty <i>African American theme</i>

College/University, State	Book, Author, Year	Genre, Subject Categories, Theme
William Peace University (NC)	<i>The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas</i> Giridharadas, Anand 2014	Nonfiction Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery Crime and Punishment <i>Muslim American theme</i>
Williams College (MA)	<i>The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History</i> Kolbert, Elizabeth 2014	Nonfiction Animals/Environmentalism/ Nature
Winona State University (MN)	<i>A Deadly Wandering: A Tale of Tragedy and Redemption in the Age of Attention</i> Richtel, Matt 2014	Nonfiction Media/Science/Technology Social Activism/ Humanitarianism
Winthrop University (SC)	<i>The Glass Castle: A Memoir</i> Walls, Jeannette 2005	Memoir Family Dysfunction/Separation Poverty
Wright State University (OH)	<i>Pivotal Tuesdays: Four Elections That Shaped the Twentieth Century</i> O'Mara, Margaret 2015	Nonfiction America/Americans Politics
Xavier University of Louisiana (LA)	<i>We Should Never Meet</i> Phan, Aimee 2004	Short Stories Emigration/Exile War <i>Asian theme</i>
Young Harris College (GA)	<i>The Postmortal</i> Magary, Drew 2011	Novel Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction Medicine/Mortality

APPENDIX II: TITLES BY SUBJECT CATEGORY, 2016-2017

America/Americans

Citizen Kane

Hamilton

Hidden America: From Coal Miners to Cowboys, an Extraordinary Exploration of the Unseen People Who Make This Country Work

Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By in America

Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City

Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis

Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality

Pivotal Tuesdays: Four Elections That Shaped the Twentieth Century

The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead

The Turner House

Animals/Environmentalism/Nature

Apocalyptic Planet: Field Guide to the Future of the Earth

Four Fish: The Future of the Last Wild Food

Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder

Memory of Water: A Novel

Saving the Places We Love: Paths to Environmental Stewardship

Silent Spring

Six Degrees

The Art of Racing in the Rain

The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future

The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World

The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History

The Soul of an Octopus: A Surprising Exploration into the Wonder of Consciousness

The Story of Stuff

The Thing With Feathers: The Surprising Lives of Birds and What They Reveal About Being Human

The West Without Water: What Past Floods, Droughts, and Other Climatic Clues Tell Us About Tomorrow

The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story

Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves

Wild Ones: A Sometimes Dismaying, Weirdly Reassuring Story About Looking at People Looking at Animals in America

Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World

Apocalyptic/Dystopian/Science Fiction

A Highly Unlikely Scenario, or a Neetsa Pizza Employee's Guide to Saving the World

Apocalyptic Planet: Field Guide to the Future of the Earth

Fahrenheit 451

Memory of Water: A Novel

Parable of the Sower

Ready Player One

Six Degrees

Station Eleven

The Circle

The Handmaid's Tale

The Martian

The Ocean at the End of the Lane

The Postmortal

Artists' Lives/Arts

Come and Go, Molly Snow

Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work



Dimestore: A Writer's Life

Losing My Cool: Love, Literature and a Black Man's Escape from the Crowd

Spark: How Creativity Works

The Prince of Los Cucuyos: A Miami Childhood

Career Advice/Success

About Our Voices: A Collection of Wisdom from Aquinas TRIO Students

A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas

An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance

Grit to Great: How Perseverance, Passion, and Pluck Take You from Ordinary to Extraordinary

Living College Life in the Front Row

My Beloved World

StrengthsFinder 2.0

The Butterfly Effect: How Your Life Matters

The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead

"They Say, I Say": The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing (Third Edition)

Civil Rights/Racism/Slavery

Americanah

Between the World and Me

Brown Girl Dreaming

Citizen: An American Lyric

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

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption

Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave

Not in My Neighborhood: How Bigotry Shaped a Great American City

Something Must Be Done About Prince Edward County: A Family, a Virginia Town, a Civil Rights Battle

Strong Inside

The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother

The Fire Next Time

The Invention of Wings

The Measure of Our Success: A Letter to My Children and Yours

The Moor's Account

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas

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

Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us

White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era

Crime and Punishment

A Question of Freedom: A Memoir of Learning, Survival, and Coming of Age in Prison

Anatomy of Injustice: A Murder Case Gone Wrong

Asking for It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture—and What We Can Do About It

Between the World and Me

Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption

Life After Death

Midnight in Mexico: A Reporter's Journey Through a Country's Descent into Darkness

Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town

S Street Rising: Crack, Murder, and Redemption in DC

Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion

The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness

The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates

The True American: Murder and Mercy in Texas

Disability/Disease/Mental Health

Boy Meets Depression: Or Life Sucks and Then You Live

Brain on Fire: My Month of Madness

Breakfast at Sally's: One Homeless Man's Inspirational Journey

Cycle of Hope: My Journey from Paralysis to Possibility

If You Feel Too Much: Thoughts on Things Found and Lost and Hoped For

Island of the Colorblind

Life Is Not an Accident: A Memoir of Reinvention

Positive

Station Eleven

The Art of Racing in the Rain

The Book of Unknown Americans

The Boys in the Bunkhouse: Servitude and Salvation in the Heartland

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

Disasters

A Paradise Built In Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster

Flight 93: The Story, the Aftermath, and the Legacy of American Courage on 9/11

One Amazing Thing

Drugs

Buck: A Memoir

High Price: A Neuroscientist's Journey of Self-Discovery That Challenges Everything You Know About Drugs and Society

Midnight in Mexico: A Reporter's Journey Through a Country's Descent into Darkness

S Street Rising: Crack, Murder, and Redemption in DC

Education

Find Me Unafraid: Love, Loss, and Hope in an African Slum

I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by the Taliban

In Defense of a Liberal Education

Losing My Cool: Love, Literature and a Black Man's Escape from the Crowd

Make Your Home Among Strangers

Emigration/Exile

A Tale for the Time Being

City of Thorns: Nine Lives in the World's Largest Refugee Camp

First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet: A Novel

In Order to Live - A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom

We Should Never Meet

When the Emperor Was Divine

Ethnic Cleansing/Genocide/Oppressive Regimes

All the Light We Cannot See

Fahrenheit 451

First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers

In Order to Live - A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom

Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness

The Complete Maus

The Hired Man

The Zookeeper's Wife: A War Story

We Need New Names

Without You, There Is No Us: My Time with the Sons of North Korea's Elite

Ethnic Identity

A Cup of Water Under My Bed

Butterfly Boy: Memories of a Chicano Mariposa

Chávez Ravine, 1949: A Los Angeles Story

Eleanor & Park

Ellis

Everything I Never Told You

Fear of a Black President

Looking for Palestine: Growing Up Confused in An Arab-American Family

Loving Day: A Novel

Nowhere Else on Earth

One Amazing Thing

Sal Si Puedes [Escape if You Can]: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution

Ten Little Indians

The Barbarian Nurseries

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven

Family Dysfunction/Separation

A Chance in the World

Buck: A Memoir

Eleanor & Park

Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother

Everything I Never Told You

Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats

Handbook for an Unpredictable Life: How I Survived Sister Renata and My Crazy Mother, and Still Came Out Smiling (with Great Hair)

Loving Day: A Novel

My Orange Duffel Bag: A Journey to Radical Change

Orphan Train

The Barbarian Nurseries

The Color of Water: A Black Man's Tribute to His White Mother

The Complete Maus

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

The Dinner

The Distance Between Us

The Glass Castle: A Memoir

The Terrorist's Son: A Story of Choice

The Turner House

The Winter's Tale

Three Little Words: A Memoir

We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves

We the Animals

Feminism/Sex Discrimination/Women

A Higher Standard: Leadership Strategies from America's First Female Four-Star General

A Room of One's Own

Asking for It: The Alarming Rise of Rape Culture—and What We Can Do About It

Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide

I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up For Education and Was Shot by the Taliban

Into the Beautiful North

Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town

My Life on the Road

Rise of the Rocket Girls: The Women Who Propelled Us, from Missiles to the Moon to Mars

The Invention of Wings

The Greenwich Village 1913: Suffrage, Labor, and the New Woman

The Handmaid's Tale

The Underground Girls of Kabul: In Search of a Hidden Resistance in Afghanistan

Food

A Highly Unlikely Scenario, or a Neetsa Pizza Employee's Guide to Saving the World

In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto

Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us

Stealing Buddha's Dinner

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

The Dorito Effect

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

Tomatoland: How Modern Industrial Agriculture Destroyed Our Most Alluring Fruit

Where Am I Eating: An Adventure Through the Global Food Economy

Globalization/World

The Bright Continent: Breaking Rules and Making Change in Modern Africa

Where Am I Eating: An Adventure Through the Global Food Economy

Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes

Immigration

Americanah

Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work

Ellis

Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with His Mother

Hamilton

Illegal: Reflections of an Undocumented Immigrant

Immigrant Voices: 21st Century Voices

Integration Nation: Immigrants, Refugees, and America at Its Best

Into the Beautiful North

Little Bee: A Novel

Lives in Limbo: Undocumented and Coming of Age in America

Make Your Home Among Strangers

Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference

Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream

Stealing Buddha's Dinner

Strength in What Remains: A Journey of Remembrance and Forgiveness

The Book of Unknown Americans

The Distance Between Us

We Need New Names

Imprisonment/Internment

The Narrow Road to the Deep North

When the Emperor Was Divine

Media/Science/Technology

A Deadly Wandering: A Tale of Tragedy and Redemption in the Age of Attention

An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth

Are We All Scientific Experts Now?

Citizen Kane

Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends on It

Everyone Is African: How Science Explodes the Myth of Race

Full Body Burden: Growing Up in the Nuclear Shadow of Rocky Flats



How to Fly a Horse: The Secret History of Creation, Invention, and Discovery

How We Got to Now: Six Innovations That Made the Modern World

Leaving Orbit: Notes from the Last Days of American Spaceflight

Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age

Rise of the Rocket Girls: The Women Who Propelled Us, from Missiles to the Moon to Mars

Salt Sugar Fat: How the Food Giants Hooked Us

So You've Been Publicly Shamed

Spare Parts: Four Undocumented Teenagers, One Ugly Robot, and the Battle for the American Dream

Stepping Out

The Dorito Effect

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

The Invention of Nature: Alexander von Humboldt's New World

The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains

The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail –but Some Don't

Medicine/Mortality

Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End

Come and Go, Molly Snow

High Price: A Neuroscientist's Journey of Self-Discovery That Challenges Everything You Know About Drugs and Society

Josie's Story: A Mother's Inspiring Crusade to Make Medical Care Safe

The Empathy Exams

The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

The Postmortal

Politics

Five Dollars and a Pork Chop Sandwich: Vote Buying and the Corruption of Democracy

How to Win an Election

Pivotal Tuesdays: Four Elections That Shaped the Twentieth Century

Poverty

\$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America

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

Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City

My Orange Duffel Bag: A Journey to Radical Change

Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America

Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis

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

The Beautiful Struggle: A Father, Two Sons, and an Unlikely Road to Manhood

The Glass Castle: A Memoir

The Other Wes Moore: One Name, Two Fates

Where Am I Wearing?: A Global Tour to the Countries, Factories, and People That Make Our Clothes

Pursuit of Happiness/Psychology/Self-Help

A More Beautiful Question: The Power of Inquiry to Spark Breakthrough Ideas

An Illustrated Book of Bad Arguments

Curious: The Desire to Know and Why Your Future Depends on It

Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance

Grit to Great: How Perseverance, Passion, and Pluck Take You from Ordinary to Extraordinary

Life Is Good: How to Live with Purpose and Enjoy the Ride

The Empathy Exams

The Road to Character

The Signal and the Noise: Why So Many Predictions Fail –but Some Don't

Tribe: On Homecoming & Belonging

Whistling Vivaldi: And Other Clues to How Stereotypes Affect Us

Religion/Philosophy/Spirituality

31 Hours

About Our Voices: A Collection of Wisdom from Aquinas TRIO Students

A Land More Kind Than Home

A Paradise Built in Hell: The Extraordinary Communities That Arise in Disaster

A Tale for the Time Being

Disgraced: A Play

Our Declaration: A Reading of the Declaration of Independence in Defense of Equality

Parable of the Sower

Sacred Ground

Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion

The Butterfly Mosque: A Young American Woman's Journey to Love and Islam

The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything

The Road to Character

This I Believe: Life Lessons

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

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

Sexual Identity

A Cup of Water Under My Bed

Becoming Nicole: The Transformation of an American Family

Butterfly Boy: Memories of a Chicano Mariposa

Redefining Realness: My Path to Womanhood, Identity, Love & So Much More

The Prince of Los Cucuyos: A Miami Childhood

Social Activism/Humanitarianism

A Deadly Wandering: A Tale of Tragedy and Redemption in the Age of Attention

Find Me Unafraid: Love, Loss, and Hope in an African Slum

Five Dollars and a Pork Chop Sandwich: Vote Buying and the Corruption of Democracy

Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide

For Love of Country: What Our Veterans Can Teach Us About Citizenship, Heroism, and Sacrifice

If You Feel Too Much: Thoughts on Things Found and Lost and Hoped For

In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto

Life After Death

Freedom: Stories Celebrating the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

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

Sacred Ground

Sal Si Puedes [Escape if You Can]: Cesar Chavez and the New American Revolution

Saving the Places We Love: Paths to Environmental Stewardship

The Boys in the Bunkhouse: Servitude and Salvation in the Heartland

The Greenwich Village 1913: Suffrage, Labor, and the New Woman

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

The Work: My Search for a Life That Matters

Wine to Water: A Bartender's Quest to Bring Clean Water to the World

Sports

Cycle of Hope: My Journey from Paralysis to Possibility

Life Is Not an Accident: A Memoir of Reinvention

Outcasts United: An American Town, a Refugee Team, and One Woman's Quest to Make a Difference

Strong Inside

The Boys in the Boat: Nine Americans and Their Epic Quest for Gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics



War

31 Hours

A Higher Standard: Leadership Strategies from America's First Female Four-Star General

All the Light We Cannot See

Flight 93: The Story, the Aftermath, and the Legacy of American Courage on 9/11

For Love of Country: What Our Veterans Can Teach Us About Citizenship, Heroism, and Sacrifice

Funeral Oration

Gettysburg Address

Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet: A Novel

Nowhere Else on Earth

The Butterfly Effect: How Your Life Matters

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

The Hired Man

The Iliad (Books 1-6)

The Narrow Road to the Deep North

The Terrorist's Son: A Story of Choice

Tribe: On Homecoming & Belonging

We Should Never Meet

We Were Soldiers Once...and Young

What It Is Like to Go to War

APPENDIX III: RECOMMENDED BOOKS FOR COLLEGE COMMON READING PROGRAMS

This appendix contains four sections. The first two consist of 100 books the NAS recommends unreservedly for colleges and universities with common reading programs. The first section contains 80 books appropriate in level of difficulty and length for any college freshman. The second section contains 30 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 why it would be a good choice for college common reading.

In compiling the books in these two sections, we had several considerations.²⁰⁴ 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.

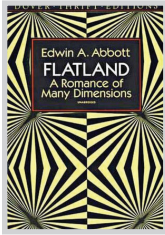
We invite colleges and universities that have common reading programs, and those that are considering the idea, to use these first two sections as a resource. We believe an educationally worthy program could be built around any one of these books. Of course, our list is not intended to be exhaustive. 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.

We have increased the number of our recommended books. We previously recommended 60 books appropriate for any college common reading program, we now recommend 80; we previously recommended 20 books appropriate for more ambitious college common reading programs, we now recommend 30.

We append to this core set of 110 recommendations 20 further suggestions in the categories of Memoirs, Young Protagonists, Science Fiction, and Graphic Novels. We think colleges and universities are too addicted to books in these categories—but if they are going to choose books of these sorts, we think these suggestions should stimulate selection committees to stretch themselves when they consider books to choose from these genres.

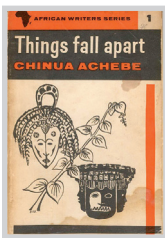
²⁰⁴ The first version of this list was published in Peter Wood and Ashley Thorne, “Read These Instead: Better Books for Next Year’s Beaches,” National Association of Scholars, September 17, 2010, http://www.nas.org/articles/Read_These_Instead_Better_Books_for_Next_Years_Beaches.

80 Recommended Books Appropriate For Any College Common Reading Program



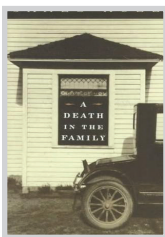
EDWIN ABBOTT ABBOTT – *FLATLAND* (1884)

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.



CHINUA ACHEBE – *THINGS FALL APART* (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 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.



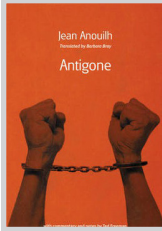
JAMES AGEE – *A DEATH IN THE FAMILY* (1957)

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.



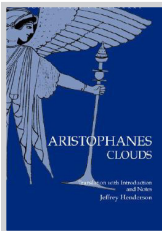
KINGSLEY AMIS – *LUCKY JIM* (1954)

Jim Dixon is a medieval history lecturer (and first-generation college student) who does not like academia, does not like academics, and is faced with the horrible prospect of spending the rest of his life in the pompous, affected world of the university. The funniest campus novel ever written, *Lucky Jim* will inoculate students against the self-importance of college life.



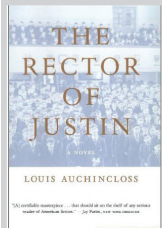
JEAN ANOUILH – *ANTIGONE* (1944)

Anouilh retold Sophocles' examination of what we owe to God and what to the State in Vichy France, where the state collaborated with Nazi overlords. This could have been a simpleminded morality tale, but Anouilh made *Antigone* a rebel from youthful impulse, who later regrets her noble stand when she must suffer for it. He also gave the tyrant Creon wise, persuasive lines in favor of realism and compromise. If Anouilh is ultimately on the side of the Resistance, he knows its flaws, and gives Power its due. *Antigone* will lead students inclined to join a latter-day Resistance to think—and to know they can call on a tradition going back to Sophocles to help them in their meditations.



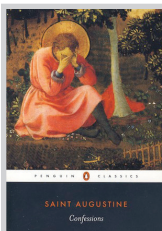
ARISTOPHANES – *THE CLOUDS* (423 B.C.)

Old Strepsiades is worried about the family's debts, so he decides to go to the Thinkery to learn from Socrates how to win an argument with bad ideas. He learns from Socrates how to deny the existence of justice and waltz on his debts—and then is outraged to learn that Socrates has taught his son Pheidippides to defy his parents. Students will learn that mockery of higher education goes a long way back. They can consider how much of the mockery is funny because it's true—and also consider that Socrates was killed in part because the citizens of Athens mistook the caricature in Aristophanes for the real man.



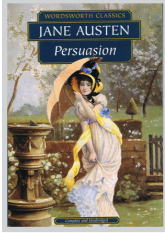
LOUIS AUCHINCLOSS – *THE RECTOR OF JUSTIN* (1964)

Auchincloss narrates from different points of view the life of Frank Prescott, founding headmaster of the fictional New England prep school Justin Martyr. Auchincloss brings us into the WASP world at the heart of American higher education, and shows us, in Frank Prescott's life, how the WASPs ultimately decided to open up their aristocratic world to the broader America. At a time when much is said in ignorance about the exclusions of the old American system of education, *The Rector of Justin* will allow students to begin to make an informed judgment.



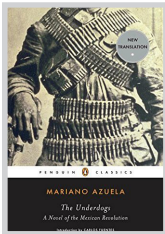
AUGUSTINE – *CONFESSIONS* (398 A.D.)

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.



JANE AUSTEN – *PERSUASION* (1817)

Anne Elliott prudently ended her engagement with Frederick Wentworth at the persuasion of her friend Lady Russell; years later, she meets Wentworth again and is given another opportunity to choose love. The last and finest of Austen’s novels, *Persuasion* tells us that there are second chances in life and love—which students ought to know.



MARIANO AZUELA – *THE UNDERDOGS: A NOVEL OF THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION* (1915)

Azuela’s classic novel of the Mexican Revolution tells about the motivations of revolutionary violence—and how the men who make a revolution are corrupted by the temptations that new power brings to them, and ultimately destroyed by revolution’s cruel chaos. This work provides a classic insight into revolution’s effect on human souls. It also will also be an antidote to shallow, solipsistic multiculturalism, as it reminds students that Mexico is a country with its own history and its own concerns, and not simply a reservoir for emigration to the United States.



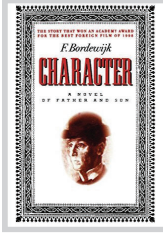
***THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES* (C. 970-930 B.C.)**

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.



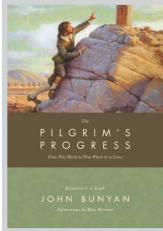
***THE BOOK OF JOB* (C. 1000 B.C.)**

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.



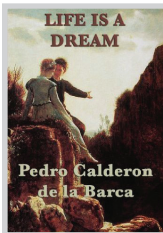
F. BORDEWIJK – *CHARACTER: A NOVEL OF FATHER AND SON* (1938)

The bastard Jacob Katadreuffe's character is formed and malformed by the implacable austerities of his Calvinist mother and ogreish father; by his own endeavors he repays all his debts, financial and spiritual. Students who complain of indebtedness from high tuition bills will benefit from reading about a young man who devotes his life to making good the debts he has assumed.



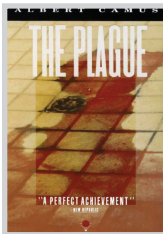
JOHN BUNYAN – *THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS* (1678)

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.



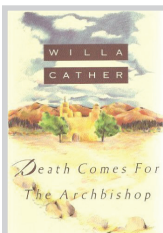
PEDRO CALDERON DE LA BARCA – *LIFE IS A DREAM* (1635)

Segismundo, Prince of Poland, is raised as a savage in a prison, commits murder when he is brought at last to court—and is returned to his prison as he sleeps, to think that he only dreamed he left his jail. Segismundo resolves to act virtuously thenceforth, for we must be good even in our dreams. The greatest and most beautiful of the plays of Spain's Golden Age, Calderon's drama shows how the most profound of doubts can lead us to virtue and to grace.



ALBERT CAMUS – *THE PLAGUE* (1947)

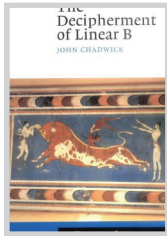
The novel depicts a city in French colonial Algeria that is quarantined during an outbreak of the bubonic plague. Camus describes the divergent ways those trapped in the city cope with the situation. We picked it because it is a compelling depiction of some of the great themes of 20th century existential 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.



WILLA CATHER – *DEATH COMES FOR THE ARCHBISHOP* (1927)

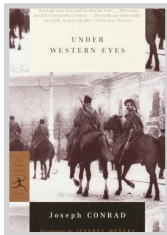
This episodic novel, based on the life of Jean-Baptiste Lamy, depicts the work of a devout French priest sent to reorganize the Catholic mission in New Mexico after the territory has been annexed by the United States. We picked it because (a) Cather's quietly expansive vision of the American landscape 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.



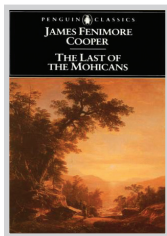
JOHN CHADWICK – *THE DECIPHERMENT OF LINEAR B* (1958)

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*.



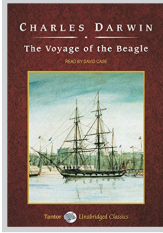
JOSEPH CONRAD – *UNDER WESTERN EYES* (1911)

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.



JAMES FENIMORE COOPER – *THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS* (1826)

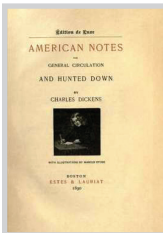
By the time Cooper wrote this novel, the French and Indian War was as distant a memory as World War II is today. The story is a complicated account of the sharp-shooting white orphan Hawkeye, raised by Indians to protect the daughters of a British colonel from the perils of war and the unwanted attentions 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.



CHARLES DARWIN – *THE VOYAGE OF THE BEAGLE* (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.

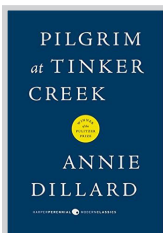
(*The Voyage* went through several editions and one of the augmented later ones might be a better choice.) We picked it because (a) it is a dazzling display of young Darwin’s curiosity and his powers of observation of people and places as well as the natural world, (b) students can benefit from a robust 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.



CHARLES DICKENS – *AMERICAN NOTES FOR GENERAL CIRCULATION* (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

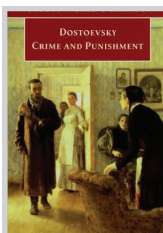
in which Americans continue to take pride, and (c) it raises important questions about celebrity, status, travel, crime, law, and a host of other themes that still preoccupy us.



ANNIE DILLARD – *PILGRIM AT TINKER CREEK* (1974)

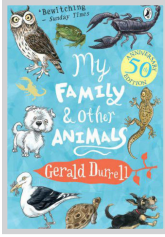
Dillard’s quasi-religious meditation on the natural world around her Appalachian home is an extraordinarily beautiful, lyric example of American nonfiction. We do not think it will challenge the environmentalist catechism prevalent on modern college campuses—but it will let students know that to be an environmentalist is something more than to engage in a career as an environmental activist. It may

also woo them toward both fine writing and an educated study of God, in himself and in the world, as worthy goals in themselves.



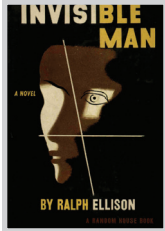
FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY – *THE HOUSE OF THE DEAD* (1862)

Dostoevsky’s semi-autobiographical novel about his exile to a Siberian prison camp, and the spiritual awakening it provoked in him. Dostoevsky describes the brutality of guards and prisoners alike—and the shafts of humanity that they could suddenly display. Dostoevsky shows the reader how one can comprehend the sinfulness of criminals, know them as moral beings responsible for their crimes, and still feel sympathy and compassion for them.



GERALD DURRELL – *MY FAMILY AND OTHER ANIMALS* (1956)

Zoologist Durrell recounts his childhood in the Greek island of Corfu, where he was fascinated by animals and raised by a delightfully eccentric family. Durrell integrates a love of the natural world, a description of the vanished world of 1930s Greece, and a whimsical account of his family, all in a comic semi-memoir of a young boy growing up. Durrell’s book is simply fun, but also a wonderful account of the making of a young scientist.



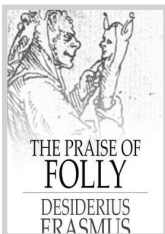
RALPH ELLISON – *INVISIBLE MAN* (1952)

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.



SHUSAKU ENDO – *SILENCE* (1966)

Endo’s historical novel tells the story of a Portuguese Jesuit missionary, Sebastião Rodrigues, sent to join the persecuted Christian community in seventeenth-century Japan. Rodrigues is threatened with torture, apostasizes, but inwardly keeps his faith. We picked this novel to illustrate the effects of demanding that people give up their faith—useful both for those students enduring such demands and those students imposing them.



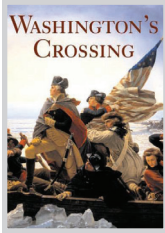
DESIDERIUS ERASMUS – *THE PRAISE OF FOLLY* (1509)

Erasmus’ satirical praise of folly lambasts corrupt churchmen and foolish pedants in equal measure. Erasmus’ *Praise* is witty, a good example of Renaissance erudition, and a useful reminder for students that folly, self-deception, and learning go hand in hand.



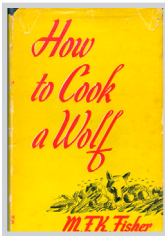
***EVERYMAN* (C. 1500)**

Everyman must die. Friendship, Kindred, Goods, Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and the Five Wits all abandon him on his journey, but Good Deeds and Confession at last bring him to heaven. The play introduces students to late medieval Christian thought, but more importantly gives them a standard by which to judge the vanities of the world. It also provides a hint that education is as much to prepare them to die as it is to live.



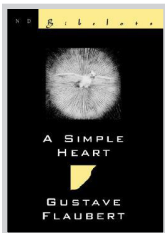
DAVID HACKETT FISCHER – *WASHINGTON'S CROSSING* (2004)

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.



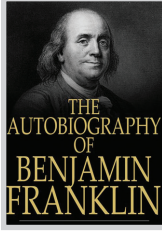
M. F. K. FISHER – *HOW TO COOK A WOLF* (1942)

One of the first great American evocations of the love of food—written during World War II food rationing, when the absence of food increased the love for it. We select this book as an alternate to the growing number of contemporary books on food selected for common readings, for 1) its literary quality; 2) its evocation of the American home front during World War II; 3) its important role in the birth of the food writing genre; 4) because Fisher turns love of food into something more than the hedonism of the well-fed; and 5) because her chapter "How to Keep Alive" gives very practical advice to a college student trying to feed himself on a tight budget.



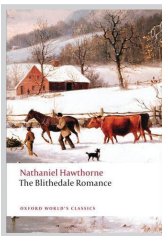
GUSTAVE FLAUBERT – *A SIMPLE HEART* (1877)

The housemaid Felicité lives a quiet life. She loves her mistress' children, cleverer people take advantage of her simplicity, and she loves without apparent reward. At her death, she sees her one companion—her parrot—take on the appearance of the Holy Ghost. We chose this because 1) it is a short masterpiece of realistic fiction; and 2) because students will learn from it that "service" is not a euphemism for political campaigning or other forms of "community organization," but a private devotion that should expect no worldly reward.



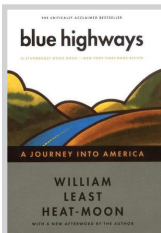
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN – *AUTOBIOGRAPHY* (1791)

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.



NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE – *THE BLITHEDALE ROMANCE* (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.



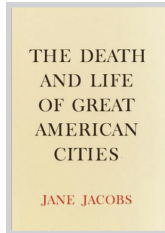
WILLIAM LEAST HEAT-MOON – *BLUE HIGHWAYS* (1982)

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.



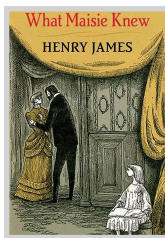
ZORA NEALE HURSTON – *THEIR EYES WERE WATCHING GOD* (1937)

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.



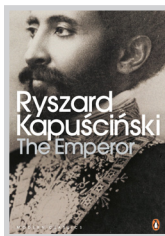
JANE JACOBS – *THE DEATH AND LIFE OF GREAT AMERICAN CITIES* (1961)

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.



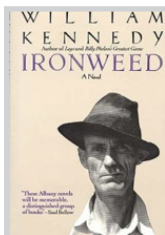
HENRY JAMES – *WHAT MAISIE KNEW* (1897)

Maisie’s irresponsible, divorced parents allow their daughter to be raised among a circle of decadent friends who assume that Maisie is already corrupt. Maisie struggles to keep her innocence intact by mouthing foul words while keeping herself from knowing what they mean—and by finally arranging to remove herself from her parents so as to save herself from inevitable degradation. James’ harrowing narrative makes a psychological thriller out of the struggle to maintain one’s virtue in a world that assumes you are already corrupt. We picked this book because it shows how and why innocence should be fought for, and why its casual destruction is unspeakably cruel.



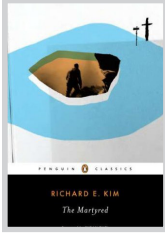
RYSZARD KAPUSCINSKI – *THE EMPEROR: DOWNFALL OF AN AUTOCRAT* (1978)

Kapuscinski’s account of the last years of Haile Selassie is a marvelous report on the politics and society of the last great kingdom of Africa. It is also a penetrating account of a state subjugated to despotism and a cult of personality. Kapuscinski, writing in Communist-suppressed Poland, also intended the portrait as a coded insight into the despotism that ruled his native land. Students should benefit from knowing that foreigners from one land can be interested in foreigners of another land, and that it can provide a cross-cultural message that has nothing to do with America and its politics.



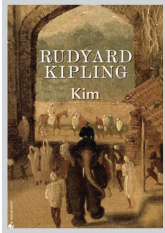
WILLIAM KENNEDY – *IRONWEED* (1983)

Francis Phelan returns to Albany in 1938, a drunken bum who has been running from his ghosts for more than twenty years. Phelan has failed at a great deal in life, but he has an honesty and inner strength that have allowed him to survive, and give him in the end a dollop of redemption. Too many common readings offer shallow, glib tales of poverty and redemption; *Ironweed*, a classic of modern American fiction, offers a mature and moving variation on the theme.



RICHARD KIM – *THE MARTYRED* (1964)

Kim's novel about the persecutions of North Korean Christians during the Korean War is a classic of taut English prose. It is also an extraordinary study of the rival calls of God and the state, of what Christianity offers to its people in times of persecution, and of how they should and actually do behave. Kim's novel is also a valuable corrective to the *M*A*S*H* view of foreign wars, which takes the natives as mere backdrops for the ethical quandaries of Americans.



RUDYARD KIPLING – *KIM* (1901)

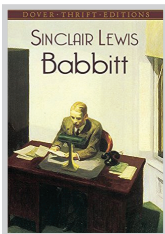
This is a book that vividly portrays British colonial India through a homeless white orphan's eyes. We picked it because it (a) raises provocative questions about contemporary American views of personal identity, multiculturalism and colonialism, and (b) is an extraordinarily artful tale of political 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?



ARTHUR KOESTLER – *DARKNESS AT NOON* (1940)

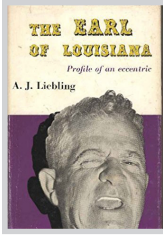
In this novel, Koestler, a former Communist, depicts the world of Stalin's show trials. The protagonist, Rubashov, is a true believer in the Communist system, but is arrested, interrogated, and struggles with the meaning of his life and loyalties as he awaits his certain execution. One of the classics 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.



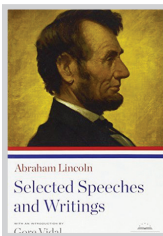
SINCLAIR LEWIS – *BABBITT* (1922)

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?



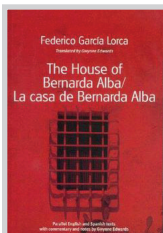
A. J. LIEBLING – *THE EARL OF LOUISIANA* (1961)

In 1959, Louisiana Governor Earl Long was sent to a mental institution, got himself sprung, and came back for a last year of politicking before his untimely death in 1960. New Yorker writer A. J. Liebling came down to Louisiana to write up the show. Liebling’s book is a bravura piece of *New Yorker* reportage, and a love letter to Earl Long’s brand of Louisiana politicking—populism and cornpone, eccentricity and corruption, and Long’s unwillingness to play the diehard opponent of the Civil Rights movement a crucial part of the story. We chose this book for its style, its historical interest, and because it will remind students that politics isn’t just about serious struggle, but can also be sheerly entertaining.



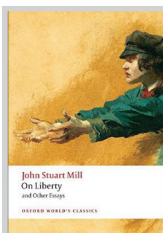
ABRAHAM LINCOLN – *SELECTED SPEECHES AND WRITINGS* (1832-1865, PUBLISHED IN THIS VOLUME IN 2009) (SELECTIONS)

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.



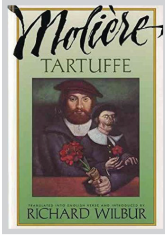
FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA – *THE HOUSE OF BERNARDA ALBA* (1936)

Bernarda Alba’s five daughters are trapped in their house by their tyrannical mother. They desire to escape and to live; the daughter who almost does get away commits suicide when she fails. A stark, elemental tragedy of sexual desire, honor, and sterilizing power, Lorca’s play will remind students that there are no easy solutions to the conflict of human passions.



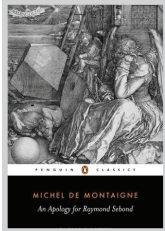
JOHN STUART MILL – *ON LIBERTY* (1869)

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.



MOLIÈRE – *TARTUFFE* (1664)

Tartuffe pretends to be a holy man and imposes himself on the credulous Orgon; Orgon’s folly almost results in the loss of all his wealth to the grasping Tartuffe. *Tartuffe* condemns religious hypocrisy in the first instance, but it is a useful warning in general both against frauds who clothe themselves in ideals and against credulous and excessive enthusiasm for ideals. There are Tartuffes enough on college nowadays, and students will benefit from reading about the archetype.



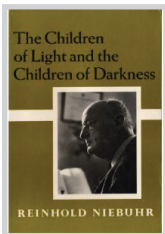
MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE – *AN APOLOGY FOR RAYMOND SEBOND* (1580-1595)

Montaigne’s essay is the greatest single statement of Renaissance skepticism—written by a believing Catholic, who took skepticism to justify his tolerant faith. Aside from illustrating a skepticism that was not dogmatic, Montaigne founded the essay genre, and his enormous learning shows what Renaissance humanism was capable of producing. Montaigne is the heart of the Western tradition: students who start with his *Apology* will be better fitted to approach any part of it, from Homer and the Bible to the present moment.



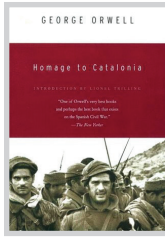
THOMAS MORE – *UTOPIA* (1516)

Thomas More spends an afternoon in a garden while a traveler he’s just met, Raphael Nonsenso, tells him about his journey to the other side of the world. He found a perfect kingdom, called No-Place—Utopia. There’s no poverty in No-Place, everyone’s equal, and it’s just about perfect if you don’t mind the lack of private property, state euthanasia, and the regular colonization and slaughter of No-Place’s neighbors whenever No-Place gets a little crowded. More invented the idea of *Utopia*—some part genuine yearning, some part satire, and mostly a way to make people think and talk about what the best set up for a country is, and how it should be achieved. We chose this because 1) that sort of discussion is what you should be doing in college; and 2) More showed right at the beginning of the Utopian tradition that you should think carefully before trying to turn your country into No-Place.



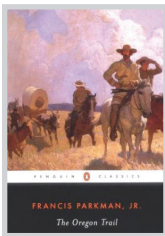
REINHOLD NIEBUHR – *THE CHILDREN OF LIGHT AND THE CHILDREN OF DARKNESS* (1944)

Niebuhr grounds democracy on both man’s capacity to do good and on his ineradicable sinfulness. Modern political theory and modern college politics characteristically ground their activism on a facile belief in human goodness; Niebuhr encourages action in the world that squarely addresses human evil. Students will benefit from grounding their civic engagements on Niebuhr’s sober estimate of the nature of the human soul.



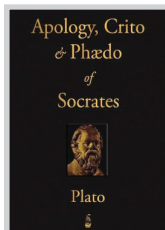
GEORGE ORWELL – *HOMAGE TO CATALONIA* (1938)

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.



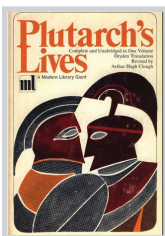
FRANCIS PARKMAN – *THE OREGON TRAIL* (1847)

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.



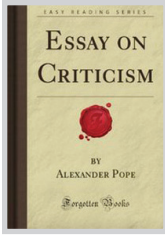
PLATO – *APOLOGY OF SOCRATES AND CRITO* (C. 399-387 B.C.)

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.



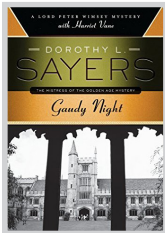
PLUTARCH – *PARALLEL LIVES* (SECOND CENTURY A.D.) (SELECTIONS)

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*.



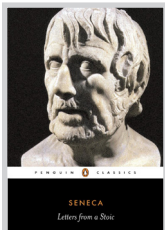
ALEXANDER POPE – *ESSAY ON CRITICISM* (1711)

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.



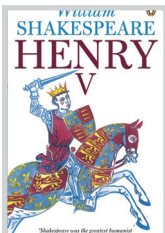
DOROTHY SAYERS – *GAUDY NIGHT* (1935)

Sayers’ mystery-romance is lovely meditation on the nature of female friendship and the proper character of companionate marriage. It’s also an extraordinary tribute to the value of college education—because what is in danger in the novel ultimately is the community of Shrewsbury College itself. This is not an easy book for a freshman—it is not an easy book for anyone—but there is no better one to make a student understand how one can fall in love with a college, and why it is worth loving.



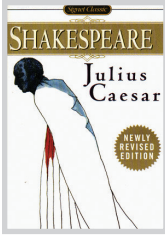
SENECA – *LETTERS FROM A STOIC* (C. 65) [Penguin Classics Edition, Selected Letters]

Seneca wrote these letters to his young friend Lucilius, to help him in his education to wisdom. We chose these letters for three reasons: 1) they convey Roman Stoic philosophy with lucid elegance; 2) they introduce students to a basic ethical text of Western civilization; and 3) most importantly, they state the basic truth that the point of education is to become wise.



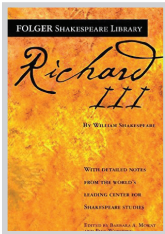
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE – *HENRY V* (C. 1598)

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.



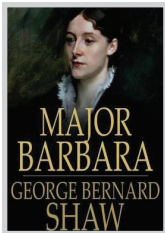
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE – *JULIUS CAESAR* (C. 1599)

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.



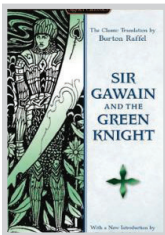
WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE – *RICHARD III* (C. 1592)

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.



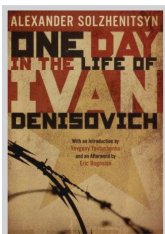
GEORGE BERNARD SHAW – *MAJOR BARBARA* (1905)

Major Barbara Undershaft of the Salvation Army wishes to do well in the world, with a pure heart—and finds that her good deeds end up financed by millionaires who make their profit from drink and guns. College students will benefit from reading Shaw's wicked commentary on the compromises young idealists must make with the world.



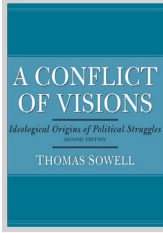
***SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT* (C. 1350-1400)**

Sir Gawain goes on a heroic quest to the castle of the Green Knight—and discovers that he is not as heroic as he thought he was. Fourteenth-century men were quite aware that the self-confidently virtuous could be tempted from honor and virtue, and students can learn that their much-vilified medieval forefathers had wisdom still apposite today.



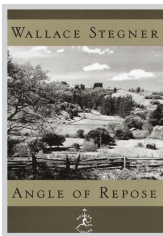
ALEKSANDR SOLZHENITSYN – *ONE DAY IN THE LIFE OF IVAN DENISOVICH* (1962)

The great novel about the Soviet Gulag. Students should know about what Communism inflicted upon the Russian people, and remember that the children of the Gulag guards still rule in Putin's Russia. The novel, beyond that, tells of the survival of some human decency and compassion within one of the most brutal prisons ever devised by man. We picked this book to allow students to consider that man's inhumanity to man is very great—but not the entire story.



THOMAS SOWELL – *A CONFLICT OF VISIONS: IDEOLOGICAL ORIGINS OF POLITICAL STRUGGLES* (1987)

Sowell analyzes the enduring split between those thinkers who envision man as imperfectible, constrained by ineradicable selfishness, and those who envision man as malleable, perfectible, and capable of rising to his natural state of quasi-saintly virtue. Sowell prefers the constrained vision, but we recommend his book because 1) he offers a convincing portrait of the deep intellectual divide that underpins our political divide; and 2) he provides an even-handed portrait of each intellectual camp, which should help members of either camp to understand the other. Students seeking to understand the intellectual underpinnings of modern political debates will find this book a fine introduction.



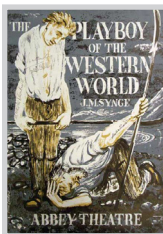
WALLACE STEGNER – *ANGLE OF REPOSE* (1971)

Stegner's novel tells of the American frontier, Victorian culture in America, and the struggle to make both life and art from the harsh materials of the American West—and Stegner's use of the actual letters of Mary Hallock Foote within his novel can introduce students to the idea that literary appropriation of documentary materials is often truer to the novelist's vision than to history. This is also an environmentalist novel as it should be done—not mawkish hagiography of nature, but an exact study of how the characters' actions and souls are shaped by the land of the West.



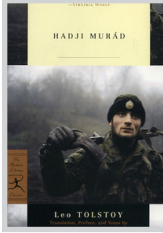
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON – *A FOOTNOTE TO HISTORY: EIGHT YEARS OF TROUBLE IN SAMOA* (1892)

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.



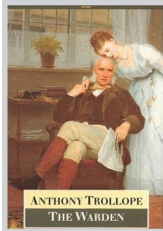
J. M. SYNGE – *THE PLAYBOY OF THE WESTERN WORLD* (1907)

Christy Mahon is a miserable nothing at home—but he's a popular hero when he travels to County Mayo and reveals that he's a brave, daring lad who's killed his own father. Or has he? Synge's play is a wonderful exploration about what makes for popularity—and how quickly it can vanish. Incoming freshmen will benefit from thinking about what it's like to reinvent yourself as a brand new person in your first venture away from home.



LEO TOLSTOY – *HADJJI MURAD* (1912)

Hadjji Murad is a whole Russian novel in miniature, and Tolstoy gives you all of Chechnya and Russia, and their war with one another, in a brief 150 pages. Russia, the Islamic world, and foreign wars are today's headlines—and nothing can tell a student more about them than Tolstoy's slim, dazzling window on those worlds.



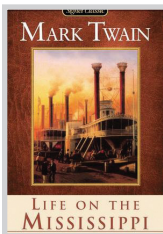
ANTHONY TROLLOPE – *THE WARDEN* (1855)

Young John Bold decides to reform the almshouse of Hiram's Hospital—too much money goes to the warden, not enough to the bedesmen (the people who are supposed to receive the charity). He starts up a campaign to make change, supported ignorantly by the professional reformers of the London media and self-interestedly by the bedesmen. The Warden, touched by conscience, resigns his position—but none of the rest of John Bold's reforms actually happen. We chose this novel 1) because it is vigorous, deft Victorian satire; 2) because it shows that reformers can be ignorant, shallow publicists more interested in letting people know how good they are than in getting results; and 3) it exposes the flaws of defenders of the status quo as well.



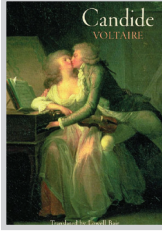
IVAN TURGENEV – *FATHERS AND SONS* (1862)

Young Arkady Kirsanoff comes home to the family estate after graduating from the University of St. Petersburg, accompanied by his new friend Bazarov. Bazarov is a nihilist, a cynic, a representative of the new intelligentsia (an *intelligent*) that rejects all traditional beliefs about family, state, and God—one of the first great representatives of the type. Students will benefit 1) from seeing how the *intelligent* appeared to others when he first appeared; 2) from learning that the *intelligent* is already a type 150 years old, whose virtues and failings have been anatomized long since; and 3) from learning that children didn't just begin rebelling against their parents yesterday.



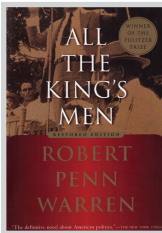
MARK TWAIN – *LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI* (1883)

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.



VOLTAIRE – *CANDIDE* (1759)

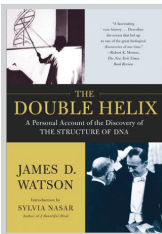
This eighteenth century satire of a young man under the spell of a philosophy that glibly treats the order of the world as “all for the best,” would seem to be superfluous counsel in an age where students are more likely to be surrounded by dire warnings that things are bad and about to get much worse. 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.



ROBERT PENN WARREN – *ALL THE KING'S MEN* (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.

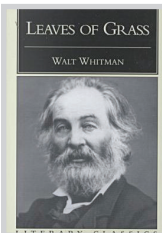
We picked it because (a) it presents political corruption but is ultimately a counsel against viewing politics as mere manipulation, (b) it is a rich and vivid depiction of the insider’s view of political life, and (c) it provides students an occasion to come to terms with their own temptation to think of governance as a raw, anything-goes game.



JAMES D. WATSON – *THE DOUBLE HELIX* (1968)

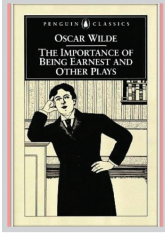
Watson’s first-person account of the discovery of the double helix structure of DNA continues to provoke controversy, especially over Watson’s cursory treatment of Rosalind Franklin, whose x-ray diffraction images of DNA were crucial to the hypothesis that he and his colleague Francis Crick developed. 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.



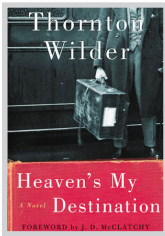
WALT WHITMAN – *LEAVES OF GRASS* (1855-1892)

Whitman’s poem is self-indulgent, sprawling, bizarre, radical, indecently sensual, the inspiration for one hundred fifty years of bad poetry, and the greatest love letter ever written to America and her people. Every American should know this eccentric masterpiece, which identifies America with every softheaded, openhearted ideal in the world. There is no better prophylactic to the anti-American cynicism that too many students will encounter in college.



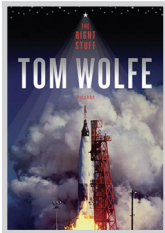
OSCAR WILDE – *THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST* (1895)

This is the funniest play ever written and about nothing at all. Students should know that we also read good books in order to laugh, and that a good education and sheer joy go hand in hand. They should also know that civic engagement isn't everything, that you should always eat your guests' cucumber sandwiches, and that it is important to spend some time not being earnest.



THORNTON WILDER – *HEAVEN'S MY DESTINATION* (1934)

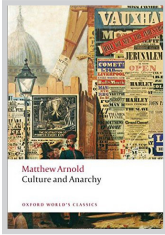
George Marvin Brush is a young fundamentalist travelling salesman wandering through the Midwest of the Great Depression, half Pollyanna, half Don Quixote, and so full of energy that he's a third half Gandhi. Brush gets arrested, tempted, and brought to the brink of despair—but for better or worse is an idealist to the end. A witty study of the follies of American idealism, it brings home the old question of *Don Quixote*: if this is the world of sane people, isn't it better to be a little mad?



TOM WOLFE – *THE RIGHT STUFF* (1979)

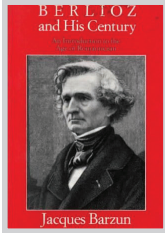
This book examines the lives of test pilots and astronauts, and chronicles the early years of the U.S.-manned space program. We picked it because (a) Wolfe's sympathetic engagement with the pilots brings to life the human side of this hugely complex scientific and technical accomplishment, (b) the book 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.

30 Recommended Books For More Ambitious College Common Reading Programs



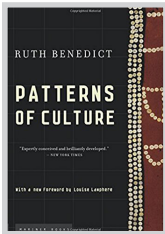
MATTHEW ARNOLD - *CULTURE AND ANARCHY* (1869)

The point of culture is the pursuit of perfection; the uncultured are mere Philistines. Arnold eloquently articulates the High Victorian ideal of culture as singular and normative—a valuable corrective to the modern view of culture as plural and descriptive. Students will learn to consider what they should do during college to acquire culture and leave off Philistinism.



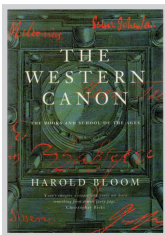
JACQUES BARZUN – *BERLIOZ AND HIS CENTURY: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE AGE OF ROMANTICISM* (1950)

An exemplar of intellectual history, which brings alive the great romantic French composer Hector Berlioz. Barzun shows how to conduct a sympathetic evocation of the past, and he lets us know both what was new and valuable about Romanticism, and how Romantic we still are.



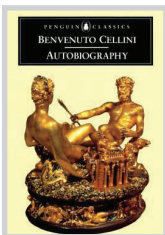
RUTH BENEDICT – *PATTERNS OF CULTURE* (1934)

Benedict's classic of anthropology beautifully describes the varying cultures of the Pueblo, the Kwakiutl, and the Dobu. Students will find an eloquent account of the concept of cultural relativism—and also discover how deeply rooted that concept is in the West's intellectual traditions and academic disciplines.



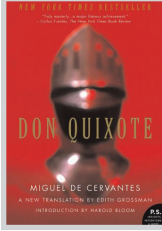
HAROLD BLOOM – *THE WESTERN CANON* (1994)

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



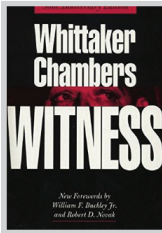
BENVENUTO CELLINI – *THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF BENVENUTO CELLINI* (1558-1563)

Goldsmith, soldier, sculptor, and musician, Cellini's life embodied the gusto and ambition of the Renaissance. Cellini's autobiography is the standard by which to measure milk-and-water memoirs—as his life is the standard by which to measure milk-and-water lives. Especially recommended for colleges with concentrations in the fine arts.



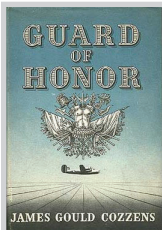
MIGUEL DE CERVANTES – *DON QUIXOTE* (1605)

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.



WHITTAKER CHAMBERS – *WITNESS* (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.



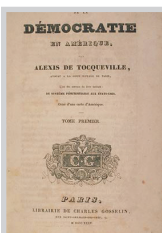
JAMES GOULD COZZENS – *GUARD OF HONOR* (1948)

The heart of Cozzens’ novel is the story of a racial conflict on an Army Air Force base in Florida in 1943; it expands to include the nature of modern warfare, the way military bureaucracy works, the tissue of American race relations built upon a thousand racial insults, the self-serving ruthlessness of the American left in its claim to care about American blacks, and the profound indifference by all other American whites to the sufferings of American blacks. Decidedly un-PC, triggering with a vengeance in its stenography of racial epithets, this is the great novel of America at war.



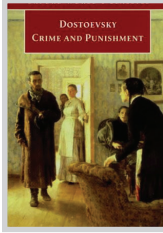
DANIEL DEFOE – *ROXANA: THE FORTUNATE MISTRESS* (1724)

Roxana is a bold, self-reliant woman—who must make her living as a courtesan, and who comes to commit an evil action of tragic consequence to preserve the good life she has finally achieved for herself. A gripping subject for freshman debate about what women owe to themselves when the world tilts the playing field against them, and what prices are worth paying in the search for a good life.



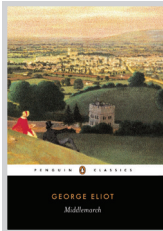
ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE – *DEMOCRACY IN AMERICA* (1838)

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



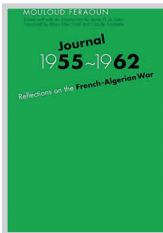
FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY – *CRIME AND PUNISHMENT* (1866)

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



GEORGE ELIOT – *MIDDLEMARCH* (1871-1872)

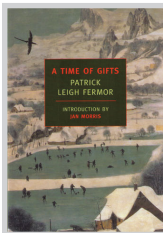
The greatest realistic novel in English. Why not have students read the best?



MOULOUD FERAOUN – *JOURNAL, 1955-1962: REFLECTIONS ON THE FRENCH-ALGERIAN WAR* (1962)

Feraoun was a Muslim Algerian in love with French civilization, sympathetic to the Algerian demand for independence, and a scrupulous observer of the horrors inflicted by both the Algerian nationalist rebels and the French Army during the savage terrorism and counter-terrorism of the Algerian independence struggle.

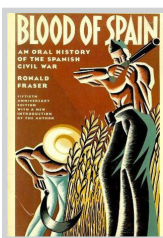
Feraoun refused to simplify his account and he refused to simplify his own commitments; he was killed in the last year of the war precisely because he was a man who refused to embrace brutal simplicities. His journal is necessary reading during our long war against Islamist terror.



PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR – *A TIME OF GIFTS* (1977)

18-year-old Fermor had no idea what to do with himself—so late in 1933 he decided to walk across Europe, from the Hook of Holland to Constantinople. Half a century later he recorded the account in some of the most beautiful prose of the twentieth century. *A Time of Gifts* depicts Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia before the twin deluges of Nazism and Communism descended on them. Students will learn

from Fermor to look at the world around them, seek out its beauty, and try to remember it. They will also learn that they can still do wonderful things if they decide to walk away from college.



RONALD FRASER – *BLOOD OF SPAIN: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR* (1979)

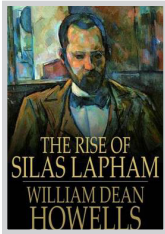
Fraser’s bricolage of first-person oral history and third-person narration is stylistically odd, but this is a riveting account of what it’s like to live through a civil war—the changes of heart, the mixtures of ideology and individual choice, and the brutal chaos that puts paid to virtually every revolutionary dream. Students who

speak blithely of “revolution” and “civil war” should read this account of what a real ideological civil war was like.



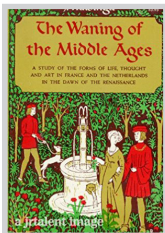
JAROSLAV HASEK – *THE GOOD SOLDIER ŠVEJK AND HIS FORTUNES IN THE WORLD WAR* (1923)

Švejk wants to be a good soldier; it's just that he's a bit slow, so it's not his fault that he happens to spend much of World War One drinking in a bar or wandering around Bohemia trying to find his regiment. Hasek's comic novel is an education for every student who wants to avoid the latest great cause without making a fuss.



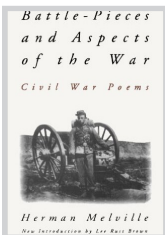
WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS – *THE RISE OF SILAS LAPHAM* (1885)

The first great realistic American novel about a businessman, as the business class began their rise in the American scene. Howells satirically dissected the American businessman from without—but also revealed him from within, with considerable sympathy. The world of American business and businessmen is terrifically important; Howell's novel is an enduringly good introduction.



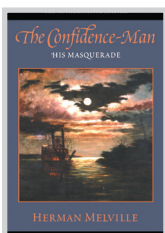
JOHAN HUIZINGA – *THE WANING OF THE MIDDLE AGES* (1919)

A great work of cultural history, bringing alive the world of late medieval Europe. Students will learn how different the world of the past was, what the discipline of history can do, and how well academics can write.



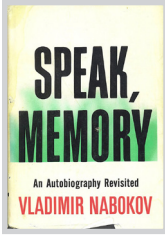
HERMAN MELVILLE – *BATTLE-PIECES AND ASPECTS OF THE WAR* (1866), EXCERPTS

The Civil War was the shattering event of the day, and Melville wanted to make sense of it in poetry. He produced a strange medley—no easy poems, some weird and baffling, others with a power that continues to the present day and brings alive the Civil War—as military event, as historical sea-change, as spiritual thunderclap. A classic of American poetry, it is also required reading for every student who wants to write poetry or fiction that speaks to contemporary events.



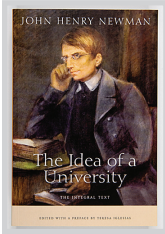
HERMAN MELVILLE – *THE CONFIDENCE-MAN* (1857)

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?



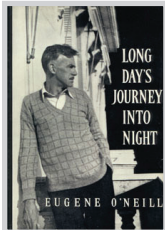
VLADIMIR NABOKOV – *SPEAK, MEMORY* (1951, 1966)

Nabokov recalls his youth, in Tsarist Russia and in exile. A staggeringly beautiful memoir. If students are going to read a memoir, why not one of the best?



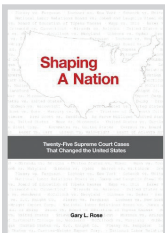
JOHN HENRY NEWMAN, *THE IDEA OF A UNIVERSITY* (1852)

Newman’s articulation of the ideal of liberal education as an end in itself, embedded within a theological framework, is one of the most powerful and influential conceptions of the purpose of the university. This should be a starting point for any student’s understanding of what precisely they are supposed to be doing in college.



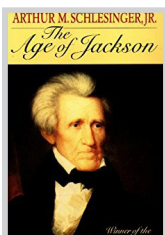
EUGENE O’NEILL – *LONG DAY’S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT* (1941-1942)

Edmund Tyrone spends a day with his family—some alcoholic, some drug-addicted, all self-deluded. At the end of the play, all self-delusions are stripped away—but the knowledge gained is of no use to save them from themselves. This harrowing American tragedy is the ultimate refutation of the psychiatric delusion that we may be redeemed by self-knowledge.



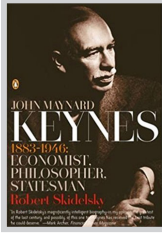
GARY ROSE, ED. – *SHAPING A NATION: 25 SUPREME COURT CASES* (2010)

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.



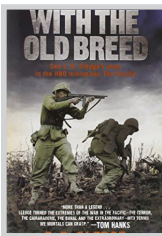
ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, JR. – *THE AGE OF JACKSON* (1945)

Irascible Old Hickory loved the common American, and he would break anything that stood in the way of their prosperity—from banks to Cherokees. He also loved the Union, and died muttering that he should have hanged the secessionist Calhoun. In the age of *Hamilton*, when we excuse plutocracy with a veneer of multiculturalism, too many Americans have forgotten what we owe to Jackson—the storm-god of populist nationalism in the United States. Schlesinger provides the classic apologia for Jackson; students should read it.



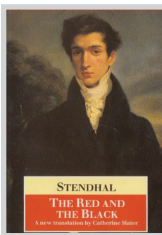
ROBERT SKIDELSKY – *JOHN MAYNARD KEYNES 1883-1946: ECONOMIST, PHILOSOPHER, STATESMAN* (2005)

Skidelsky's biography of Keynes (abridged, but still massive) tells us about the man whose theory still governs the global economy. His personal life ranged from gay affairs in Bloomsbury to marriage to a Russian ballerina; his instant analysis of the economic effects of the Treaty of Versailles predicted World War II twenty years in advance; his General Theory of Employment revolutionized economics and is still the basis of modern economic thought; his economic management carried England through World War II; and at Bretton Woods he helped lay the foundations for the postwar economic order. Skidelsky's biography is indispensable for understanding the architect of the modern economic world.



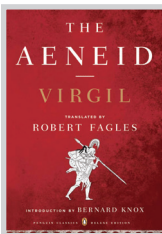
EUGENE B. SLEDGE – *WITH THE OLD BREED: AT PELELIU AND OKINAWA* (1981)

The classic memoir of what it was like to fight as a Marine during World War II—everyday courage in hell. Students should know what young Americans are capable of doing for one another and for their country.



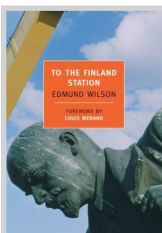
STENDHAL, *THE RED AND THE BLACK* (1830)

Julien Sorel is a young, poor man on the make, longing to conquer a world he considers inferior to him; he ends up dead for his pains. The best refutation to the thesis that French novels must be boring; a handy guide for ambitious students to the dos and don'ts of professional success.



VIRGIL – *THE AENEID* (19 B.C., FAGLES TRANSLATION, 2006)

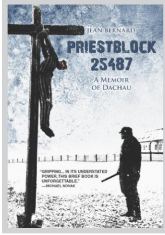
An epic in every sense, *The Aeneid* is one of the masterpieces of Western civilization.



EDMUND WILSON – *TO THE FINLAND STATION* (1940)

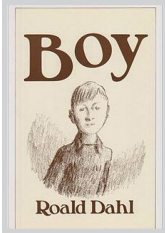
In *To the Finland Station*, Edmund Wilson traces historical, political, and ideological threads from the French Revolution to the Russian Revolution of 1917. The title refers to the St. Petersburg train from which Lenin emerged to take charge of the burgeoning Bolshevik revolt. Wilson's narrative is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

Memoirs



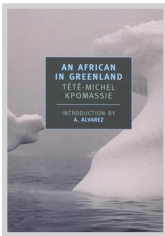
JEAN BERNARD – *PRIESTBLOCK 25487: A MEMOIR OF DACHAU* (2004)

Father Bernard survived Dachau, persecuted by the Nazis for his religion, with courage and grace granted to him by his faith. Bernard’s witness from the seventh circle of the Nazi inferno is accessible to all readers, but is especially recommended to Catholic colleges and universities.



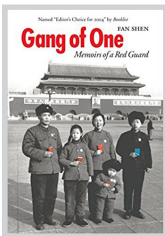
ROALD DAHL – *BOY* (1984)

Dahl’s memoir of his boyhood in 1920s and 1930s is a reminder that the fantastic freedom and cruelty in his stories reflects the reality of that strange place England was in living memory. Students will learn gratefully that no college in America now could possibly be more unpleasant than an English boarding school a century ago.



TETE-MICHEL KPOMASSIE – *AN AFRICAN IN GREENLAND* (1981)

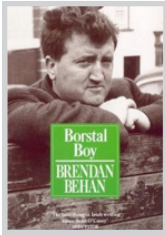
Kpomassie was a teenager in Togo when he almost died in an accident. Recovering, he came across a book about Greenland—and decided he would travel there himself. This book tells of his travel to Greenland, his account of what it was like, and of his experience as the first black man most Greenlanders had ever seen. Students will learn about fulfilling a childhood dream—and about people from different cultures meeting one another, none of whom are American.



FAN SHEN – *GANG OF ONE: MEMOIRS OF A RED GUARD* (2004)

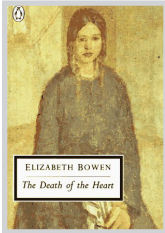
Fan Shen joyfully joined the Cultural Revolution as a Red Guard—and learned that he had joined a murderously evil movement. A memoir of complicity and survival, Fan Shen’s memoir is a useful reminder to students that youthful enthusiasm for a revolutionary cause can often be misplaced.

Young Protagonists



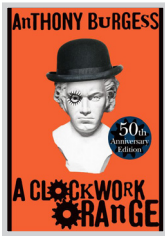
BRENDAN BEHAN – *BORSTAL BOY* (1958)

In 1939, the 17-year-old Behan was caught working as an IRA terrorist; underage, he was sent to an English juvenile prison—the borstal. His memoir of life among young men, halfway between boys and criminals, is beautiful and gripping—as is his account of how he himself changed in prison. Especially recommended to colleges looking for books about the criminal justice system.



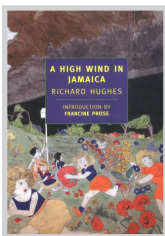
EMMA BOWEN – *THE DEATH OF THE HEART* (1938)

Sixteen-year-old orphan Portia Quayne moves to London. She is an innocent, and struggles unsuccessfully to comprehend her new-met relations and friends—none of whom truly care for her. College freshmen will learn the useful lesson that callous new acquaintances often take advantage of young strangers.



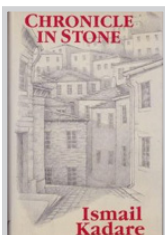
ANTHONY BURGESS – *A CLOCKWORK ORANGE* (1962) (ENGLISH VERSION)

Alex is a young sociopath with a taste for ultraviolence and rape. The state then decides to brainwash him into being good—which leaves him helpless when his victims seek revenge. He is ultimately unbrainwashed—and, in the English version, finally grows up and decides on his own that he should do something better with his life. The great fable on the danger of sentimentalizing the criminally violent—and of the dangers of trying to force people to be good.



RICHARD HUGHES – *A HIGH WIND IN JAMAICA* (1929)

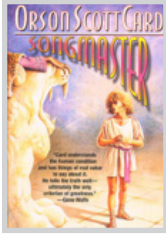
The Bas-Thornton children are captured by pirates in the nineteenth-century Caribbean. They slip easily from such virtue as they knew to a life of moral laxity and murder—and barely know what has happened to them. Students will benefit from a non-sentimentalized view of the moral nature of children, and from an awareness of how easily we may be corrupted in a new environment.



ISMAIL KADARE – *CHRONICLE IN STONE* (1971)

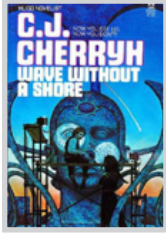
A young boy comes of age in World War II Albania. Kadare interweaves his account of Albania's sufferings with sly humor, and lightens his account with the narrator's innocence—for if the world he sees has terrible things in it, it is also all new to him, and therefore wonderful. Especially recommended to colleges looking for books about children in wartime.

Science Fiction



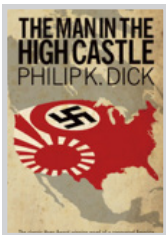
ORSON SCOTT CARD – *SONGMASTER* (1980)

Anset is a beautiful singer who comes to serve Mikal, master of a star-spanning empire. Card’s tale of artistry, high politics, and sexual passion (heterosexual and homosexual) highlights the complications of the sometimes-conflicting demands of these separate realms. A mature science-fiction novel that preaches no simple polemics.



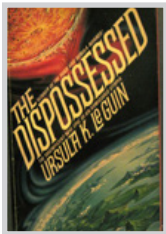
C. J. CHERRYH – *WAVE WITHOUT A SHORE* (1981)

On the planet Freedom, devotees of Sartrean existentialism have set up a world where they decide that what they do not choose to recognize does not really exist. This includes both their criminals and the entire native species of the planet—which decides they have been colonized by madmen. But what happens when a reality impossible to ignore intrudes? A fine novel of philosophical science fiction, which is also a nice parable of excessive commitment to bizarre philosophies.



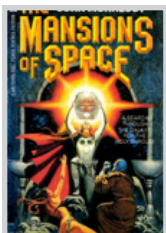
PHILIP K. DICK – *THE MAN IN THE HIGH CASTLE* (1963)

The United States has been occupied by Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan; various Americans, Japanese, and Germans try to stave off a looming nuclear war—and there are some characteristically Dickian surprises as the novel reaches its climax. Possibly the best alternate history novel ever written, it is also a meditation on the American national character, and on how we might have responded to shattering defeat.



URSULA K. LEGUIN – *THE DISPOSSESSED* (1974)

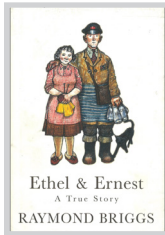
The adventures of the physicist Shevek illustrate the travails of the anarchist society on the planet Anarres, attempting to survive in a solar system dominated by capitalist and communist states. Perhaps the most ambitious exploration of political philosophy in the science fiction genre, Le Guin’s subtitle, “An Ambiguous Utopia,” indicates that utopian dreams never work as planned in reality. On the other hand, they don’t necessarily fail entirely either. Students may take some chastened optimism from this work.



JOHN MORRESSY – *THE MANSIONS OF SPACE* (1983)

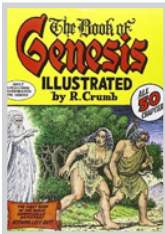
Space-trader Jod Enskeline discovers that the Shroud of Turin (thinly disguised) is lost in space. He goes in search of it, at first in hopes of financial reward—and then as a way to unify all humans and aliens in the search for the Face of God. A laconic, ultimately moving exploration of the workings of providence. Especially recommended for religious colleges.

Graphic Novels



RAYMOND BRIGGS – *ETHEL AND ERNEST* (1998)

Briggs recounts the lives of his parents, working-class Londoners, from *ca.* 1930 to *ca.* 1970. Briggs uses the graphic medium for a serious exploration of history, culture, and everyday life—with birth, marriage, and death. Students will benefit from learning how love of one’s parents can inspire serious artistry.



ROBERT CRUMB – *GENESIS* (2009)

Crumb tries to tell the oldest and most important story of all in the graphic medium. No comic book has ever been more ambitious—and Crumb succeeds remarkably well. Students will learn how the oldest works inspire new creativity and beauty—and learn to discuss what precisely images add to (or subtract from) stories told by words alone.



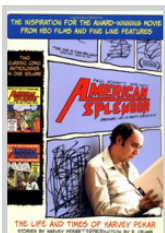
WILL EISNER – *A CONTRACT WITH GOD: AND OTHER TENEMENT STORIES* (1978)

Eisner invented the modern graphic novel with these linked stories of early-twentieth-century Jewish New York. Students will learn how the graphic novel first tried to transcend its pulp origins—and be able to discuss whether it succeeded.



JACOB LAWRENCE – *THE GREAT MIGRATION* (1941)

The story of the African-American Great Migration of the 1910s and 1920s, told in captioned sequential art. Not precisely a graphic novel, but a close precursor to the form. Students will learn how to focus on how precisely art can tell a story, and how necessary words are at all.



HARVEY PEKAR – *AMERICAN SPLENDOR AND MORE AMERICAN SPLENDOR: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF HARVEY PEKAR* (1986-1987)

Pekar’s autobiographical slices-of-life, illustrated by a dozen different comic book artists, show how you can turn the most banal subject matter into artistic memoir. Students interested in memoirizing the quotidian details of their own lives will learn how this can be done well.

APPENDIX IV: 80 RECOMMENDED BOOKS APPROPRIATE FOR ANY COLLEGE COMMON READING PROGRAM: PRESSES AND COSTS

Book	Press	Cost	Cost x 1,000
Edwin Abbott Abbott – <i>Flatland</i> (1884)	Dover	\$3.00	\$3,000
Chinua Achebe – <i>Things Fall Apart</i> (1958)	Anchor	\$7.34	\$7,340
James Agee – <i>A Death in the Family</i> (1957)	Penguin	\$11.18	\$11,180
Kingsley Amis – <i>Lucky Jim</i> (1954)	NYRB Classics	\$9.34	\$9,340
Jean Anouilh - <i>Antigone</i> (1944)	A & C Black Publishers, Ltd.	\$11.56	\$11,560
Aristophanes – <i>The Clouds</i> (423 B.C.)	Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.	\$11.00	\$11,000
Louis Auchincloss – <i>The Rector of Justin</i> (1964)	Mariner	\$11.35	\$11,350
Augustine – <i>Confessions</i> (398 A.D.)	Dover	\$6.00	\$6,000
Jane Austen – <i>Persuasion</i> (1817)	Dover	\$5.00	\$5,000
Mariano Azuela – <i>The Underdogs: A Novel of the Mexican Revolution</i> (1915)	Penguin	\$8.07	\$8,070
<i>The Book of Ecclesiastes</i> (C. 970-930 B.C.) (Robert Alter translation)	Norton	\$14.46	\$14,460
<i>The Book of Job</i> (C. 1000 B.C.) (Robert Alter translation)	Norton	\$14.46	\$14,460
F. Bordewijk – <i>Character: A Novel of Father and Son</i> (1938)	Dee	\$19.95	\$19,950
John Bunyan – <i>The Pilgrim’s Progress</i> (1678)	Dover	\$7.00	\$7,000
Pedro Calderon De La Barca – <i>Life is a Dream</i> (1635)	Dover	\$3.50	\$3,500
Albert Camus – <i>The Plague</i> (1947)	Vintage	\$9.14	\$9,140
Willa Cather – <i>Death Comes for the Archbishop</i> (1927)	Vintage	\$9.51	\$9,510
John Chadwick – <i>The Decipherment of Linear B</i> (1958)	Canto	\$19.99	\$19,990
Joseph Conrad – <i>Under Western Eyes</i> (1911)	Dover	\$3.00	\$3,000
James Fenimore Cooper – <i>The Last of the Mohicans</i> (1826)	Dover	\$5.00	\$5,000

Charles Darwin – <i>The Voyage of the Beagle</i> (1839)	Penguin	\$11.26	\$11,260
Charles Dickens – <i>American Notes for General Circulation</i> (1842)	Penguin	\$15.00	\$15,000
Annie Dillard – <i>Pilgrim at Tinker Creek</i> (1974)	Harper	\$10.00	\$10,000
Fyodor Dostoevsky – <i>The House of the Dead</i>	Dover	\$4.50	\$4,500
Gerald Durrell – <i>My Family and Other Animals</i> (1956)	Macmillan	\$9.64	\$9,640
Ralph Ellison – <i>Invisible Man</i> (1952)	Vintage	\$9.75	\$9,750
Shusaku Endo – <i>Silence</i> (1966)	Picador	\$9.52	\$9,520
Desiderius Erasmus – <i>The Praise of Folly</i> (1509)	Dover	\$3.00	\$3,000
<i>Everyman</i> (C. 1500)	Dover	\$3.00	\$3,000
David Hackett Fischer – <i>Washington’s Crossing</i> (2004)	Oxford	\$15.16	\$15,160
M. F. K. Fisher - <i>How To Cook a Wolf</i>	North Point Press	\$10.66	\$10,660
Gustave Flaubert – <i>A Simple Heart</i> (1877)	New Directions Biblot	\$9.48	\$9,480
Benjamin Franklin – <i>Autobiography</i> (1791)	Dover	\$4.00	\$4,000
Nathaniel Hawthorne – <i>The Blithedale Romance</i> (1852)	Dover	\$5.00	\$5,000
William Least Heat-Moon – <i>Blue Highways</i> (1982)	Back Bay	\$11.26	\$11,260
Zora Neale Hurston – <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> (1937)	Harper	\$12.27	\$12,270
Jane Jacobs – <i>The Death and Life of Great American Cities</i> (1961)	Vintage	\$10.46	\$10,460
Henry James – <i>What Maisie Knew</i> (1897)	Dover	\$5.56	\$5,560
Ryszard Kapuscinski – <i>The Emperor: Downfall of an Autocrat</i> (1978)	Vintage	\$10.44	\$10,440
William Kennedy - <i>Ironweed</i> (1983)	Penguin	\$11.95	\$11,950
Richard Kim – <i>The Martyred</i> (1964)	Penguin	\$16.00	\$16,000
Rudyard Kipling – <i>Kim</i> (1901)	Dover	\$4.50	\$4,500
Arthur Koestler – <i>Darkness at Noon</i> (1940)	Scribner	\$10.00	\$10,000
Sinclair Lewis – <i>Babbitt</i> (1922)	Dover	\$6.00	\$6,000
A. J. Liebling - <i>The Earl of Louisiana</i> (1961)	LSU Press	\$17.28	\$17,280

Abraham Lincoln – <i>Selected Speeches and Writings</i> (1832-1865) (Selections)	Library of America	\$14.28	\$14,280
Federico Garcia Lorca – <i>The House of Bernarda Alba</i> (1936)	Dramatists Play Service, Inc.	\$9.00	\$9,000
John Stuart Mill – <i>On Liberty</i> (1869)	Dover	\$4.00	\$4,000
Molière – <i>Tartuffe</i> (1664)	Dover	\$3.00	\$3,000
Michel De Montaigne – <i>An Apology for Raymond Sebond</i> (1580-1595)	Penguin	\$15.00	\$15,000
Thomas More – <i>Utopia</i> (1516)	Dover	\$3.00	\$3,000
Reinhold Niebuhr – <i>The Children of Light and the Children Of Darkness</i> (1944)	University of Chicago Press	\$16.39	\$16,390
George Orwell – <i>Homage to Catalonia</i> (1938)	Mariner	\$12.70	\$12,700
Francis Parkman – <i>The Oregon Trail</i> (1847)	Oxford	\$10.23	\$10,230
Plato – <i>Apology of Socrates and Crito</i> (C. 399-387 B.C.)	Dover	\$5.50	\$5,500
Plutarch – <i>Parallel Lives</i> (Second Century A.D.) (Selections)	Dover	\$6.95	\$6,950
Alexander Pope – <i>Essay on Criticism</i> (1711)	Dover	\$4.00	\$4,000
Dorothy Sayers – <i>Gaudy Night</i> (1935)	Harper	\$10.78	\$10,780
Seneca – <i>Letters from a Stoic</i> (C. 65) [Penguin Classics Edition, Selected Letters]	Penguin	\$8.35	\$8,350
William Shakespeare – <i>Julius Caesar</i> (C. 1599)	Dover	\$3.00	\$3,000
William Shakespeare – <i>Richard III</i> (C. 1592)	Dover	\$4.00	\$4,000
William Shakespeare – <i>Henry V</i> (C. 1598)	Dover	\$3.00	\$3,000
George Bernard Shaw – <i>Major Barbara</i> (1905)	Dover	\$3.50	\$3,500
<i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i> (C. 1350-1400)	Dover	\$4.95	\$4,950
Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn – <i>One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich</i> (1962)	Signet Classics	\$4.28	\$4,280
Thomas Sowell - <i>A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles</i> (1987)	Basic Books	\$14.73	\$14,730
Wallace Stegner – <i>Angle of Repose</i> (1971)	Vintage	\$10.99	\$10,990
Robert Louis Stevenson – <i>A Footnote to History: Eight Years of Trouble in Samoa</i> (1892)	CreateSpace	\$4.99	\$4,990
J. M. Synge – <i>The Playboy of the Western World</i> (1907)	Dover	\$3.00	\$3,000

Leo Tolstoy – <i>Hadji Murad</i> (1912)	Dover	\$7.95	\$7,950
Anthony Trollope – <i>The Warden</i> (1855)	Dover	\$2.00	\$2,000
Ivan Turgenev - <i>Fathers and Sons</i> (1862)	Dover	\$4.50	\$4,500
Mark Twain – <i>Life on the Mississippi</i> (1883)	Dover	\$5.00	\$5,000
Voltaire – <i>Candide</i> (1759)	Dover	\$3.00	\$3,000
Robert Penn Warren – <i>All the King’s Men</i> (1946)	Mariner	\$12.71	\$12,710
James D. Watson – <i>The Double Helix</i> (1968)	Touchstone	\$13.61	\$13,610
Walt Whitman – <i>Leaves of Grass</i> (1855-1892)	Dover	\$3.50	\$3,500
Oscar Wilde – <i>The Importance of Being Earnest</i> (1895)	Dover	\$3.00	\$3,000
Thornton Wilder - <i>Heaven’s My Destination</i> (1934)	Harper Perennial	\$14.99	\$14,990
Tom Wolfe – <i>The Right Stuff</i> (1979)	Picador	\$12.15	\$12,150
Average Cost		\$8.59	\$8,595

APPENDIX V: COMMON READING PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS SPEAK

Owensboro Community and Technical College (Kentucky), Tonya Northenor, Common Reading Committee Co-Chair, Associate Professor of English, MFA

2016-17 COMMON READINGS: MARY ANN TAYLOR-HALL, *COME AND GO*, MOLLY SNOW (1995); GARTH STEIN, *THE ART OF RACING IN THE RAIN* (2008)

1. How did the common reading program get started?

It started before my time here (in Spring 2004) as an idea in the English department to try a kind of common reading in those classes. Once a committee was formed, a few semesters later, the decision-making process became more formal and more departments became involved. Our Common Reading committee has faculty and staff from across campus. Although we usually try, now, to get books for which we can have the author visit, the first choice was Brave New World, followed the next semester by Kentucky writer Silas House's A Parchment of Leaves (House did visit OCTC, and he was our featured speaker also for our 10 year anniversary of the program). We do not always have the author on campus, but like to when possible.

2. What is the program's mission statement? How does it affect book selection?

Here is the mission statement:

Each semester a book is selected as OCTCs Common Reading, with the idea that all participants could read the same material and have common ground for new discussions and mutual interests. While the book choices vary in many ways (different genres, time-periods, subject matters) they are chosen with the intention of expanding the knowledge and perspectives of readers. The background of the selected writers is diverse; however, many Kentucky and regional writers are also included in order to help us appreciate local talent, acknowledge shared concerns, and celebrate our common heritage. All OCTC students, staff, faculty, and interested community members are invited and encouraged to participate by reading the books and attending the related presentations each semester.

We have a commitment to local/regional writers built into our mission statement, and the committee still considers this an important goal. (Both of our choices this year were regional writers, although we've also had academic years where both were more "national" writers). I love the moments when students fully recognize that the successful writer we're reading is from our state or area – to see a success story and hear a voice they can relate to. I think reading about area history, issues, or culture helps students connect to and appreciate their own heritage and community.

We really do make an effort to involve the community, and we have a few community members that regularly make it to Common Reading events. Author events always have a number of community members present.

In the spring of 2008 our program cooperated with several Owensboro organizations to host a BIG READ (Amy Tan’s The Joy Luck Club) which helped us form partnerships we still work with. We were not fortunate enough to have Amy Tan visit, but we had a community-wide Kick Off which over 2000 people attended, featuring demonstrations and hands on activities related to Chinese culture. As another example, when we read Jhumpa Lahiri’s The Namesake, our focal event that semester was that our committee helped host the annual Garba Festival put on by the local Indian-American community. When we brought a Holocaust survivor to campus, about a third of the audience members were from local high schools.

In general, diversity and critical thinking are also important to our committee. For example, future book/author goals include a dystopian novel and possibly literature related to immigration topics.

3. Do you have both academic and non-academic goals in the mission statement? How do you fulfill both, if you do?

When books are considered, we look at many factors. One of which is how practical and useful would the book be in a classroom setting. Sometimes we have decided not to choose a title because the book’s challenging length or structure (for freshman readers) was not worth its payoff. Often we have themes we are interested in pursuing, but it sometimes takes a long time to find the “perfect” book to fit that theme. Another consideration is whether we will be able to develop meaningful events or presentations to pair with that book.

Some of our faculty come up with some creative and innovative assignments to go along with the book. This semester one English teacher has asked her students to do a small volunteer project and to write about the experience. We love it when the book can be useful in not only English classes, but Music, Philosophy, Biology, and so on.

A lot of our non-academic (“beyond” academic maybe?) goals are addressed in the presentations we host each semester which go along with the themes of the chosen book. For example, in the Spring of 2016 we read The Art of Racing in the Rain by Garth Stein. In addition to the author’s reading, we had two presentations by community members. One was a presentation about law enforcement policies when entering a home where dogs are present. Another was a presentation by two Veterans who brought their service dogs to campus to talk about service dog programs and PTSD. We were also hoping to have a dog show, working with our Veterinary students, but it didn’t work out.

4. Do you try to choose works of fiction? Why or why not?

Most of our selections have been fiction, but we have also used non-fiction, anthologies of mixed genres, graphic novels, and poetry. Fiction is often engaging to students (and more familiar than poetry or even essays), and a good novel often brings multiple theme possibilities to the classroom and presentations. Our poetry selections have all been from Kentucky authors, so even if the genre was sometimes more challenging to teach and read, the subject material connected well with our students. For the 10-year anniversary of the September 11th attacks, we chose an anthology with poems, stories, and non-fiction.

This semester (Scott Russell Sanders, Earth Works) we are using our first essay collection. I have liked the option of picking from the selections to find the themes and topics that best suit the classes I'm teaching. Just a few minutes ago, in class, my students were telling me that they always had a negative connotation of what an "essay" was, but that if they'd been assigned essays like these in their prior education they would not have felt that way.

5. Do you try to choose works by local authors? Why or why not?

I have some of this answer above, in number 2, but I will say that we have really enjoyed having local authors on campus. Even the very successful of these authors have been personable, grateful, and cooperative. I believe they appreciate the chance to connect with local readers as much as students can learn from re-considering local matters through their work. As George Ella Lyon put it, the opportunity "completes the arc" between reader and writer. On a more personal level, some of these are the writers who inspired me as a young reader and writer, so it thrills me to bring their work to a new audience.

6. Is the common reading program integrated with other programs in the college?--e.g., service-learning, civic engagement. Why? How does that work?

*Any of these connections are informal. For example, our campus does have a new FYE (First Year Experience) class where they use the Merit online system²⁰⁵ to track events and activities students have participated in on campus. Our events are always considered Merit options, so this cooperation helps initially get students to our events as well as providing them more activities to choose from. We have also co-hosted events with other groups (Cultural Diversity/Global Studies, our student Christian organization, WISE – Women in Support of Education, and others). Sometimes another department will plan an event that connects to the common reading, and we try to help promote those events too (a biofuels presentation during the semester we read Joel Salatin's *Folks, This Ain't Normal*, for example).*

²⁰⁵ Editor's Note: see Owensboro Community & Technical College, Merit Approved, https://owensboro.kctcs.edu/student_life/merit_approved.aspx.

7. How large is the selection committee? Does the size of the committee affect book selection?

The committee size varies, but it is typically between 10 and 20 officially. We also have a lot of active people on campus who have either previously been on the committee or who just want to help with our efforts each semester. For example, our whole library staff is particularly helpful and supportive when we have events or meetings, although only one or two are officially on the committee each year. The library also puts up displays each semester to promote the book and draw attention to resources they have that relate to the book, including other titles by the author.

Sometimes our meetings are very energetic, with a lot of ideas and perspectives to sort through. That can be overwhelming, but is also energizing.

8. Who's on the committee? Do the institutional affiliations of the committee members affect book selection?

The Chairs do not have any official say over who is on the committee. Faculty and staff get to rate their committee assignment preferences, but these are not always able to be honored. As mentioned above, many "unofficial" members also regularly participate but any faculty/staff member could be assigned to the group. One advantage is that a Nursing or Technical faculty, for example, will have a different perspective on how a potential book might be viewed in their program or by their students. Committee members also get an "inside" look at what we're trying to do on campus, and sometimes that has helped create new partnerships, such as presentations related to programs on campus that have never before been involved in the common reading program. We occasionally will have student committee members who have volunteered because they want to help.

9. Are professors willing or reluctant to serve on the committee? What could be done to make them more willing to serve?

Many people are eager to help us with the Common Reading, whether officially on the committee or not. Like any committee that's assigned, some members get removed who wanted to stay (but they can remain involved) and others get added who didn't have this committee as their first choice. Members are occasionally assigned whose workload is unrelated to our overall goals, so naturally they are less involved. One of our challenges is that all of us on campus are very, very busy, so it can be difficult to keep up with the reading involved in looking for and choosing the best books for our goals. Sometimes we create, and then split up, a reading list of potential books we're interested in.

10. Do you try to get faculty to use the common readings in their classes? If so, how?

Using the book is entirely voluntary. We try to select the book as far ahead as possible so we can give people a chance to read and consider whether they'd like to use the book. (Sometimes the timing is complicated by difficulties in securing the author and other obstacles). Some

English faculty, for example, always use the book, while others choose based on what they're teaching that semester and the nature of the book itself. Sometimes faculty in other disciplines only use the book occasionally, if it happens to work well with their subject.

We do try to communicate the best features of the book to the entire campus. This semester, some of the essays related to the changing nature of manual labor and "work" in general. We sent a link to an online version of an essay to some technical faculty who might be able to incorporate that material into their class, even though they are typically unable to use the book itself. Sometimes faculty will bring classes to or promote an event that lines up well with their program (a panel discussion on caregiving, for example, for nursing students).

11. Do you have written assignments, voluntary or required, attached to the common reading? Why or why not?

There aren't currently any campus-wide assignments, although we have tried things like a scavenger hunt before. Teachers using the book find their own best approach to assignments (sometimes varying with each book) and we often share ideas. We do have an online InfoGuide, a database each semester of related website links, and links to articles, essays, and videos, so that anyone teaching the class would have ready-made resources to choose from if interested.

We have a campus literary magazine, and sometimes teachers will ask their students to consider submitting common reading-related material to the journal.

12. How do you assess how well the common reading program works? How do you assess non-academic goals?

Formally, especially as part of our grant, we collect surveys at many of the events and compile the responses. Most assessment is more informal: discussion and written responses from students, committee feedback, etc. Each semester is a different animal for us, and we've done a wide variety of books and presentations, so we try to informally keep track of what kinds of things worked best. We love to have a good turn-out at events, but any event that gets students (as well as colleagues and community members) thinking and talking about important issues is a success.

13. Can you say anything about how much the common reading program, and its associated activities, cost?

The cost varies per semester and per author. A lot of our presentations feature state or local guests, or even faculty and staff, so those are generally free or more affordable. This semester we had an area activist speak about climate change and a Biology professor will speak about wildlife homes and how our on-campus nature center and committee helps with wildlife conservation. Regional authors have usually been very generous offering more-than-fair fees. Some national authors we've wanted to host have been out of our price range and so we have rejected a few desirable books based on speaker fees. (In a few cases, we've chosen

the book and held other activities with no author visit). In a few cases we've been able to secure an author because they were already traveling in the region for other events, so we've been able to share travel expenses.

At times we've had a very small budget. At other times we have been able to secure small grants, such as one from the South Arts program. We were eventually able to get an NEH challenge grant (with many local donors contributing) that has helped us secure future funding, plus we are developing a small mini-grant program to provide a little funding for (Common Reading) related activities, displays, etc. on and off campus. Even with a somewhat better foundation for funding, we are still sometimes unable to afford writers or presenters we would like to invite to campus.

14. What procedures do you have in place on your common reading committees to prevent the common reading from imposing a particular political belief on students?

We have a small "disclaimer" on the website and Infoguide, just to indicate that neither the program or college is advocating for any particular point of view but trying to present diverse perspectives. Typically, in a college context, we are able to have good discussions with students about the material and different viewpoints come from that.

15. What works best about your common reading program?

Helpful colleagues and strong partnerships on and off campus!

A diverse selection of books and authors. In some cases we're presenting perspectives students have not encountered before, and in others we are reminding them of the value of their own culture and communities.

Honestly, one of my favorite aspects of our program is the focus on state and regional writers, for some of the reasons I've expressed above.

16. What would you change if you could? Why?

It would always be nice to have more time to read potential books and consider (and develop) presentations, activities, and assignments which would make each semester beneficial, in and out of the classroom. Everyone involved is either a full-time faculty or staff member (the program has no designated staff of its own). In my own classes, I am always trying to find ways to make the experience of reading the book rewarding - and not just something that has to be done for assignments.

Xavier University of Louisiana (Louisiana), Jason S. Todd, Associate Director of the Center for the Advancement of Teaching & Faculty, Associate Professor of English

2016-17 COMMON READINGS: AIMEE PHAN, *WE SHOULD NEVER MEET* (2004)

1. How did the common reading program get started?

Xavier began including a common reading in its Freshman Seminar classes in 2007, as it was making changes to its Freshman Seminar program. For the first few years, it did not have a clear focus or purpose and was limited solely to the Freshman class. In 2010, Xavier implemented a program called Read Today, Lead Tomorrow, which was a five-year Quality Enhancement Plan designed to improve our students' active and engaged reading across campus. The common reading was incorporated into this program and given a clearer focus and purpose. It also was promoted across campus.

2. What is the program's mission statement? How does it affect book selection?

The common reading program does not have a specific mission statement; however, the book must also have a clear connection to the mission of the university -- the promotion of a more just and humane society.

3. Do you have both academic and non-academic goals in the mission statement? How do you fulfill both, if you do?

Not applicable.

4. Do you try to choose works of fiction? Why or why not?

*We have for the past two years used works of fiction. For a long time, the faculty who teach the Freshman Seminar classes were worried about having to teach fiction; however, our first fiction selection, *Salvage the Bones* by Jesmyn Ward, was so well-received and successful, that those concerns have subsided.*

5. Do you try to choose works by local authors? Why or why not?

Not intentionally, no. Our main criteria for our books is that it must focus on and explore some aspect of social justice. That focus greatly limits the possible titles.

6. Is the common reading program integrated with other programs in the college?--e.g., service-learning, civic engagement. Why? How does that work?

The Freshman Seminar classes do have a service-learning component, and so there is often some overlap, although it is not a requirement.

7. How large is the selection committee? Does the size of the committee affect book selection?
8. Who's on the committee? Do the institutional affiliations of the committee members affect book selection?
9. Are professors willing or reluctant to serve on the committee? What could be done to make them more willing to serve?

We have no formal selection committee, but the steering committee for the Freshman Seminar program does have oversight of the process. We take nominations/suggestions throughout the year from anyone with an idea. Those suggestions are narrowed to a list of 6-10 titles based on whether the titles have a connection to social justice, are appropriate for the program, if the author is possibly available to speak on campus, the cost and availability of the book, etcetera. We then ask everyone on campus (students, faculty, and staff) to vote on their preferred titles.

10. Do you try to get faculty to use the common readings in their classes? If so, how?

It is encouraged. For a number of years we had a grant that enabled us to buy copies of the book for the classes of faculty interested in teaching it.

11. Do you have written assignments, voluntary or required, attached to the common reading? Why or why not?

The Freshman Seminar program uses the book to introduce students to the idea of Writing to Learn, which is a common entry-level approach to Writing Across the Curriculum. The students have several short (200-500 word) informal writing assignments that are in direct response to the reading. The faculty members make up their own specific assignments/prompts. Often these are done as blog posts. We have found that this is an effective way to teach students how to engage a text and to think about it in a more personal way than they do with a textbook. The assignments often encourage students to make connections between the reading and other aspects of their lives -- things they've learned in other classes; personal experiences; current events; etc.

12. How do you assess how well the common reading program works? How do you assess non-academic goals?

For a number of years, while the Read Today, Lead Tomorrow program was in effect, we sampled the writing assignments described above using a common rubric that was designed to measure the degree to which students were engaging with the text. We also used a survey that asked students about their enjoyment of the book and if they thought reading, discussing, and writing about it would have an impact on their personal lives, their academic careers, and their future professional careers.

13. Can you say anything about how much the common reading program, and its associated activities, cost?

Through the Read Today, Lead Tomorrow program, we were able to purchase the book for every student in the freshman class and many others. That was the main cost, around \$8,000 to \$10,000 per year. We also try to bring the author to campus for a lecture. That also costs around \$10,000. Neither of those are necessary for the program to work, however.

14. What procedures do you have in place on your common reading committees to prevent the common reading from imposing a particular political belief on students?

We don't have any procedures in place. The steering committee has some oversight over the selection process, though, and would be able to address this were it ever a possibility.

15. What works best about your common reading program?

That we keep it so closely tied to our mission, and that we use the shared reading as a means of discussing and engaging our mission, I think, is the greatest success of the program. The books that have been deemed least "successful," in terms of how well the students and the campus engaged with them, were not clearly linked to the mission. As a result, those unsuccessful books were seen as busy work by many students, thus leading to the disengagement. The books that have been the most successful have helped our students to understand the mission in ways that force them out of their comfort zones, in ways that make them see that justice and injustice are more complex and more expansive than they originally thought.

16. What would you change if you could? Why?

We need to clarify the purpose of the program, and perhaps develop a mission for it, so that everyone understands why we do it and what we hope to accomplish through it. The university as a whole needs to do a better job of communicating the purpose of the shared reading with the students. We used to mail the books to our incoming students during the summer, but budget changes have ended that part of the program. We used the book as a way to welcome our first-year students to their new academic lives.

I would also like to see the book reaching more of the campus. Some people outside of Freshman Seminar are interested every year, but I think the shared reading can become a means of unifying the entire campus.

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