

Common Reading

Rethinking Assessment of Student Engagement



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Narrative Engagement

In common reading program studies, students' reading of the text is most often simplified into a binary categorization. Reading, however, is a complex process; students' responses to the book are equally complex. To explore these complexities of students' reading experience in Texas State University's Common Reading Program, we employed theories of narrative engagement to retool our assessment plan. This communication field explores how individuals are absorbed into a storyline and identify with the story's characters (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). Though reader-response theories explore similar concepts, reader-response theories focus on individuals' responses to fictional literature (Sadoski & Paivio, 2007). In contrast, narrative engagement theories may be applied to nonfiction texts, and thus, are more appropriate for common reading programs. For this study, we combined assessment questions with Busselle & Bilandzic's (2009) Narrative Engagement Scale and questions exploring students' prior experiences with the themes and "story-consistent beliefs."

Reading the Text

What percentage best represents the amount of the Common Reading book that you read?

- » 33.6% read less than one quarter of the book
- » 15.1% read more than a quarter, but less than half of the book
- » 16.1% read more than half, but less than three-quarters of the book
- » 35.1% read more than three-quarters of the book to all of it (n=205)

Compared to course evaluations from US 1100:
Did you read [title of Common Reading book]?

- » Fall 2015: 3,121 of 3,673 respondents answered YES (84.97%)
- » Fall 2016: 2,791 of 3,383 respondents answered YES (82.50%)

Program Engagement

We surveyed students about all the CRP-related events, activities, and assignments in which they participated. On average, students participated in 5.29 related experiences. Specifically, students participated in an average of 3.39 in-class activities and assignments and 2.15 out-of-class experiences.

Reliability

Our 10-item scale testing students' "story-consistent beliefs" met minimum standards for reliability ($\alpha = 0.86$). The emotional engagement factor of Busselle and Bilandzic's (2009) Narrative Engagement possessed a slightly lower reliability ($\alpha = 0.67$); during their scale development, the reliabilities of the emotional engagement factor ranged from 0.69 to 0.86.

Reading Matters!

Students who read more than three-quarters of the book were more likely than students who read less than a quarter of the book to report:

- » Community with other students
- » Community with faculty/staff*
- » Higher amounts of program engagement
- » Emotional engagement with the text.**

The portion of text that students read did not appear to impact their story-consistent beliefs.

* This was also true for students who read between one-half and three-quarters of the book.

** Emotional engagement was also significantly different for students who read less than a quarter of the text and those who read between a quarter and half the text.

Unfortunately, the amount of missing data on other Narrative Engagement Scale factors prohibited further analysis for purposes of this presentation.

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