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# Telling the “Story” of Common Reading Programs: Using National Data

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National Resource Center for

The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition

# Session Outline

- Background and purpose of common reading experiences
  - Definitions
  - Goals
  - Characteristics
- Empirical studies of common reading experiences
  - 2014 National Study of CRE Texts (pilot)
  - 2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars (qualitative and quantitative findings)
- Discussion



Jennifer R. Keup

# COMMON READING EXPERIENCES: AN INTRODUCTION



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# 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
- Used in 40% of orientation and first-year experience programs

# High-Impact Educational Practices



## First-Year Seminars and Experiences

Many schools now build into the curriculum first-year seminars or other programs that bring small groups of students together with faculty or staff on a regular basis. The highest-quality first-year experiences place a strong emphasis on critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies. First-year seminars can also involve students with cutting-edge questions in scholarship and with faculty members' own research.

## Common Intellectual Experiences

The older idea of a "core" curriculum has evolved into a variety of modern forms, such as a set of required common courses or a vertically organized general education program that includes advanced integrative studies and/or required participation in a learning community (see below). These programs often combine broad themes—e.g., technology and society, global interdependence—with a variety of curricular and cocurricular options for students.

## Learning Communities

The key goals for learning communities are to encourage integration of learning across courses and to involve students with "big questions" that matter beyond the classroom. Students take two or more linked courses as a group and work closely with one another and with their professors. Many learning communities explore a common topic and/or common readings through the lenses of different disciplines. Some deliberately link "liberal arts" and "professional courses"; others feature service learning.

## Writing-Intensive Courses

These courses emphasize writing at all levels of instruction and across the curriculum, including final-year projects. Students are encouraged to produce and revise various forms of writing for different audiences in different disciplines. The effectiveness of this repeated practice "across the curriculum" has led to parallel efforts in such areas as quantitative reasoning, oral communication, information literacy, and, on some campuses, ethical inquiry.

## Collaborative Assignments and Projects

Collaborative learning combines two key goals: learning to work and solve problems in the company of others, and sharpening one's own understanding by listening seriously to the insights of others, especially those with different backgrounds and life experiences. Approaches range from study groups within a course, to team-based assignments and writing, to cooperative projects and research.

## Undergraduate Research

Many colleges and universities are now providing research experiences for students in all disciplines. Undergraduate research, however, has been most prominently used in science disciplines. With strong support from the National Science Foundation and the research community, scientists are reshaping their courses to connect key concepts and questions with students' early and active involvement in systematic investigation and research. The goal is to involve students with actively contested questions, empirical observation, cutting-edge technologies, and the sense of excitement that comes from working to answer important questions.

## Diversity/Global Learning

Many colleges and universities now emphasize courses and programs that help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. These studies—which may address U.S. diversity, world cultures, or both—often explore "difficult differences" such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power. Frequently, intercultural studies are augmented by experiential learning in the community and/or by study abroad.

## Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

In these programs, field-based "experiential learning" with community partners is an instructional strategy—and often a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. A key element in these programs is the opportunity students have to both *apply* what they are learning in real-world settings and *reflect* in a classroom setting on their service experiences. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life.

## Internships

Internships are another increasingly common form of experiential learning. The idea is to provide students with direct experience in a work setting—usually related to their career interests—and to give them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. If the internship is taken for course credit, students complete a project or paper that is approved by a faculty member.

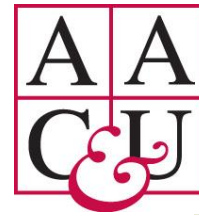
## Capstone Courses and Projects

Whether they're called "senior capstones" or some other name, these culminating experiences require students nearing the end of their college years to create a project of some sort that integrates and applies what they've learned. The project might be a research paper, a performance, a portfolio of "best work," or an exhibit of artwork. Capstones are offered both in departmental programs and, increasingly, in general education as well.



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## Common Reading Experiences

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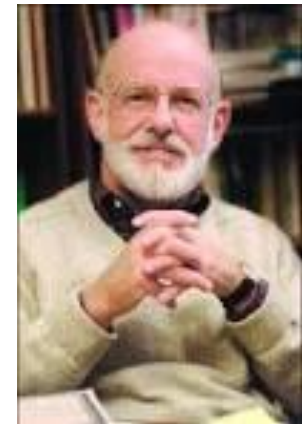
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# Common Reading Experience: Why?



**“A common reading may simulate, on a smaller scale, the advantages associated with a core curriculum by providing a “core” learning experience...” (Cuseo, *FYE listserv* 2004)**

**“Involving students in both in and out of class activities can impact cognitive development, including critical thinking.” (Terenzini, *et al.*, 2006)**





# Why NOT a Common Reading

In 2014, 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)**



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# COMMON READING EXPERIENCES: 2014 NATIONAL STUDY OF TEXTS



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# CRE Text Selection

- “The choice of a single book...can be a powerful signal to students (and to faculty members) about the college’s educational priorities. In many cases, the book that is chosen is the only reading that all members of a class or a college have in common.” (Thorn, Wood, Plum, & Carter, 2013)
- Exploratory questions:
  - What are the **general characteristics** of the texts selected for common reading programs at institutions across the country?
  - What do national data tell us about the **content** of the texts selected for common reading programs?

# CRE Text Selection-Data Source

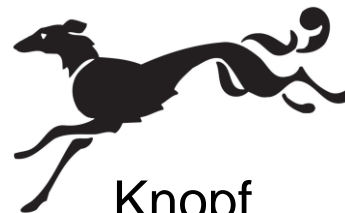
- Informed by NAS “Beach Books” series
- Institution is the unit of analysis
- 2014 book data provided by publishers
  - Title
  - Author
- Amazon
  - Publication year
  - List price
  - Format



HarperCollins



RANDOM HOUSE



Knopf  
Doubleday



# CRE Text Selection-Methodology

- Institutional information from IPEDS
  - Control
  - Type (2-year/4-year; special serving)
  - Size
  - Selectivity
  - Carnegie classification
- Source for Subject/Genre/Scope
  - Library of Congress
  - WorldCat
  - Alibris
  - Amazon



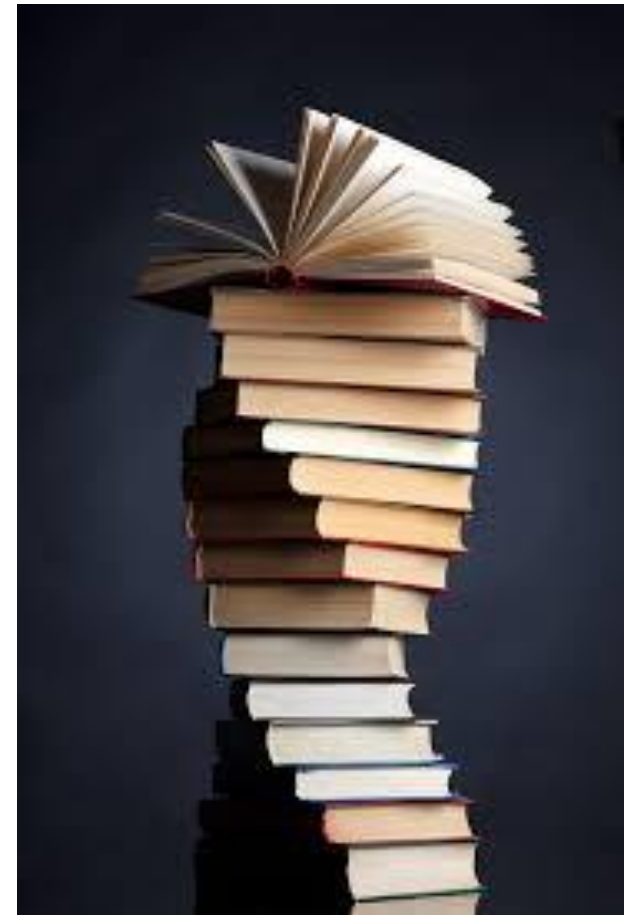


# CRE – Institutional Sample

<b>Institutional characteristic</b>	<b>National %</b>	<b>% of respondents to NSFYS (N=896)</b>	<b>% of respondents to NSFYS w/CRE (N=315)</b>	<b>% of CRE Sample (N=242)</b>
<b><i>Control</i></b>				
Public	53.2	54.2	41.5	<b>63.1</b>
Private	46.8	45.8	58.5	<b>36.9</b>
<b><i>Type</i></b>				
Two-year	36.7	26.7	9.6	<b>8.3</b>
Four-year	63.3	73.3	90.4	<b>91.7</b>
<b><i>Number of first-year students</i></b>				
Less than 500 students	62.8	29.8	43.3	<b>21.9</b>
501-1,000 students	17.5	22.8	24.7	<b>15.7</b>
1,001-2,000 students	11.9	19.4	15.4	<b>26.0</b>
2,001-4,000 students	5.5	16.1	11.9	<b>21.1</b>
More than 4,001 students	2.4	12.0	4.8	<b>15.3</b>

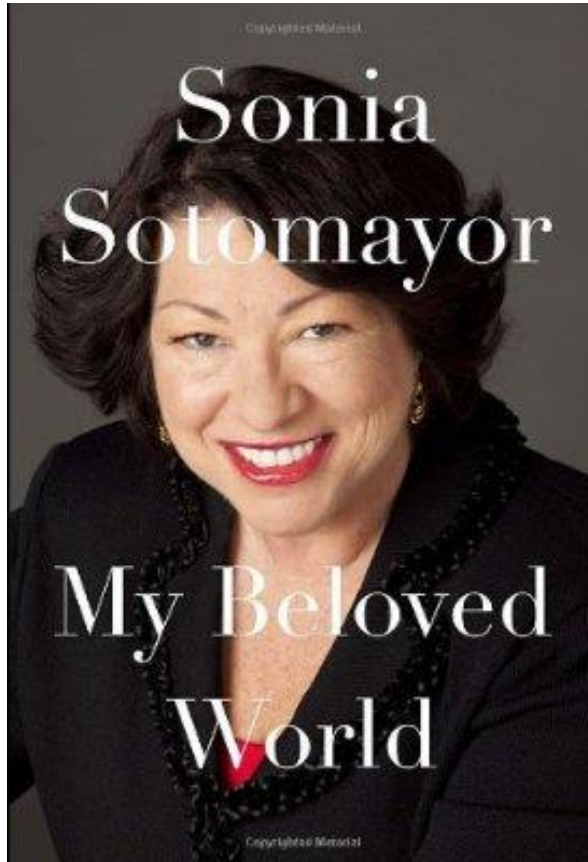
# CRE – Analysis and Coding

- Characteristics of the book
  - Price point (MSRP)
  - Format
  - Release date
  - Page count
- Characteristics of content
  - Genre
  - Scope
  - Subject





# CRE – Coding Example



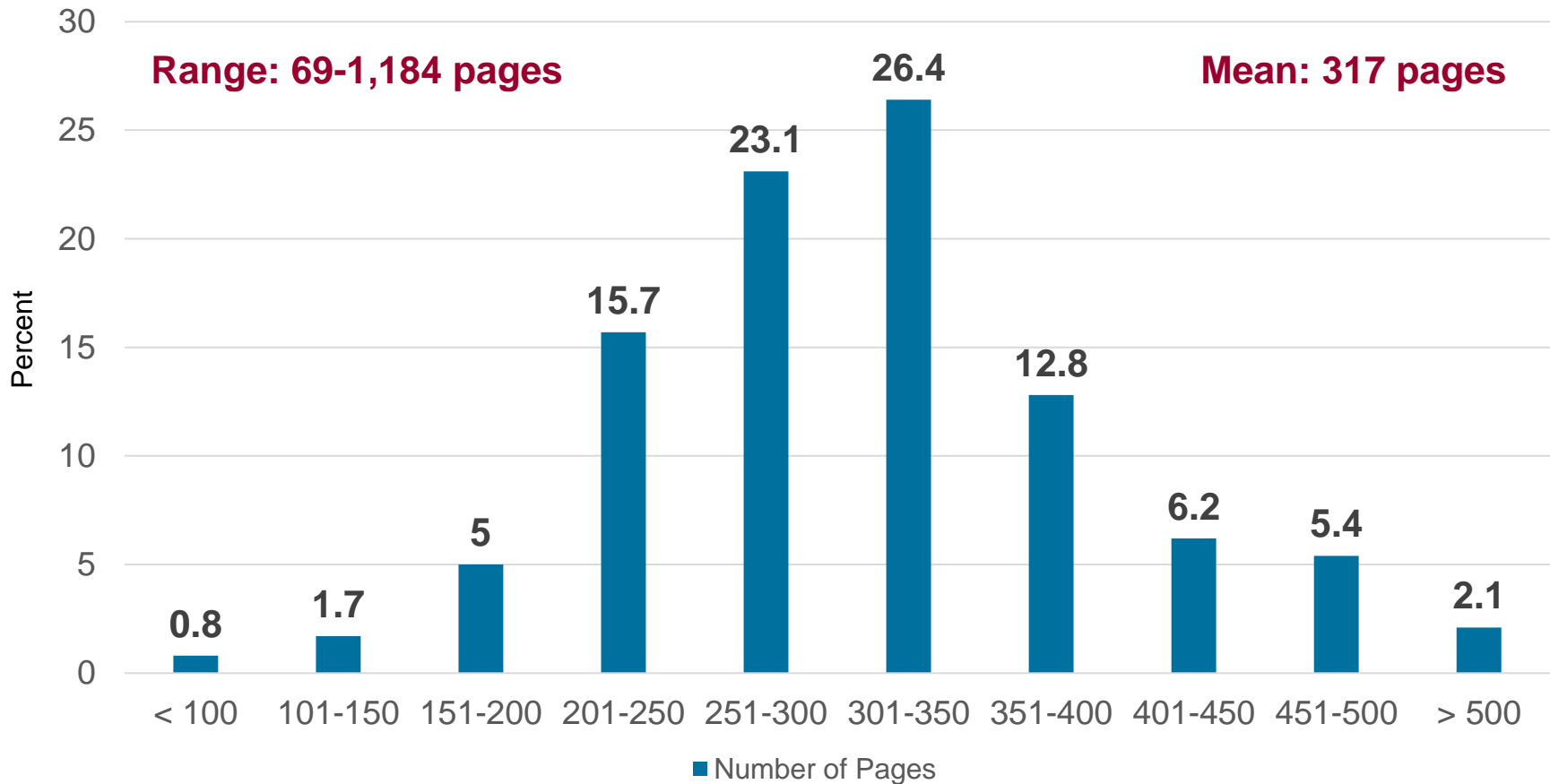
- Published in 2007
- 425 pages in paperback
- \$16.95
- Nonfiction-Memoir/Biography/  
Autobiography
- Set in the United States
- Subjects
  1. Politics/Government
  2. Race/Race Relations/Ethnic Studies
  3. Women/Gender

# CRE - Trends

- Price point is generally consistent
  - Range: \$12.95 – \$29.99
  - Mean: \$16.31
- 95% of selections were in paperback format
  - Hard back selections were not yet available in paperback
- Selections focused on newer releases
  - Only 23 prior to 2000
  - Majority (55%) published 2010-2013

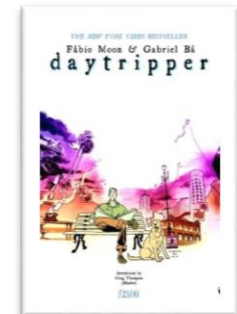
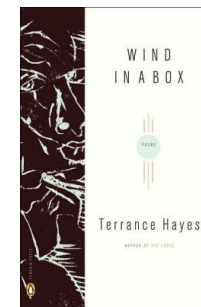
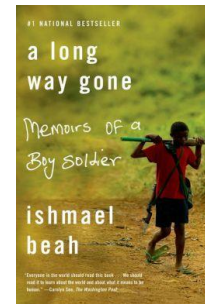
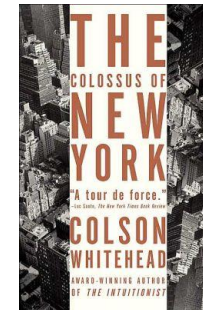
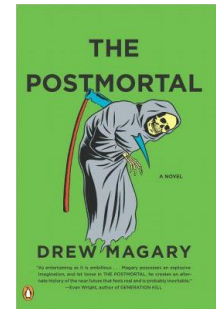
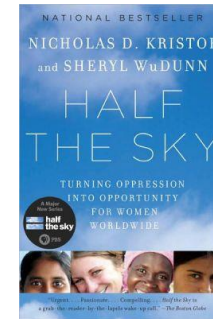


# CRE– Page Count



# CRE – Text Genre

- Nonfiction (163)
  - General (98)
  - Memoir/Biography/Autobiography (47)
  - Essays (18)
- Fiction (79)
  - General (62)
  - Graphic Novel (9)
  - Short Stories (7)
- Poetry (1)



# CRE – Scope

- **United States** (136)
- **Foreign**-set in one country outside the U.S. (37)
- **International**-setting is between more than one country (40)
- **Global**-inclusive or relevant to numerous countries (4)
- **Not Indicated** (25)



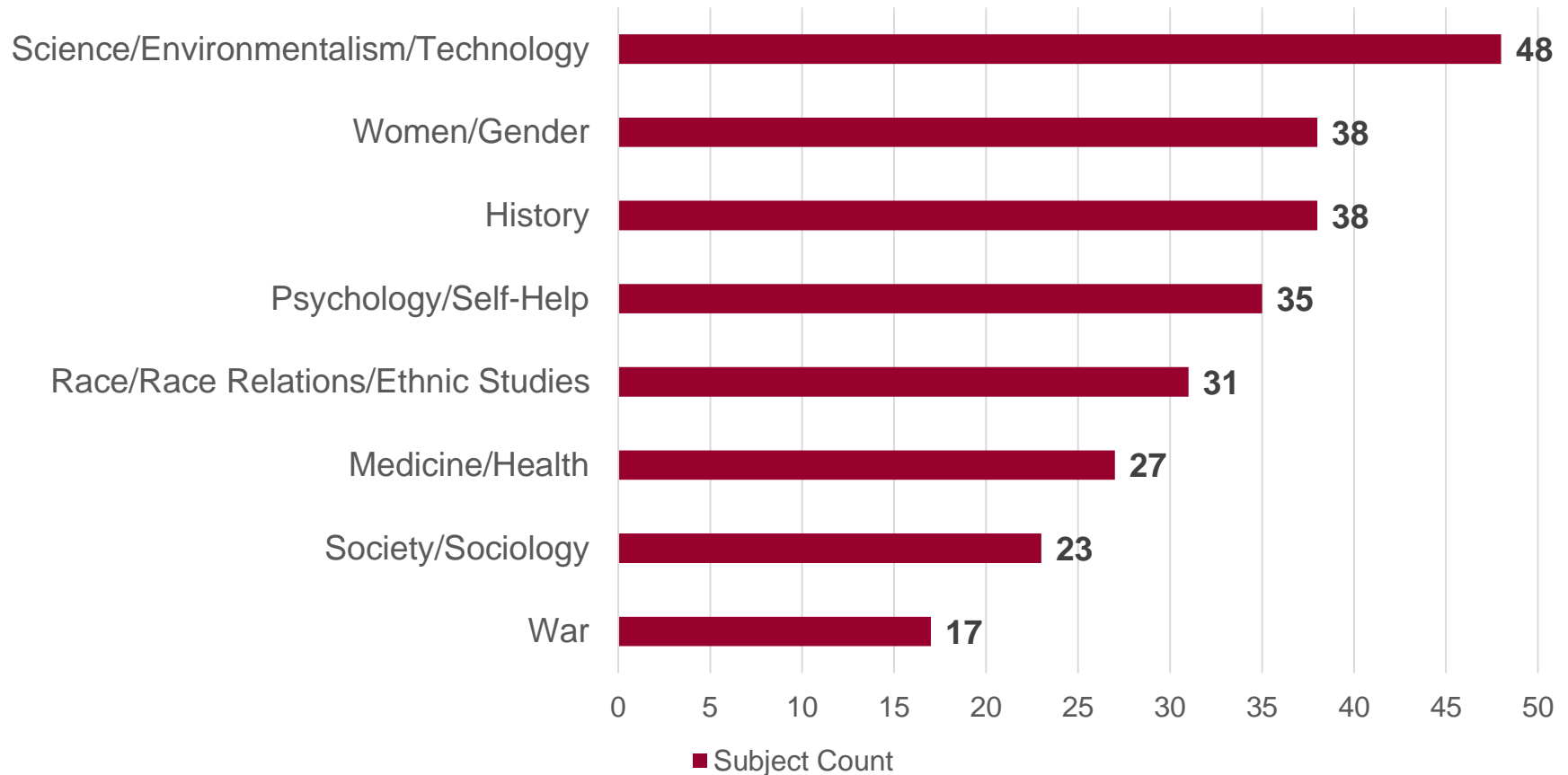
# CRE - Subject

1. Cooking/Food
2. Crime & Punishment
3. Economics/Poverty
4. Education/Children/  
Youth
5. History
6. Immigration/Refugee
7. Medicine/Health
8. Politics/Government
9. Psychology/Self-Help
10. Queer/LGBT
11. Race/Race  
Relations/Ethnic Studies
12. Religion
13. Science/Environ-  
mentalism/Technology
14. Society/Sociology
15. War
16. Women/Gender

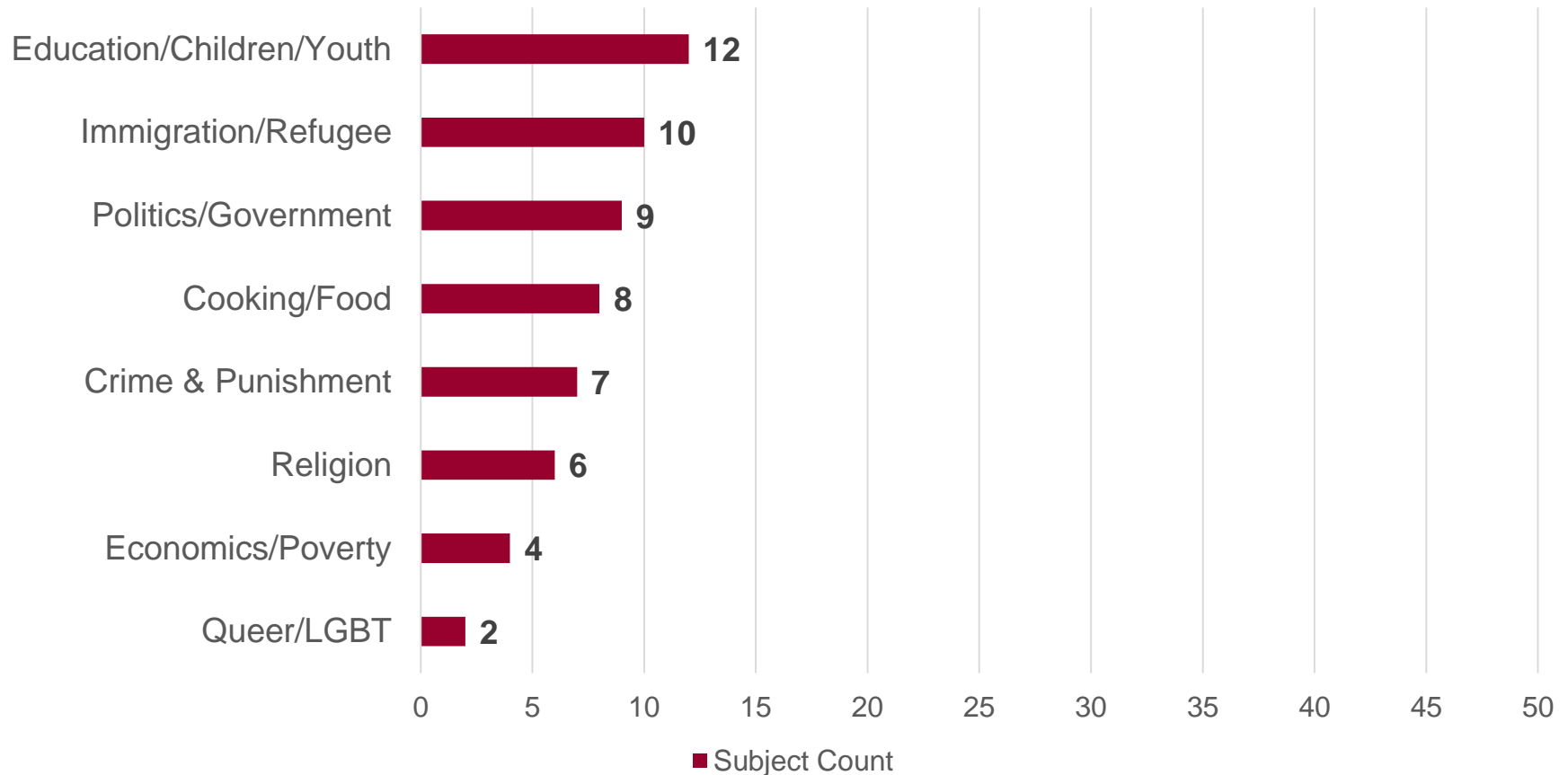
**Over 60 had 2  
subjects & 11  
had 3 subjects**



# CRE – Most Common Subjects



# CRE – Less Common Subjects





# Discussion

“Perhaps the most comprehensive critiques of these programs have come from the National Association of Scholars (NAS), which...released reports castigating universities for choosing books that the association sees as **too liberal,...too easy, too recent, too similar to one another, and too far from the classics.**” (*Inside Higher Ed, January, 2011*)

- How do these data & analyses hold up to past criticisms?
- What do the characteristics of the book & content suggest about the national trends re: common reading programs?
- What conclusions can we draw from the frequency of genre, scope, & subject categories suggest about the goals & outcomes of common reading programs nationally?

# Next Steps

- Broaden institutional sample
- New variables (film/documentary)
- Analyze data by institutional characteristics
- Replicate study to identify trends
- Incorporate student learning outcomes to identify impact of CRE
  - General impact
  - Impact by characteristics of book and content



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# COMMON READING EXPERIENCES: 2012-2013 NATIONAL SURVEY OF FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS



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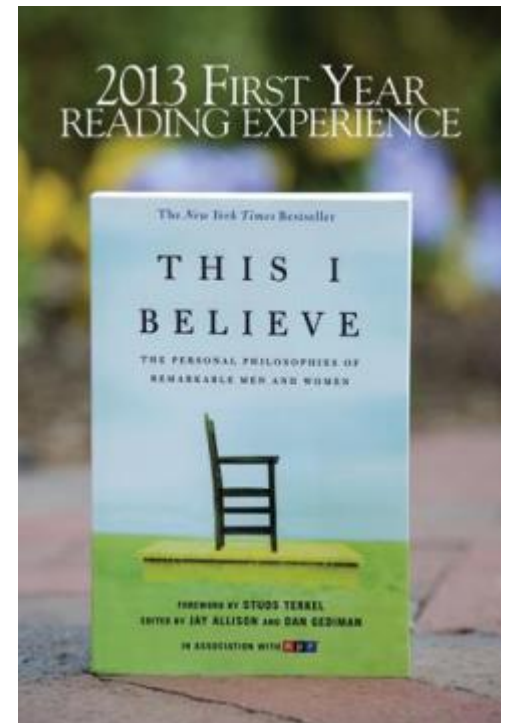
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# NSFYYS 2012-13 Methodology

- 3,753 institutions were invited to participate
  - 4 waves: CAO, CEO, CSAO, 2009 NSFYS participants
  - Administered from Nov. 2012-Jan. 2013
- 896 campuses responded (23.9% response rate)
- 804 (89.7% of sample) indicated that they had one or more FYS

# NSFYS 2012-13: Common Reading Experiences

- Which of the following high-impact educational practices are connected to the first-year seminar with the highest enrollment of students?
  - Common Reading Experience
  - First-year reading experience or summer reading program



# CRE in FYS: Institutional Characteristics

- Much more common at four-year institutions
  - Present in nearly half (45.8%) of FYS at four-year campuses
  - 31.3% more than two-year colleges \*\*\*
- Much more common at private institutions
  - Present in nearly half (48.0%) of private FYS
  - 18.3% more than publics \*\*\*

CRE in FYS: Big Question

“How are Common  
Reading Experiences  
intentionally connected to  
First-Year Seminars?”



# CRE in FYS: Small Question

**“In what ways are institutions with CREs connected to FYS different from those without?”**





# How We Will Answer Those Questions

- **Qualitative** analysis of open-ended responses to:  
“Please describe how sections of the first-year seminar incorporate the common reading experience”  
(Big Question)
- **Quantitative** analysis will follow themes as framework to illuminate findings  
(Small Question)



# CRE in FYS

Goals and Purposes



# CRE in FYS: Goals and Purposes

- Community Building
- Inter-Departmental Connection
- Communicating Expectations
- Shared Intellectual Experience
- Learning Objectives
  - Critical Thinking
  - Self-Awareness
  - Diversity and Global Issues



# CRE in FYS: Objectives

Goals for FYS with CRE were *more often* about:

- **Making Connections and Building Community**
  - Create common first-year experience \*\*\*
  - Develop support networks or friendships \*
- **Communicating Expectations and Learning**
  - Introduce the liberal arts \*\*\*
  - Develop writing skills \*
  - Develop intercultural competence \*



\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

# CRE in FYS: Objectives

- Goals for FYS with CREs were ***less often*** focused on
  - Developing study skills \*\*\*
  - Campus resources and services \*\*\*



\*\*\*  $p < .001$

# CRE in FYS

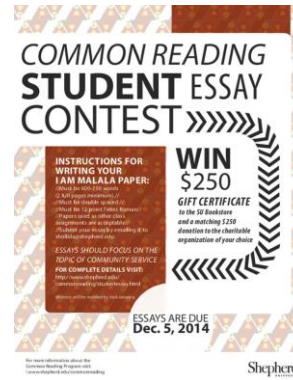
Goals and Purposes

Structural



# CRE in FYS: Structural

- Events
  - Essay contests
  - Discussions
  - Lectures
- Text
  - Type
  - Number
- Reach



# CRE in FYS: Reach

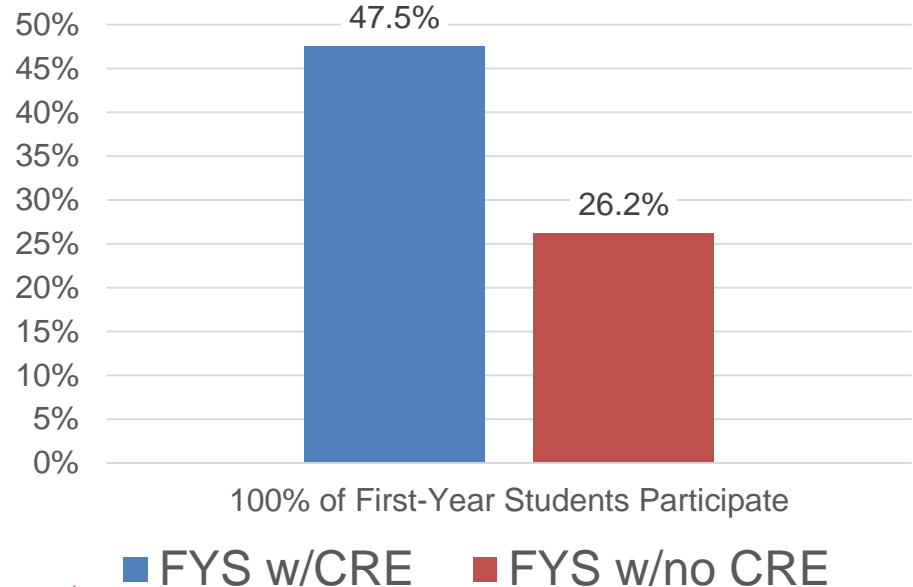
## More students participate in FYS at institutions with CRE

- Nearly half of institutions with CRE in FYS report that **all** first-year students participate in seminar
- 21.3% more than FYS with no CRE

\*\*\*

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

Student Participation in First-Year Seminar  
Based on Presence of Common Reading  
Program





# CRE in FYS

Goals and Purposes

Structural

Curricular



# CRE in FYS: Curricular

- Curriculum of FYS
  - Text – Required or supplemental in FYS
  - Themes
- Connection Across Curriculum
  - Learning Communities
  - Connecting intellectual activity for first year

“[Students] read about it in the reading class, write about it in the writing class, present on it in the first-year seminar.”

# CRE in FYS: Topics

First-year seminars connected to common reading programs reported the following course topics:

## More Frequently

- Critical thinking \*\*\*
- Writing skills \*\*\*
- Global learning \*\*\*
- Diversity issues \*

## Less Frequently

- Study skills \*\*\*
- Campus resources \*\*
- Time management \*\*
- College policies and procedures \*\*\*
- Financial literacy \*

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$



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# CRE in FYS

Goals and Purposes

Structural

Pedagogical

Curricular



# CRE in FYS: Pedagogical Approaches

- Assignments
- Reflection
- Assessment of Learning



- Connection with other HIPs
  - Service-learning
  - Diversity
  - Collaborative assignments



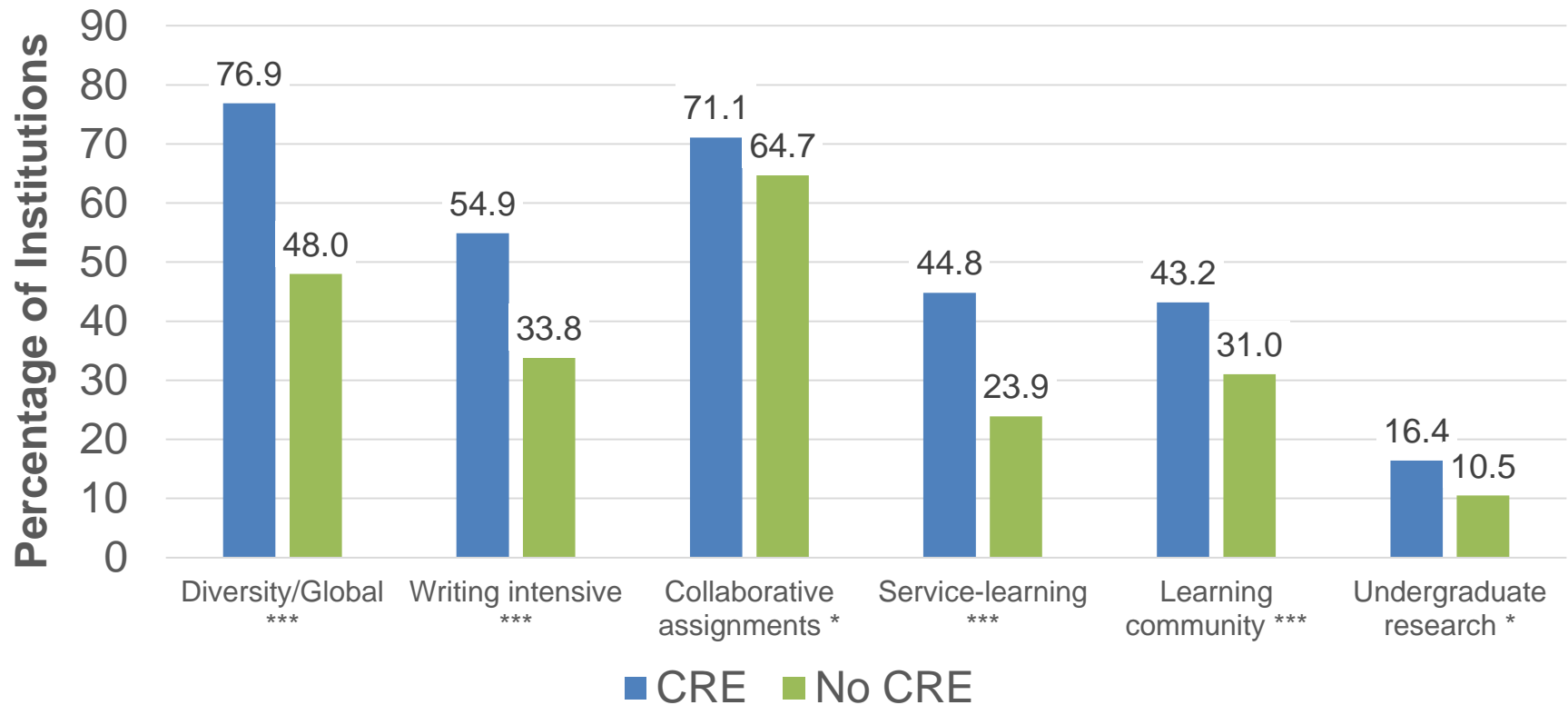
# HIP to have a CRE in your FYS

- Connected to FYS at more institutions than any of the other “programmatic” HIPs
  - Common reading experience – 38.1%
  - Learning Communities – 36.8%
  - Service-Learning – 31.8%
  - Undergraduate Research – 12.8%
- CRE had a strong presence even with institutions reporting they didn’t have an FYS (32.2%)



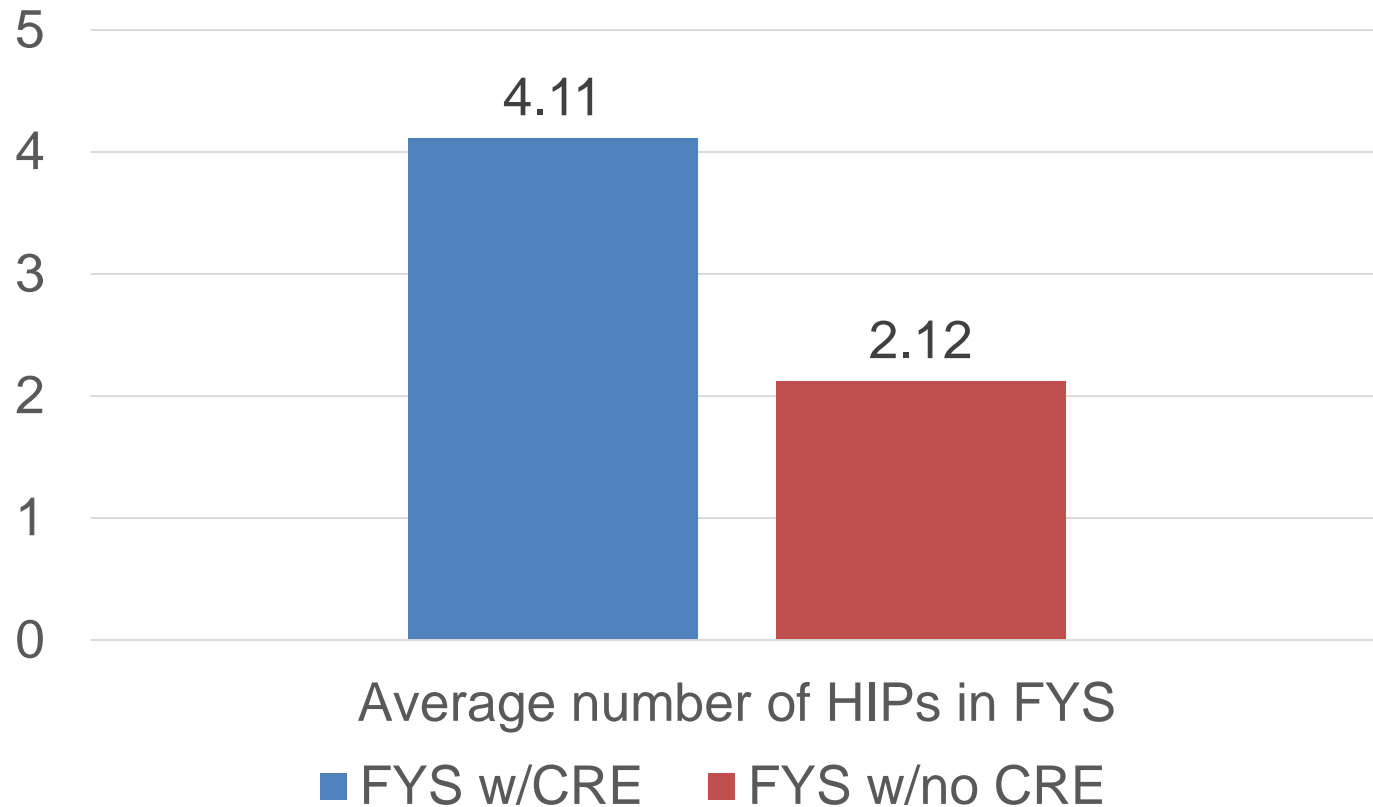
# HIP to have a CRE in your FYS

## HIPs in FYS by Connection of CRE



\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

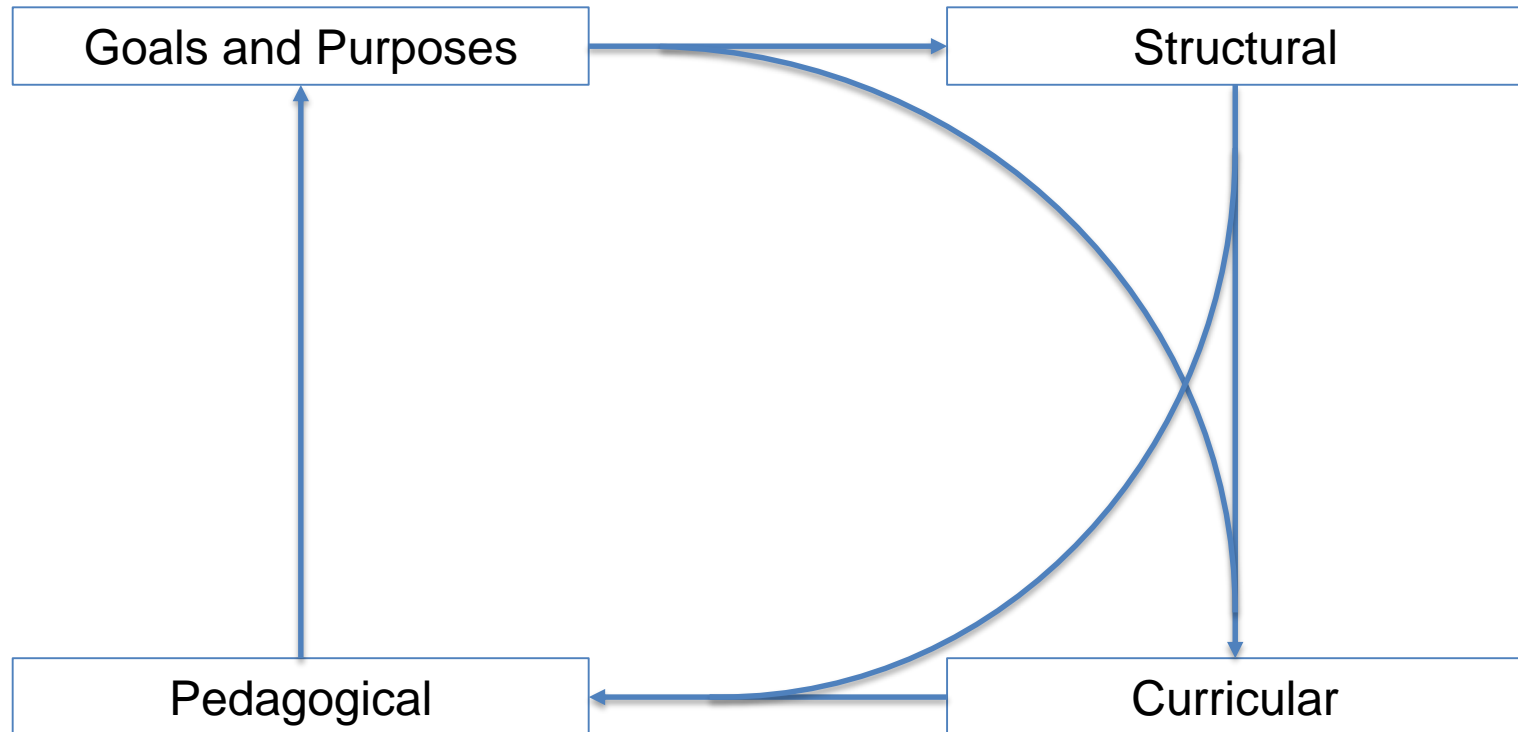
# HIP to have a CRE in your FYS



( $p < .001$ )



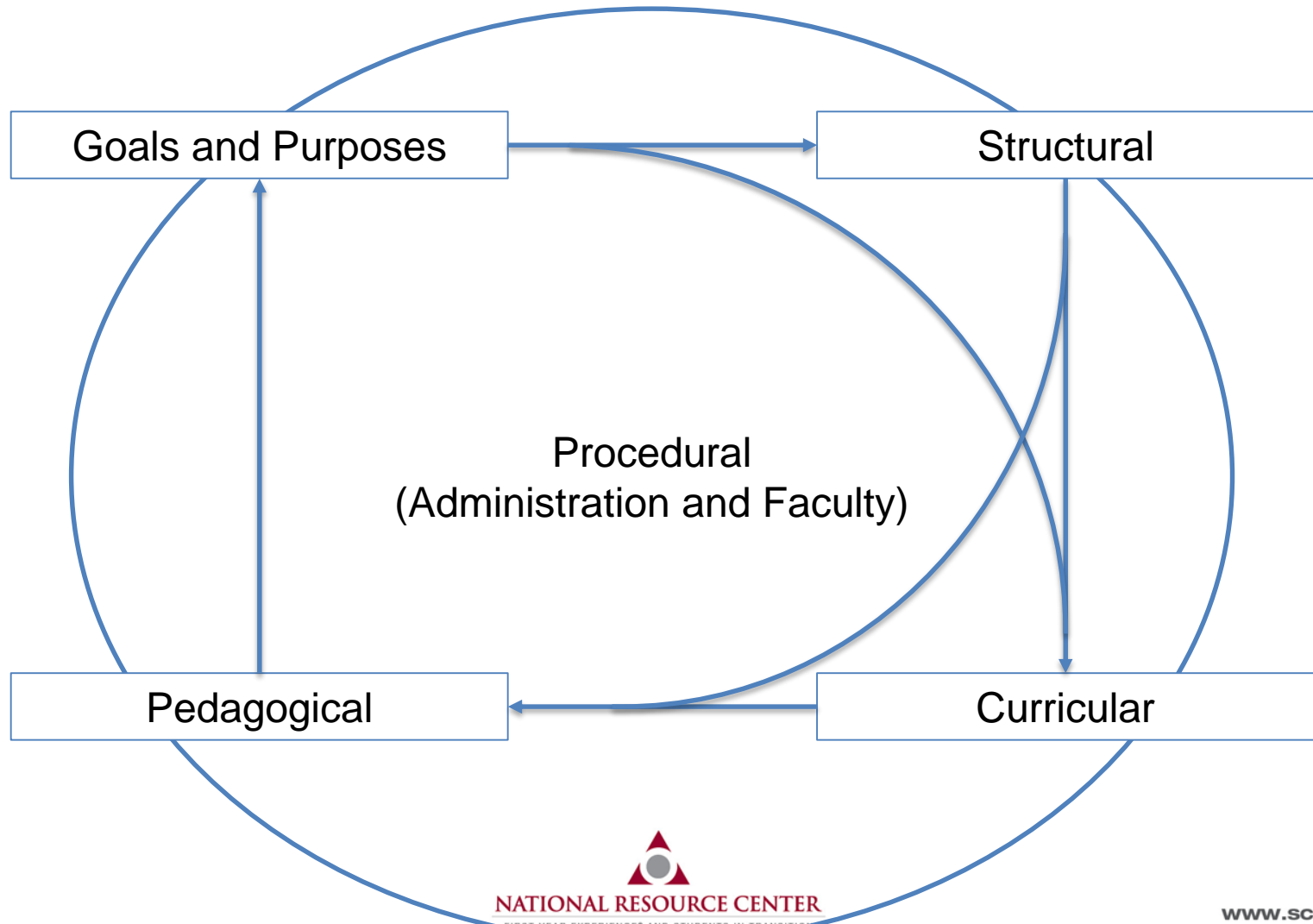
# CRE in FYS



# CRE in FYS: Outcomes

- FYS connected to CRE were more likely to assess the following outcomes:
  - Satisfaction with faculty \*\*\*
  - Writing ability \*\*\*
  - Participation in campus activities \*\*
  - Student self-reports of course impact \*
  - Student self-reports of improvement \*\*
  - Involvement in service \*\*
  - Understanding of institutional identity and culture \*\*
  - Satisfaction with the seminar \*
  - Information literacy \*
  - Connections with peers \*
  - Satisfaction with institution \*

# CRE in FYS



# CRE in FYS: Procedural



- Administration



- Faculty



# CRE in FYS: Instructor

- Campuses that connect CRE to FYS report :
  - Greatly more tenure-track faculty \*\*\*
  - Slightly more full-time non-tenure-track faculty and other campus professionals \*
  - Slightly more graduate students \*\*
- Overall report a ***greater variety of types of instructors*** compared to campuses where CRE is not connected to FYS

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$



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# CRE in FYS: Administration

- FYS with CRE are more often administered by a ***first-year program office*** or the academic affairs central office
- FYS without CRE are more often administered by ***an academic department***

( $p > .01$ )



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# COMMON READING EXPERIENCES: CLOSING DISCUSSION



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# Why Common Reading?

- Can be a campus win for everyone but
  - Must tie to ***shared*** goals
  - Must be assessed
  - Must justify ROI
  - Must involve key stakeholders
  - Must share results
  - Must be willing to change



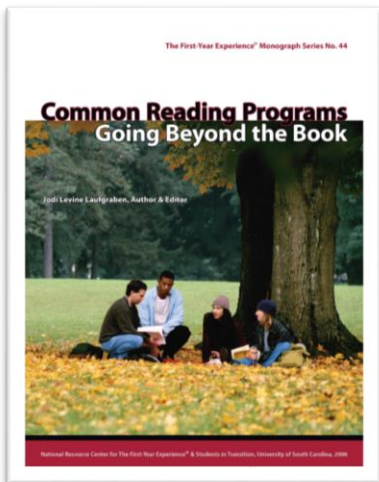


**How do we go beyond the book to create an ongoing and engaging academic initiative for students?**



**“By intentionally creating this relationship between the curricular and co-curricular components of the common reading program, the gap between students’ in- and out-of-classroom learning is narrowed and learning is deepened.”**

*(Laufgraben, 2006, p. 73)*



# More Information Available



***2012-2013 National Survey of First-Year Seminars: Exploring High-Impact Practices in the First College Year*** by  
Dallin George Young and Jessica M. Hopp

***Common Reading Programs: Going Beyond the Book*** edited by Jodi Levine Laufgraben

Available now  
[www.nrcpubs.com](http://www.nrcpubs.com)

