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Common Reading Programs as a High-Impact Practice: Going Beyond the Book

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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
COMMON READING EXPERIENCES:
AN INTRODUCTION
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
The LEAP (Learning Excellence and Professional Development) program is designed to enhance students' educational experiences. This program includes a variety of components, such as collaborative assignments, projects, and internships, which are aimed at fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and real-world application skills.

- **Collaborative Assignments and Projects**: These assignments are designed to encourage teamwork and collaborative learning. Students work in groups to tackle complex problems, which helps them develop communication and interpersonal skills.

- **Writing-Intensive Courses**: These courses emphasize the importance of writing in different disciplines. Students are required to write extensively, which enhances their analytical and critical thinking abilities.

- **Capstone Courses and Projects**: These courses are designed to provide an integrative and comprehensive learning experience. They often involve a research project or a senior thesis, which allows students to apply the knowledge and skills they have acquired throughout their academic career.

- **Internships**: Internships offer students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in their chosen field. This practical experience is invaluable for career preparation and can significantly enhance job prospects.

The LEAP program is integrated into the curriculum to ensure that students are prepared for future academic and professional endeavors. It promotes a holistic approach to education, focusing not only on academic excellence but also on developing well-rounded individuals.
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 Reading Experiences

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.
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)
COMMON READING EXPERIENCES: 2014 NATIONAL STUDY OF TEXTS
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
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
Common Reading Experience: Text Selection
## CRE – Institutional Sample

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

Range: 69-1,184 pages
Mean: 317 pages

Number of Pages

- < 100: 0.8%
- 101-150: 1.7%
- 151-200: 5%
- 201-250: 15.7%
- 251-300: 26.4%
- 301-350: 23.1%
- 351-400: 12.8%
- 401-450: 6.2%
- 451-500: 5.4%
- > 500: 2.1%

www.sc.edu/fye
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/Environmentalism/Technology
14. Society/Sociology
15. War
16. Women/Gender

Over 60 had 2 subjects & 11 had 3 subjects
CRE – Most Common Subjects

- Science/Environmentalism/Technology: 48
- Women/Gender: 38
- History: 38
- Psychology/Self-Help: 35
- Race/Race Relations/Ethnic Studies: 31
- Medicine/Health: 27
- Society/Sociology: 23
- War: 17

Subject Count
CRE – Less Common Subjects

- Education/Children/Youth: 12
- Immigration/Refugee: 10
- Politics/Government: 9
- Cooking/Food: 8
- Crime & Punishment: 7
- Religion: 6
- Economics/Poverty: 4
- Queer/LGBT: 2

Subject Count

www.sc.edu/fye
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
COMMON READING EXPERIENCES:
2012-2013 NATIONAL SURVEY OF FIRST-YEAR SEMINARS
NSFYS 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: Primary Question

“How are Common Reading Experiences intentionally connected to First-Year Seminars?”
CRE in FYS: Secondary 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”

  (Primary Question)

- **Quantitative** analysis will follow themes as framework to illuminate findings

  (Secondary 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

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals and Purposes</th>
<th>Structural</th>
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CRE in FYS: Structural

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

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

- Diversity/Global: 76.9% CRE, 48.0% No CRE
- Writing intensive: 54.9% CRE, 33.8% No CRE
- Collaborative assignments: 71.1% CRE, 64.7% No CRE
- Service-learning: 44.8% CRE, 23.9% No CRE
- Learning community: 43.2% CRE, 31.0% No CRE
- Undergraduate research: 16.4% CRE, 10.5% No CRE

* p < .05, *** p < .001
HIP to have a CRE in your FYS

Average number of HIPs in FYS

- FYS w/CRE: 4.11
- FYS w/no CRE: 2.12

(p < .001)
CRE in FYS

Goals and Purposes

Structural

Pedagogical

Curricular
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: Procedural

- Administration
- Faculty
CRE in FYS: Instructor

• Campuses that connect CRE to FYS report:
  – Far 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
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*  

\( p > .01 \)
COMMON READING EXPERIENCES:
CLOSING DISCUSSION
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