

Common Book Program

A report prepared for the Student Success Team

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“Common reading programs are educationally purposeful programs that engage students in a variety of in- and out- of class academic and social experiences. These are initiatives that engage a particular group of students, an entire campus or even the neighboring community in the reading and discussion of a selected book.”

--Laufgraben, *Common Reading Programs: Going Beyond the Book*

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❖ Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide background information and recommendations concerning a campus-based common book program at the University of Iowa, based on and growing out of the success of the One Community, One Book (OCOB) program, operated through the UI Center for Human Rights (UICHR) since 2001. If the recommendations of this report are accepted, the program will be expanded to include all incoming students to the University, beginning in the fall semester of the 2008-09 academic year.

In preparation for this report, UICHR staff read the published monograph on the subject (Laufgraben's *Common Reading Programs: Going Beyond the Book*), undertook significant internet research on existing programs of a similar nature, and contacted administrators and staff at two institutions (the University of Washington and Appalachian State University) to inquire further about organizational and budgetary matters that were not available online. Given the limited amount of time available to research and prepare this report, we did not attempt to be exhaustive, but rather to provide a meaningful overview of existing programs that provide the best comparisons to one that could be established at the University of Iowa.

Our research has determined that common book programs are seen by colleges and universities as contributing positively to student success and retention by:

- instituting a new academic tradition
- extending the opportunity to orient new students to campus (summer-fall-spring)

- creating a sense of belonging through shared experiences
- providing opportunities (and, more importantly, a reason) for interaction between faculty and students outside the classroom, and between the campus and surrounding communities
- generating small group activities in and around campus (forums, first-year seminar sections, residence hall events)
- encouraging students to reflect on citizenship and engagement (across local, regional, national, and international boundaries)

According to the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Annual Report 2007, among the most promising “high impact” practices in higher education, in terms of desired outcomes such as persistence, are first-year seminars, common intellectual experiences, learning communities, service learning, and experiences with diversity.¹ An expanded OCOB program could involve and enhance these practices. It would incorporate features such as required out-of-class activities and discussion groups that integrate material across courses, features that are identified in the NSSE report as contributing to students' critical-thinking skills, self-understanding, and social lives. A common book program would address other academic and campus goals as well, such as what the President of Carleton College has referred to as creating opportunities for “meaningful encounters with difference.”²

❖ **History of the One Community, One Book Program**

Begun in 2001 by Dorothy Paul and Burns Weston at the UI Center for Human Rights, OCOB began as a county-wide reading project for Johnson County (“All Johnson County Reads”). During the past two years, it was expanded to include other neighboring communities as well. In late winter, the planning committee for this project selects a book with themes related to human rights and social justice. Once the book is identified, negotiations can begin with the publisher, the author is contacted, donations are sought, and arrangements are made for a range of activities. Beginning in the fall, community forums are held for participants to gather and share their reactions to the book and its themes. All of the local high schools and libraries sponsor forums, as do the Oakdale Medical Classification Center, area book clubs, and several senior living centers. Most forums are open to the public, and each year participation increases (in 2006, small group forums totaled 157 participants). For the capstone event, the author is invited to Iowa City for a presentation. Since the inception of the program, there has been only one year in which the author did not attend. This year, well over 300 people attended the presentation by author Timothy B. Tyson and Mary D. Williams.

The selection committee is currently composed of members of the UI community, representatives of public libraries in Johnson County, members of the Iowa City Human Rights Commission, and local booksellers. Members of the committee propose and review books; and the selection is made by simple majority vote.

With the important exception of UICHR staff time and community volunteer time, OCOB is self-supporting, raising funds yearly through donations and small grants. Expenses include printing and publicity (posters, radio and newspaper advertising), book purchases (with volume discounts negotiated each year with the publisher), and author travel and lodging costs. Authors receive no honorarium (a complete budget for the 2007 OCOB program can be found in appendix 3).

Listed below are previous OCOB selections:

2007: *Blood Done Sign My Name* by Timothy B. Tyson

¹ The National Survey of Student Engagement, Annual Report 2007, p. 7:

http://nsse.iub.edu/NSSE%5F2007%5FAnnual%5FReport/docs/withhold/NSSE_2007_Annual_Report.pdf.

² Tamar Lewin, “Summer Reading Programs Gain Momentum for Students About to Enter College,” *New York Times*, 8 August 2007.

2006: *The Tortilla Curtain* by T. Coraghessan Boyle
 2005: *When the Emperor Was Divine* by Julie Otsuka
 2004: *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini
 2003: *Bel Canto* by Ann Patchett
 2002: *First They Killed My Father: A Daughter of Cambodia Remembers* by Loung Ung
 2001: *The Last Summer of Reason* by Tahar Djaout

Suggested [discussion questions](#) are prepared each year by UICHR staff with some help from interns and made available to forum leaders to assist them in leading discussions.

A common book program for all incoming students would benefit from the existing infrastructure of OCOB, established relationships with local businesses and media, and the awareness and participation of the community.

❖ Program Models

A handful of different models for common book programs are represented in college or university settings (see appendix 1 for specific information on select programs). In some cases, such programs have grown from campus into the community. In other cases, as would be the case at the UI, community-based programs have expanded to include the campus. With the understanding that they can be combined and modified in various ways, the four basic models we have identified are:

- Orientation-based common reading programs specifically targeting entering students (first-year students and transfers)
- Semester or year-long programs continuing throughout the academic term
- Course-based programs limited to a course or cluster of courses
- Community-based programs informally open to member of the campus community

The six primary constituent activities of common reading programs that go beyond individual courses are 1) the initial *planning* of the program, 2) *selecting* the reading, 3) *connecting* the common reading to the campus curriculum, 4) *designing* events and activities to generate interest and engagement with the reading over time, 5) *coordinating* publicity and marketing, and 6) *assessing* the program.

❖ Characteristics of Effective Programs

Creating a common reading program provides a valuable opportunity for campuses to consider or revisit clearly articulated goals and intended outcomes for students. Activities that are innovative and creative should be planned in alignment with these goals. These programs are opportunities to build on or connect with other institutional initiatives. Successful common reading programs set and model academic expectations for entering students, and are designed as collaborative efforts of faculty, administrators, students, and staff from across campus. Beyond the book itself, students are provided meaningful opportunities to become integrated into a community of learners. Beyond implementation, such programs are institutionalized into their campus cultures. Selecting a book that is a “great read” or that would allow for an interesting author visit is not enough. A successful program requires year-round planning; and senior campus leadership must demonstrate support for the effort continuously and publicly.

A number of programs have grown to include library exhibits, film series, theatrical performances, and grant-funded faculty development experiences. These elements can help create a sense of continuity beyond orientation.

Some programs choose a book close to two years in advance and contact authors of books under consideration as part of their selection process. If an author will not be available to come to campus during the desired time frame, the book will not be considered for that year. Some also contact publishers of considered books to be sure adequate copies of the book will be

available when needed. Publishers will negotiate prices for large quantities of books and the discount varies by publisher and by number of books needed for purchase.

❖ **Recommendations**

- Hire a staff coordinator to develop and organize the program.
- Expand existing OCOB program to include first-year undergraduates for fall, 2008. At a future date, continue expansion to all incoming undergraduate students.
- Take advantage of the existing OCOB project, maintaining the focus on human rights/social justice issues in a global context. Expanding frames of reference from the local to the trans-national is an important educational experience for first-year students.
- Build on the campus literary signature of “The Writing University” by building connections to the Writers Workshop and IWP.
- Formalize selection committee structure and procedures to ensure adequate campus and community representation.
- Expand orientation program through an initial set of activities centered on the selected book, both in students’ home communities (involving students, their parents and families, perhaps volunteer/outreach efforts) and on campus.
- Budget adequately for the expansion of OCOB, including staff time, publicity, accommodations for students with disabilities using orientation fees. In the first year, a donor might be identified to launch the program. Wherever possible, build on existing funding to support the program (such as first-year seminars).
- Develop supporting elements for planned activities: pre-reading questions, reading questions, strategies for leading forums.
- Require participation through a mandatory number (2 or 3) of à la carte options: curricular-based engagement, follow-on activities such as films, dorm-based events.
- Target Rhetoric to include the selected reading, taught by continuing graduate students who can set their schedules by late spring.
- Involve GE Interpretation of Literature sections.
- Integrate the book into the Honors Program, Living Learning Communities, First-Year Seminars, Courses in Common, and into the Message Project as feasible.
- Provide service-learning opportunities.
- Consider a spring break event to sustain interest.
- Create a master calendar to track events and serve as a record for future years.

❖ **Tentative Master Calendar**

November

- Administration
 - Adopt recommendations of the Subcommittee
- Book selection and distribution
- First year activity planning
- Community activities
- Service activities
- Faculty activities
- Advertising / Message
- Fundraising

Early December

- Administration
 - Commit to project and ask Provost and Deans to commit to success
 - *Provost*: commit leadership
 - *Vice Provost*: commit initial funding of \$50,000 FY 2008 and submit proposal for a new fee (or raise the orientation fee) by Dec. 5th deadline for a total budget of \$200,000-250,000, beginning FY 2009

- *Deans*: commit to goal of 100% collegiate representation in FY seminar / discussion sessions
 - *Staffing*: hire program assistant to coordinate project
- Book selection and distribution
 - Discuss with community partners launch of UI book program
 - Ask for commitment to move up book selection date and limit book selection pool to permit vibrant launch
 - Consider books from previous years' pools; select book with public health / health care theme
 - Select book with the possibility of the author as a speaker, with available video and other materials as a supplement to coursework.
- First year activity planning
- Community activities
- Service activities
- Faculty activities
- Advertising / Message
 - Announce launch of book program
 - Adopt Book project as a pilot for the message project to provide advertising frame
 - Agree to message about purpose of the program and how it relates to the Message
- Fundraising
 - To do project well, \$200,000-\$250,000
 - Meet with foundation officials to discuss possible funding / naming opportunities to replace fee eventually

Late December / Winter Break

- Administration
 - Change SST Subcommittee to executive committee for book project
 - Create expanded book committee to include community leaders, students, admissions, continuing education, writer's workshop, advising, res life, UIHC, faculty (including College of Education), Center on Aging, and UI Community Engagement representatives
 - Consult with learning communities, honors programs, theatre and arts program and Hancher for possible tie-ins
- Book selection and distribution
 - Convene book selection committee; establish process and goal of selecting book by January
- First year activity planning
- Community activities
- Service activities
- Faculty activities
- Advertising / Message
- Fundraising
 - Possible opportunity for author to be a writer in residence in partnership with the Writers' Workshop

January

- Administration
- Book selection and distribution
 - Select and announce book
- First year activity planning
- Community activities
- Service activities
- Faculty activities
- Advertising / Message

- Fundraising

February

- Administration
- Book selection and distribution
 - Order books for distribution as part of the planning process
- First year activity planning
 - Announce tools and incentives for incorporating book into FY through:
 - additional FY seminars (goal: 10),
 - CT (goal: at least 50% of CT courses) and
 - Rhetoric (goal: 8 sections)
- Community activities
- Service activities
 - Create Peer Leaders from current student body to engage students in process
- Faculty activities
 - Meet with CT faculty about book and available resources (videos, etc).
 - Meet with Rhetoric faculty to discuss ways of incorporating into course
 - Ask Deans to nominate faculty to participate in workshops to develop FY seminars
 - Announce creation of competitive research funding for those integrating the book program into research / outreach projects. (goal, 3 grants of \$8000)
- Advertising / Message
 - Advertise Peer Leadership opportunities
 - Begin developing marketing campaigns focused on the book; one that is community / adult focused; one that is student focused and tied to the message
 - Student campaign should have elements that speak to admitted but not committed students; students attending orientation; students on campus and participating in book programming.
- Fundraising
 - Key fundraising to book selection;
 - Seek lecture committee support;
 - If health care theme, seek sponsorship by UIHC

March

- Administration
- Book selection and distribution
- First year activity planning
 - Consider ways to integrate into first year programming
 - Res halls
 - Family weekend (Nov 7-8, 2008)
 - Greek events
 - Cultural houses
- Community activities
 - Engage community leaders in planning programming and outreach opportunities
- Service activities
 - Begin planning winter/spring break opportunities related to the book theme
- Faculty activities
- Advertising / Message
 - Begin promoting the book project at events for admitted students
 - Promote with high school advisors as a new commitment by the university
 - Possible presentations in Des Moines, Davenport, Waterloo, Chicago
- Fundraising

April

- Administration

- Commit to 10-minute presentation on the book project in orientation
- Commit to holding reading circles as evening activities for certain orientation sessions
- Book selection and distribution
 - Order additional books.
 - Begin distributing to students who have paid a deposit
- First year activity planning
- Community activities
- Service activities
- Faculty activities
- Advertising / Message
 - Launch campaign
 - Advertise reading circle as part of orientation programming
- Fundraising

May

- Administration
- Book selection and distribution
- First year activity planning
 - Develop ways of tying in art, photography, and other projects
- Community activities
- Service activities
- Faculty activities
- Advertising / Message
- Fundraising

June / July

- Administration
- Book selection and distribution
- First year activity planning
- Community activities
- Service activities
- Faculty activities
- Advertising / Message
- Fundraising

August / September

- Administration
- Book selection and distribution
- First year activity planning
- Community activities
- Service activities
- Faculty activities
- Advertising / Message
- Fundraising

Possible community tie-ins

- Hospital reading circles (some led by students)
- Senior citizen centers (some led by students)
- Journaling project with Iowa City Schools

❖ Bibliography

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- (4) Laufgraben JL. Common Reading Programs: going beyond the book. Columbia, SC: National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience & Students in Transition (University of South Carolina); 2006. [See contents below]
- (5) Lewin T. Summer reading programs gain momentum for students about to enter college. *New York Times* 2007 Aug. 8; B (Vol. 156 Issue 54030):9.
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**Appendix 1
Selected Common Reading Programs**

APPALACHIAN STATE UNIVERSITY SUMMER READING PROGRAM*

Year started:	1997
Goal:	Students establish a common experience with other new students that will help develop a sense of community with their new environment and introduce them to a part of the academic life they are beginning at Appalachian
2007 Selection:	<i>A Home on the Field: How One Championship Team Inspires Hope for the Revival of Small Town America</i> by Paul Cuadros
Selection process:	Book chosen up to a year in advance. There are 15-20 active committee members representing many disciplines. A librarian from Wataugua Public Library is a community representative
Expenses & Funding:	Paid through student orientation fee. A small markup is added to the discounted price of the books which accrues the funds for the program
Book criteria:	Students read it on their own over the summer. The book should have important multi-disciplinary themes, be 300 pages or less, and have appeal for college freshmen. The author is affordable and must be willing to come to campus. 300 pages or less.

Note: This program started as a campus reading program and at some point, expanded to include the community through the local public library.

*Assistance provided by Janet K. Beck, Academic Advisor in Learning Assistance, Appalachian State University and Evelyn Johnson, Adult Services Librarian at Watauga County Library.

**MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY/CITY OF EAST LANSING
ONE BOOK/ONE COMMUNITY PROGRAM**

Year started	2002
Goal	The goal of the One Book, One Community program is to create opportunities for individuals to learn more about each other through the sharing of a common interest.
2007 Selection:	<i>Lay That Trumpet in Our Hands</i> by Susan Carol McCarthy
Funding:	Many corporate sponsors as well as university and city Departments
Book required:	Yes, for all incoming MSU freshmen
Book distribution:	Students get a copy of the book at academic orientation. The \$10 charge is applied to each student's account for the fall semester.

Note: The city-university community is encouraged to read the same book and come together to discuss it in a variety of settings. This is one of the very few programs that bring together a city and a university. Co-sponsors are Michigan State University and East Lansing Public Library.

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA (CHAPEL HILL)
CAROLINA SUMMER READING PROGRAM**

Year started:	1999
Goals:	Enhance student participation in intellectual on campus; enhance a sense of community among students, faculty and staff; provide a common experience for incoming students.
2007 Selection:	<i>The Death of Innocents</i> by Sister Helen Prejean
Desired Learning Outcomes:	Students have a greater understanding of their place in society (Identity). Students will be challenged about their reactions to the book (Critical Thinking). Students will learn active listening techniques in group discussions (Practical Competencies). Students will recognize that there are multiple perspectives; understand and appreciate these differences and similarities. (Appreciation of Human Difference). Students gain an appreciation of civility (Civil Responsibility).
Book required:	Yes, from 1999-2003. Now only suggested but not required (participation is down).

Note: This program is one of several First-Year Initiatives. UNC has compiled a good deal of information for discussion leaders in this project.

UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON COMMON BOOK PROGRAM³

Year started:	2006-2007
Goal:	To help to create a more thoughtful public
2006 Selection:	<i>Mountains beyond Mountains</i> by Tracy Kidder and Paul Farmer
2007 Selection:	<i>Field Notes from a Catastrophe: man, nature and climate change</i> by Elizabeth Kolbert
Selection process:	Committee of representatives from across campus chose from a list of 25+ books which students will read; is teachable and from which readers can learn
Expenses & Funding:	Book purchases \$40k Other (speaker, travel, venue, marketing) \$35k Money from Dean's office for non book expenses \$35k (Student fee increase covered some expenses as well as others not related to this project)
Data from Year One:	Number of books purchased for incoming students: 8100 Students who completed an assignment related to book: 3300 Students who attended talk by Paul Farmer, M.D.: 1300 Students who attended talk by Tracy Kidder: 100
Cross Campus Connections:	Worked with 150+ Freshmen Interest Group (FIG) leaders to get book to all freshmen and incoming transfer students to facilitate discussions. At Paul Farmer's lecture, more than 30 community-based organizations participated to introduce students to service learning opportunities. Book was incorporated into the following classes: Introduction to Globalization; Diagnosing Injustice; Creating Drama; and Microbiology. UW librarians trained honors students to be discussion facilitators. These students then also facilitated UW alumni book groups; many local book clubs also participated. UW librarians produced an extensive online map of resources for the community to get more connected to additional information about the issues in the book. Global Health Resource Center produced World Health Cinema film series. Center for Curriculum Transformation had faculty and students create a set of diversity oriented study notes for students which were distributed to 6000 students, staff and faculty.
Formats for author event:	Auditorium reading Webcast Simulcast for remote sites Later played on UWTV and put into archives as video-on-demand

³ Information provided by Kirsten Atik, Public Information Specialist, Undergraduate Academic Affairs, University of Washington.

Appendix 2

Assessing Common Reading Programs

University of South Carolina
By Carrie Linder

The University of South Carolina regularly assesses its First-Year Reading Experience for the purpose of improvement. Following the mid-August event, members of the program committee conduct a formal evaluation of the program. Three separate instruments are created and distributed to (a) discussion leaders, (b) student participants, and (c) students who did not participate. Evaluations ask students and discussion leaders to rate the book choice, resource materials, timeliness of information, keynote speaker, and their overall experience with their discussion group. Students who do not participate are asked to comment on their reasons for not participating. Until fall 2003, evaluations were mailed directly to discussion leaders and Honors students, but were distributed in class to University 101 (first-year seminar) students. Since fall 2003, evaluations have been conducted online.

To assess whether First-Year Reading Experience goals have been met, the committee analyzes student responses to the evaluations' open-ended questions and other questions that ask about student and faculty satisfaction with various components of the experience. Responses to statements such as, "Describe your understanding of the purpose of the First-Year Reading Experience," allow the committee to determine whether students truly understand the benefits of participating in a shared reading experience. Responses to statements such as, "Rate your experience in the small-group discussion" and "Rate the contribution of the faculty facilitator of your First-Year Reading Experience group," indicate whether students value the interaction with faculty and participation in college-level, academic discussions.

Feedback from the evaluations is compiled and distributed to members of the planning committee in early October. After results are shared with the committee and members have had an opportunity to provide their own feedback, decisions are made about aspects of the program that need to be altered to make it more effective or inclusive. As a result of lessons learned, the program has increased the number of students invited to attend each year, and in 2005, expanded to include the entire first-year class. Also, as a result of faculty feedback regarding their discomfort with leading discussions, the planning committee now writes and distributes discussion guides to all student participants and discussion leaders.