See How They Read! Reading Habits of First-Year Students
Conference on the First-Year Experience
Feb. 15, 2010 * Session CR171 [3:00 – 4:00 pm] * Governor’s Square 15
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Slides viewable at http://docs.google.com/present/view?id=dhrg8kgm_1hdbv99gj

Guiding questions
• How are students actually reading?
• (And: How can we meet students where they are?)

Quick lit review: Some key points
• Reading on the decline (NEA, 2007)
• Gap between strong and struggling readers widens during college (Bray et al., 2004)
• Lack of explicit instruction (Nist & Holschuh, 2000)
• Metacognition affected by attitude/motivation (Bain, 2004)
• Pleasure reading matters (Bray et al., 2004)
• Online reading under-assessed/taught (Leu & Zawalinski, 2007)

Our study
In October 2009, we sent an online survey to all first-time, first-year students at UW. The survey collected information about students’ reading backgrounds, goals, attitudes, strategies, and environments. 310 students responded, for a participation rate of 18%.

Conclusions
Attitudes
• Students see academic and personal goals as more important than social goals for reading. The least important goal for all readers: “to discuss what I read with others.” Results indicate that below average readers value academic/pragmatic pursuits over other goals.
• Most respondents have positive attitudes about reading. Below average readers have slightly negative attitudes about performative aspects of assigned reading.
• Female students are likely to feel more positive about starting new books, reading over breaks from school, and spending free time reading. But they are also more uncomfortable when asked questions about their reading in class.

Strategies and Habits
• Students see highlighting (34.7%) and note-taking (39.2%) as their most effective reading strategies; they indicate relatively little use/exposure to pre-reading approaches (7.6% for skimming/surveying and 3.8% for answering pre-reading questions). Strong readers rely on different strategies than average and below average readers.
• First-year students are likely to read in their beds, at their desks, at the library, and in common living space. They indicate they are unlikely to read in the student union, in computer labs, coffee shops, dining center, gym, or someone else’s room/apartment.

Exposure
• Poorer readers are doing much less reading, both academically and for pleasure:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Books read for pleasure in previous twelve months</th>
<th>Above average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Below average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 or fewer</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>81.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 or more</td>
<td>67.9%</td>
<td>40.2%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Below-average readers report less exposure to most genres, especially literary texts, than average and above average readers.
- Students overwhelmingly encounter non-fiction in textbooks; fewer than half of students report being “often” or “occasionally” required to read other forms of non-fiction like newspapers, magazines, or online discussion sites.

**Online Reading**
- Respondents report an average of 2.3 hours reading online per day.
- The transition to online reading is ongoing; students still indicate that they prefer print for long texts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which format do you prefer to read?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Print</td>
<td>56.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No preference</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends on the reading</td>
<td>29.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- News is the third most common type of online reading for students (after email and social networking sites): 70% of participants said that news is a type of reading they do online.
- Text messaging is more heavily used than emails or social networking: 34.8% of respondents said they sent over 50 text messages per day, while less than 9.4% said they post more than 50 social networking posts and 0.6% said they sent over 50 emails per day.

**Implications**
- Balance social/visible and quiet/secluded study space
- Balance online and print reading spaces, and be aware of the message your design sends
- Promote social reading
- Be explicit in reading instruction, and promote self-regulated reading awareness
- Ensure the printability of online material
- Other implications? (For online courses? For residence life? For student centers? For learning communities? For first-year transition programs? For other auxiliary services?)

**Questions for discussion**
- In your position, how can you promote and develop reading?
- Is there a mismatch between high-school instruction and college-level expectations?
- How can we build on (and move beyond) students’ non-assigned reading practices?

**Questions?**
- Email us at kcalkins@uwyo.edu or fishr78@uwyo.edu!

**For further reading**

