



the university of alabama at birmingham

Linking a Discussion Book Initiative to Learning Outcomes

Marilyn Kurata, Ph.D.

Director, Core Curriculum Enhancement

Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience
February 8, 2009



Historical Context for the Discussion Book Initiative at UAB



Component of 2005 Quality Enhancement Plan

To promote a more coherent undergraduate education

1. FYE Experience
2. Mid-curricular enhancement of
 1. Writing
 2. Quantitative Literacy
 3. Ethics and Civic Responsibility
3. Capstone

The First Year Experience at UAB



- Discussion Book Initiative
 - Implemented in Fall 2005
- Freshman Learning Communities (and other First Year Experience Courses)
 - Implemented in Fall 2006

UAB Discussion Books



- 2005 *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of Two Cultures*
- 2006 *The Kite Runner*
- 2007 *All Over But the Shoutin'*
- 2008 *Field Notes from a Catastrophe: Man, Nature, and Climate Change*

Discussion Book Components



- Facilitator training
- Freshman Discussion Groups
- Presentation by author
- Campus-wide DB events
 - Link to other campus programs
- Off-campus DB events
- Essay contest
- Collection of original essays

Participation in Freshman Discussion Groups



	<u>% of Freshmen</u>	<u># Facilitators</u>
2005	79%	54
2006	85%	59
2007	82%	69
2008	92%	64

Factors behind an Expanding Discussion Book Initiative



- Campus-wide involvement
- Faculty and Staff-driven
- Presidential endorsement
- Community partners
- Link to QEP learning outcomes
- Assessment & Feedback

Campus-wide Involvement



- Everyone can nominate a book
- Discussion Book Committee includes 21 faculty and staff members
- Freshman Discussion Group facilitators from multiple campus units

Sample Faculty/Staff Feedback



- “The UAB reading program is a well motivated and outstanding concept, and I will support it while I am at UAB in any way I can. Keep after these students. It’s clear they appreciate it!”
- “I thoroughly enjoyed the interaction with the students and was very impressed by their maturity and ability to discuss issues as they arose. If my group is a representative sample of the Freshmen class then we have a great year to look forward to.”
- “As expected, several students either did not read the book or were too diffident to offer opinions, even after being cajoled by their facilitator. Some students made comments that were both provocative and thoughtful and demonstrated that they valued this experience.”

Presidential Endorsement



- Chooses annual book from list of finalists
- Introduces speaker on Discussion Book day and leads a Freshman Discussion Group
- Sends evaluation survey over her signature
- Has Discussion Book link on UAB's home page

Community Partners



- College Night at the Birmingham Museum of Art
- McWane Science Center
 - Downtown Business Discussion Groups
 - Author presentation
- College Night at the Birmingham Zoo

Link to QEP Emphasis on Writing



- Source of writing prompt for EH101 diagnostic and/or EH 102 assessment
- Essay contest for students, faculty, and staff (2005, 2006, 2007)
- *Campus Conversations* (2007, 2008)

Link to QEP Emphasis on Ethics and Civic Responsibility



- Freshman Discussion Groups
 - Difficult dialogues in facilitator training
 - “Rights and Responsibilities” with Discussion Groups
 - Discussion Group questions on relevant social issues
- *Campus Conversations*
- Discussion Book Dialogues

Additional Link to QEP Emphasis on Quantitative Literacy in 2008



Field Notes from a Catastrophe publicized as promoting the necessity for students

- To be quantitatively & scientifically literate
- To discern the legitimacy of resource material
- To value the integrity of scientific inquiry in the service of the common good

Assessing Impact of Discussion Book



- Freshman Discussion Group surveys
- Evaluation forms after campus discussion book events
- Emails, anecdotes, and other informal feedback

Sample Student Discussion Group Survey



To what extent did the FDB & FDB day contribute to your experience and personal development in the following areas?

- Thinking about social, medical, or ethical issues from a different perspective
- Understanding people of other racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds
- Being aware of the impact that global events have on my life in the United States
- Being prepared to engage in difficult dialogues in class or on campus
- Easing the transition into UAB

Student Assessment Data I



% 2005-08 respondents said the DB contributed “quite a bit” or “very much” to ECR components

28-64% their thinking about social, medical, or ethical issues from different perspective

51-75% their understanding of people of other racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds.
28% 2008

52-56% their awareness of global events
35% 2007

Student Assessment Data II



% 2005-08 respondents said the DB contributed “quite a bit” or “very much” to

37-48% Being prepared to engage in difficult dialogues in class or on campus

32-42% Easing the transition into college

49% 2008 understanding importance of being
only quantitatively & scientifically literate

Early Facilitator Discussion Group Surveys



To what extent do you think reading the DB & participating in a FDG contributed to the freshman experience with respect to

Easing the transition into college

Being prepared to engage in difficult dialogues

Building a sense of campus community

To what extent did reading the DB and facilitating a FDG contribute to your experience with respect to

Expanding your understanding of UAB students

Reinforcing your appreciation of UAB's educational mission

Building a sense of campus community

Facilitator Assessment Data I



% 2006/2007 respondents said the DB contributed “quite a bit” or “very much” to

60/47% Easing the transition into college

65/61% Preparing students to engage in Difficult Dialogues

63/74% Building a sense of campus community for freshmen

Facilitator Assessment Data II



% 2006 & 2007 respondents said the DB contributed “quite a bit” or “very much” to

- 63/63% Expanding their understanding of UAB students
- 84/76% Reinforcing their appreciation of UAB’s educational mission
- 82/83% Building a sense of campus community for them

Discussion Book Events Feedback



- Very informative but maybe too technical?
- I believe there is a great deal of potential harm to this country and the world in presenting the case for manmade global warming as fact, when it is clearly not.
- Good presenter--Glad to hear the other side on global warming

Discussion Book Impact--Other



Student email to advisor:

“I was planning on doing pre-med but I have changed my mind since [the Freshman Discussion Group]. I’m looking more toward the path of Geo-engineering, Geo-physics, something along the lines of that. After reading the required book it greatly sparked my interest in the field and I began doing research on climatology, Geo-engineering, etc”

Contact Information



UAB Discussion Book website

www.uab.edu/discussionbook

Marilyn Kurata, Ph.D.

Chair, UAB Discussion Book Committee

mkurata@uab.edu