Pre-arrival shared-reading is well established in the U.S., not so in the U.K. What can two programs 5,000 miles apart learn from each other?

Why this Presentation Matters

- Pre-arrival shared-reading long-established in the US, growing in UK
- International concern over literacy rates
- Students arrive to read for a degree; books as gifts are appropriate

BUT

1. Research gap; widespread practice more described than analysed
2. How to assess?
3. Where is the value added?
4. What is the book’s role in outreach and marketing?

Literature Review

- Widespread research into the benefits of reading for pleasure; readers are healthier, happier, safer, more empathetic, more successful (The Reading Agency and BOP Consulting, 2015)
- ‘Common reading programs of all types are helping bridge divides on campus: between disciplines, between student life and academic affairs, between the orientation period and the first semester.’ (Ferguson, 2006)
- ‘...discussion and respect for diverse viewpoints.’ (Laufgraben, 2006)
- Fun; drawing people into their new community (R. Mark Hall, 2003)
- An effective welcome mitigates the tendency to ‘sort into islands of comfortable consensus’ (Tenda, 2013)
- Kingston’s work on welcome and retention (Hughes, 2016)
The KU Big Read – in summary

- Pre-program research into reading habits/likely responses of first-year arrivers
- Book sent to all new students at Kingston University
- Made available to all staff
- An associated program of discussion groups
- Author visit
- Balloon debate to demonstrate cross-organisational relevance
- Post-delivery circulation of questionnaires
- Comparison with other metrics, e.g. university stats on retention – although these correlate rather than show causative relationships
- Expansion into the wider community

UM Common Reading Experience – in summary

- Shared reading program promotes reading and discussion across campus; connects new students with the University academic community
- Books distributed during new student orientations over summer where parents are encouraged to read along with their students
- Books distributed to all faculty and made available to staff as well
- Common Read embedded across curriculum, especially in writing courses and first-year seminars
- Resource guide provided to all instructors
- Author is keynote speaker at Fall Convocation

Common Reading Selection Process

Kingston University
- Criteria for a KU Big Read
- Suggestions sought
- Algorithm applied
- Secret cataloguing
- Shortlist available in libraries
- Selection panel made choice

University of Mississippi
- Solicit nominations from faculty, students, alumni, and community members at umreads.olemiss.edu
- Book Selection Committee of faculty, staff, students, and alumni meet several times to determine a short list that all members read before ranking titles
- Committee makes a recommendation to the Common Reading Experience Committee and Provost to approve

UK/US Similarities

- Attempt to be inclusive of stakeholders and keep an open discussion about what to read
- Embed into curriculum of early teaching and find a way to assess
- Push for best pricing of selected titles
- Utilize the library in promoting the book

Utilizing the Library

Kingston University
- Access to meetings
- Project enthusiasm
- Display of titles

University of Mississippi
- Library liaisons on common reading committees
- Book-themed exhibit
- Co-hosts events
- Keeps extra copies of the book
- Creates LibGuide
  
UK/US Differences

- UM has an established committee for events, resource guide, title selection, course embedding, and working with the author and publisher
- UM purchases and distributes the books, embedding the cost into summer orientation fees
- KU mails the books to the student’s home over the summer
- KU makes a concentrated effort to provide more outreach into the wider community
First Year Experience Conference, Texas, February 2018

Common Concerns

1. Project leadership within the institution
2. Academic freedom
3. Getting buy-in on the book
4. Defining success
5. Attendance at events

Assessment

- Attendance at events
- Social media traffic
- Involvement of staff
- Embedding within modules and early assignments
- University metrics
- Publications
- Invitations to speak about the work
- Surveys

Working with Publishers

1. Establish timeline/calendar/delivery date(s) well in advance
2. Request “courtesy” copies for selection committee
3. Expect to negotiate price
4. Request “custom” edition for your institution (featuring school logo, letter from president, etc.)
   - You will have to provide camera-ready art
5. Leverage use of author’s speakers’ bureau for lower price per book cost
6. Make yourself available to speak with other schools who are considering a book/author you have previously chosen for your common read (assuming you had a good experience)
7. Offer opportunity for campus book sales and signings

Working with Authors

1. Speakers’ fees
   - Play to your institution and location strengths
   - UM—Oxford community has #1 independent book store in U.S.—Square Books
   - Well known to authors
   - Literary community (Faulkner)
2. Halo effect around other titles by same author
3. Authors typically reluctant to promote/speak for an “older” work; they want to promote the most recently published book
5. Negotiate with speakers’ bureau for author to participate in select classes, meet with student and faculty groups, etc.
6. Review speaking contract with institution’s general counsel

Working with the Wider Community

1. Many KU students remain in the local area after graduation
2. Placements, dissertations, and further study
3. Affirmation of institutional values for existing staff
4. University PR
5. UM outreach to local talents, working with schools and libraries

Conclusions: What We Learned from Each Other

- We are both doing something right
- Leadership role is crucial
- Fostering cross-organisational connections
- Raising the profile of our institutions – nationally and internationally
References


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