



## NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER

FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE® AND STUDENTS IN TRANSITION  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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# Opening the Book: Outcomes of First-Year Common Reading Programs

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National Resource Center for

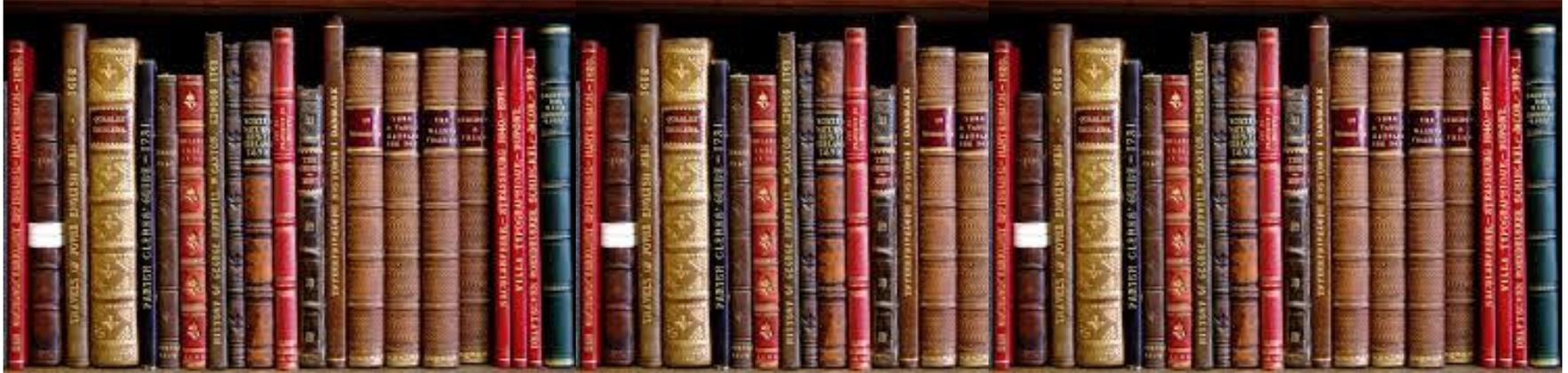
The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

**Ellen Bara Stolzenberg**

Higher Education Research Institute

# Session Outline

- Background and purpose of common reading experiences
- Theoretical Framework
- Outcomes of common reading experiences
- Discussion



# COMMON READING EXPERIENCES: BACKGROUND

# Common Reading Experience: What?

- Book chosen for all entering students (or a targeted group)
- Series of events to promote a common intellectual experience
- Faculty, staff & extended community participate
- Are academically oriented
- Promote reading, critical thinking, & discussion skills
- Focus on a theme generated from the selected work

# Goals of Common Reading Programs

- Most frequently named objectives of CREs:
  - Introduction and modeling of college academic content and intellectual rigor
  - Building community

(Ferguson, 2006; Laufgraben, 2006; Skipper, et al., 2010; Twinton, 2007).



# Other Goals of Common Reading Programs

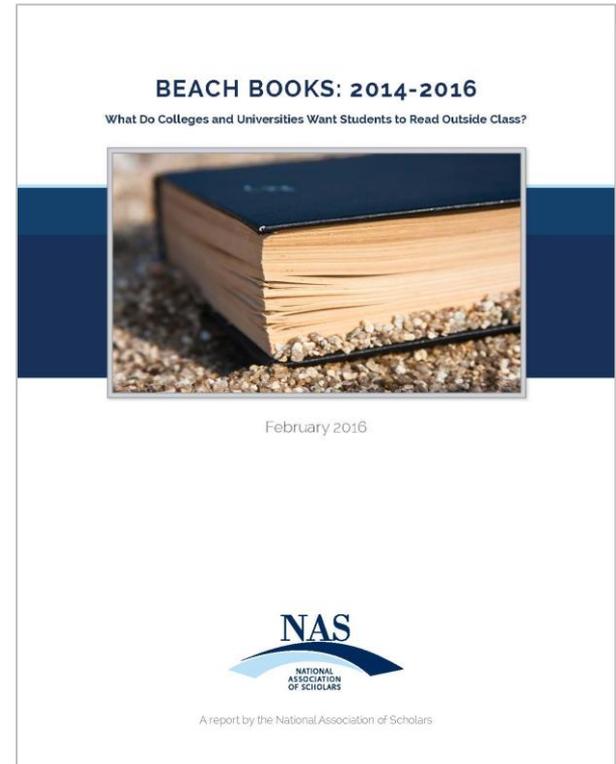
- Diversity and global learning
- Facilitating discourse across difference
- Advancing the understanding of interdisciplinarity
- Reading and reading comprehension

(Laufgraben, 2006; Sanger, Ramsey, & Merberg, 2008; Twinton, 2007)



# Why NOT a Common Reading

- Beach Books, National Association of Scholars (NAS)
- One of the few national studies of common reading selections is conducted biennially
- Conclusions assert that common reading text selections are:
  - Too homogeneous across institutions
  - Too recent
  - Too liberal in their thematic content and perspective
  - Generally lacking in intellectual and academic rigor
  - Rarely include classic literature



(Randall, 2016; Thorne, 2015;  
Thorne, Wood, Plum, & Carter, 2013)

# Why NOT a Common Reading

In 2013, Purdue University abruptly cut CRE over winter break to save \$75,000



**"Let me put it this way: no one produced any evidence it was having great success." "The common reading program is really being replaced by things that we think will be more valuable to incoming students."**

*(Daniels, 2014)*

# Previous Research on CRE

- CREs Positively Related to:
  - Development of first-year student community
  - Introduction of academic content to entering students;
  - Connections between curricular and cocurricular learning experiences
  - Exposure to new ideas, alternative perspectives, and diverse people
  - Information literacy
  - Critical thinking

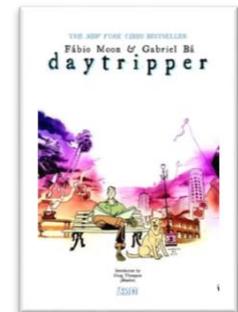
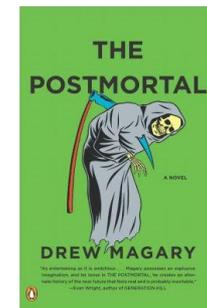
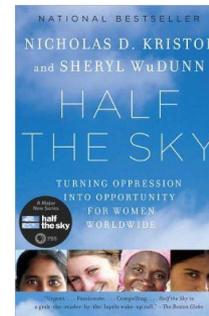
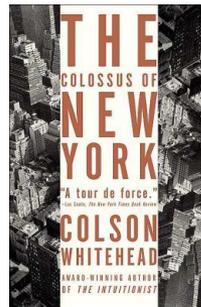
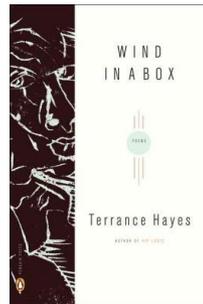
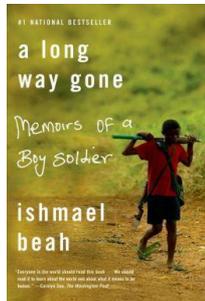
(Delmas & Harrell, 2015; Goldfine, Mixson-Brookshire, Hoerrner, & Morrisey, 2011; Laufgraben, 2006; Mallard, et al., 2008; Sanger, Ramsey, & Merberg, 2008)

The image shows two posters. The left poster is for the 'COMMON READING STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST'. It features a white background with a decorative border of small orange and white squares. The text includes 'INSTRUCTIONS FOR WRITING YOUR I AM MALALA PAPER:', 'WIN \$250 GIFT CERTIFICATE to the 50 Bookstore and a matching \$250 donation to the charitable organization of your choice', and 'ESSAYS ARE DUE Dec. 5, 2014'. The right poster is for 'THE POSTMORTAL' by Drew Magary. It has a light blue background with a grid of small human figures in various colors. The text includes 'THE POSTMORTAL', 'DREW MAGARY ■ AUGUST 19TH, 2013', and 'UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA'. The 'experience' logo is at the bottom right.



# Previous Research on CRE

- Other single institution studies suggest CREs:
  - Have the power to develop empathy and remove stigmas surrounding LGBT issues (Madden, 2015) and mental illness (Feeg, et al., 2014)
  - Achieve their goals and were a worthwhile experience overall to students, faculty, and staff (Mallard, et al., 2008)



# Previous Research on CRE

- Only two multi-institution studies of the impact of CREs on student learning outcomes:
- Twinton (2007)
  - CREs established community, forged commonality among new students, facilitated faculty-student interaction, and encouraged cross-campus collaboration
  - Based on a survey of faculty and staff opinions
- Soria (2015)
  - Participation in common reading programs are “significantly and positively associated with first-year students’ self-reported development in academic skills and multicultural appreciation and competence” (p. 29).
  - Sample of students at large, research-intensive institutions (SERU)

# Theoretical Framework

## Legitimate Peripheral Participation Theory

- Educational environments are communities of practice with masters (faculty and staff) and novices (students)
- On entry to a given community, learners are legitimate peripheral participants and with experience (may) become full participants

Lave & Wenger,  
1991

# Theoretical Framework

## Legitimate Peripheral Participation Theory

- Success in an education system – learning – is full participation
- Students adopt and perform the valued practices of that community and in so doing contribute their own experience and modify practice and shift values.
- To achieve this, meanings and their negotiation are paramount and profoundly connected to identity.

Lave & Wenger,  
1991

# Theoretical Framework

## Legitimate Peripheral Participation in CRPs

- Common reading programs may serve as an initial format for introducing students to the academic community of practice.
- Stated objectives of common reading programs are in line with the perspective of LPP such as introducing desired academic behaviors, setting expectations for college-level work, and fomenting an intellectual community on campus

# Theoretical Framework

## Legitimate Peripheral Participation in CRPs

- Related concepts in the discussion of student transition to college are sense of belonging, academic adjustment, student-faculty interaction, academic skill development, and creating a common first-year experience.
- Students who engage in common reading programs should have greater levels of participation in the academic community of practice and will thereby manifest increased learning, self-efficacy, and self-awareness as members of the intellectual community



# COMMON READING EXPERIENCES: OUTCOMES

# Study Details

- 9,831 students who completed both the 2015 Freshman Survey and 2016 Your First College Year Survey
  - 32% (n=2,656) participated in a CRE
- Blocked Regression analyses testing the impact of CREs on a variety of outcomes after controlling for demographics, background characteristics, and other college experiences

# Is there a Relationship between CRE Participation and...

- Academic Behaviors and Orientation
  - Institution contributed to...
    - Intellectual and Practical Skills
    - Critical Thinking Skills
  - Academic Adjustment
  - Habits of Mind
- Introduction and Participation in Academic Community
  - Sense of Belonging
  - Faculty Interaction
  - Overall Satisfaction



	Intellectual and Practical Skills	Sense of Belonging	Faculty Interaction	Overall Satisfaction
<b>Student Success Programs</b>				
Academic support	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	+	<i>n.s.</i>
Undergraduate research	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	+	<i>n.s.</i>
Learning community	<i>n.s.</i>	+	<i>n.s.</i>	+
FYS - academic inquiry focus	<i>n.s.</i>	+	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>
FYS - adjustment to college life focus	<i>n.s.</i>	+	+	<i>n.s.</i>
<b>Common Reading Experience</b>	+	+	+	+

$p < .05$

	Intellectual and Practical Skills	Sense of Belonging	Faculty Interaction	Overall Satisfaction
<b>Institutional characteristics</b>				
Control (Private)	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	+	<i>n.s.</i>
Selectivity	+	<i>n.s.</i>	-	<i>n.s.</i>
<b>Demographics</b>				
Students of color	<i>n.s.</i>	-	-	-
Sex (Female)	<i>n.s.</i>	+	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>
First-generation status	<i>n.s.</i>	-	-	<i>n.s.</i>
Income	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	-	<i>n.s.</i>
<b>Background characteristics</b>				
First-choice institution	<i>n.s.</i>	+	+	+
HS GPA	+	+	+	+
Need special tutoring or remedial work in reading	<i>n.s.</i>	-	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>
Need special tutoring or remedial work in mathematics	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	+	<i>n.s.</i>
Ultimate degree objective	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	+	<i>n.s.</i>

	Intellectual and Practical Skills	Sense of Belonging	Faculty Interaction	Overall Satisfaction
<b>Experiences with Faculty</b>				
Faculty empower me to learn here	+	+	+	+
Faculty encouraged questions and discussions	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	+	+
Faculty express stereotypes	<i>n.s.</i>	-	+	+
Faculty provided feedback	+	+	+	+

$p < .05$



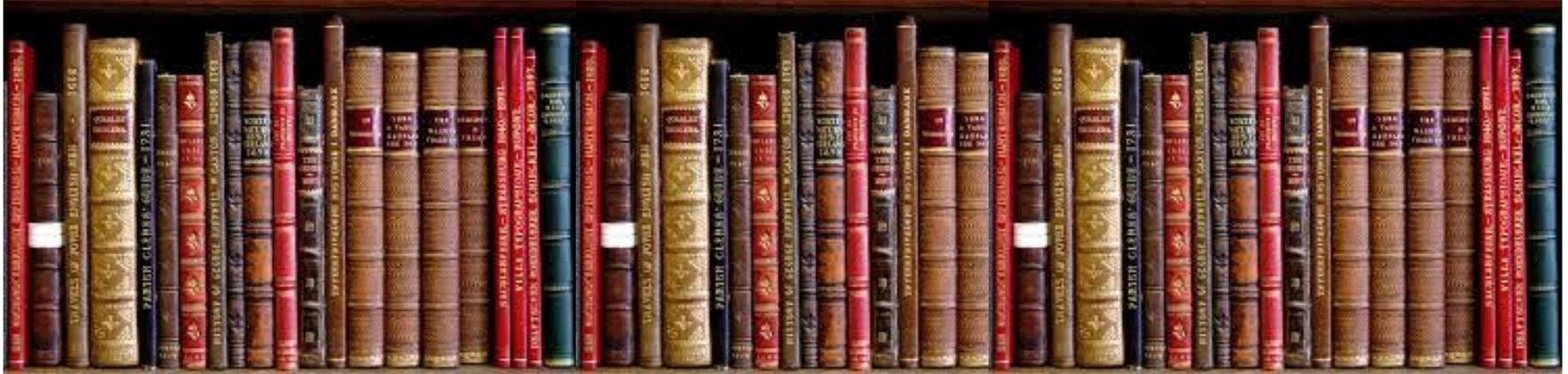
	Intellectual and Practical Skills	Sense of Belonging	Faculty Interaction	Overall Satisfaction
<b>Academic Engagement</b>				
Made a presentation in class	+	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>
Discussed course with students outside of class	+	+	+	<i>n.s.</i>
Worked with classmates on group projects	+	+	+	+
Felt that courses inspired you to think in new ways	+	+	+	+
Exposure to diverse opinions, cultures, and values	+	+	<i>n.s.</i>	+
Contributions were valued	+	+	<i>n.s.</i>	+
Contributed to class discussions	<i>n.s.</i>	+	+	+
Current GPA	+	<i>n.s.</i>	+	+
Academic Disengagement	-	-	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>
Undecided about a major	<i>n.s.</i>	-	<i>n.s.</i>	-

	Intellectual and Practical Skills	Sense of Belonging	Faculty Interaction	Overall Satisfaction
<b>Physiological and Affective</b>				
Felt Isolated from campus life	-	-	-	-
Felt depressed	-	-	<i>n.s.</i>	-
Felt lonely or homesick	<i>n.s.</i>	-	<i>n.s.</i>	-
Felt unsafe on campus	-	-	+	-
Felt worried about health	-	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>
Felt overwhelmed	+	+	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>
Job responsibilities interfered with schoolwork	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	+	-
Family responsibilities interfered with schoolwork	<i>n.s.</i>	<i>n.s.</i>	+	<i>n.s.</i>
Felt family support	<i>n.s.</i>	+	-	<i>n.s.</i>

# CRE Not a Predictor of:

- Habits of mind
- Inst. contribution to critical thinking skills
- Academic adjustment





# COMMON READING EXPERIENCES: CLOSING DISCUSSION

# Conclusions

- Results from study population a mixed bag:
  - CRE Significant and positive predictor of:
    - Sense of belonging
    - Faculty interaction
    - Satisfaction
    - Intellectual and practical skills
    - **Connects with previous multi-institution research NET of other covariates**
  - Non-significant predictor of:
    - Habits of mind
    - Critical thinking skills
    - Academic adjustment
    - **Does not match previous research (single- or multi-institution studies)**

# Conclusions

- Background has an influence on feeling like a member of the academic community:
  - Significant contextual predictors:
    - Students of color (lower sense of belonging, faculty interaction, and overall satisfaction)
    - First-choice institution (higher sense of belonging, faculty interaction, and overall satisfaction)
    - HS GPA positive relationship with all outcomes

# Conclusions

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# Conclusions

- Reframing results
  - CRE a reasonable pathway to meet institutional goals related to:
    - Introduction and Participation in Academic Community
      - Sense of belonging
      - Faculty interaction
      - Satisfaction
    - Intellectual and practical skills

# Conclusions

- Ideas for Future Research
  - Specifying path model based on theoretical framework and previous results
  - Does the book itself matter?
  - How can this be reconceptualized to become more advantageous for certain subgroups?  
Does the Common Read serve as a mechanism for social reproduction?

# Thank You!

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