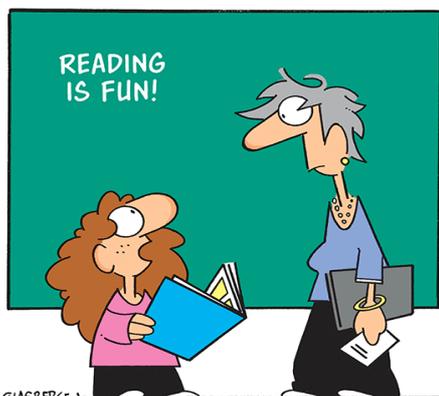


Le Goût De La Lecture (The Love of Reading)

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We read to know we are not alone. – C.S. Lewis

Across cultures, reading behavior has been described in many languages: in French, *goût de la lecture*; in English, the love of reading, the habit of reading, or the desire to read; and in German, *Leselust*. How can AUC discover and promote a culture of reading within our community? How can students, faculty, librarians, administrators and staff assist with promoting a reading culture to enhance the “first year experience” for all incoming freshmen? One possibility is to implement a common reading program in



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“I tapped the page, but nothing happened!”

which a discourse about reading is celebrated. Often described as a catalyst to establish intellectual community during a student’s academic career (Laufgraben 2006), common reading programs have been adopted by hundreds of colleges and universities in the United States. As an instructor in Rhetoric and Composition, it is increasingly apparent from classroom experience and from survey results produced by the Office of Data Analytics and Institutional Research (2013) that reading habits among AUC students is disconcertingly low. How can we increase the reading levels of our students while also addressing their attitudes about reading and other literary cultural activities? The inaugural launch of AUC’s *One Book, One Conversation, One Community* initiative is scheduled to begin with the fall 2014 freshman class. Such a program can put in motion an intentional partnership with learning communities across AUC that can help students achieve a heightened sense of the individual’s role in society as well as acquire an

awareness of diverse cultural perspectives to foster an academic year of sustained conversations, collaboration and community spirit.

More than a Book Club

A central goal for a successful *One Book, One Conversation, One Community* reading program is to harness an understanding of our student’s interests, shared experiences and the culture of learning, which is unique to AUC. When combined together, these factors can allow the university to move forward with a purposeful agenda to enhance its Freshman Year Program by encouraging all stakeholders to actively participate in the creation and sustainability of this important initiative. (See Table 1 below).

Characteristics of Common Reading Programs

- Focus a theme around a selected book and related activities for the academic year.
- Strengthen the academic community and create opportunities for intellectual engagement and depth in learning through carefully selected common readings that pose multiple or differing perspectives and questions, followed by theme-oriented academic and co-curricular activities throughout the year.
- Establish an intellectually stimulating environment that is both informal and structured, setting a tone for intellectual engagement among our new students.
- Create a common academic focus for our entering freshmen classes.

There exists a plethora of titles considered common reads, however a major challenge AUC will face is choosing books that are of interest to our culture of learning here in Egypt. Books may often lose the "common" when closely examined for context, content, culture and environment. It is for these reasons focus groups were organized last fall and surveys were distributed to the AUC community to ascertain potential titles of interest. In addition, Selection and Implementation Committees have been organized to ensure an informed process is conducted by which a single text can be recommended for adoption.

Following a critical review of countless common reading programs in the United States, far too many of the titles have engendered a "commercial" element, which has resulted in placing too much emphasis on inviting the "author" to campus. In this regard, the original purpose of the "common reading" objective, which is to enhance the first year experience and beyond for entering freshman, runs the risk of being lost. This critical review has also provided key insights into how the world of "common reads" may help us steer clear of these pitfalls that often cause such programs to fail. If we remain vigilante to interpret potential texts by connecting them to our students, our community, and our individual histories, we can choose texts that are culturally relevant to commence a community dialogue. (See Table 2 below).

Selection Criteria for Common Reading Text

- Engage freshmen, and draw them into reading and reflection.
- Encourage freshmen to grow intellectually.
- Encourage thought and discussion in a variety of courses and contexts.
- Value diverse cultural perspectives.
- Address contemporary social issues? Be academically oriented.
- Promote reading, critical thinking, information literacy, and discussion skills.
- Bring students, faculty, and staff together around a range of activities and events such as essay contests, debates, colloquia, plays and other activities involving common intellectual exchanges that will focus on themes central to the selected book.
- Be accessible in multiple formats (print, e-books) and other formats to accommodate students with disabilities.
- Be affordable (purchase cost of the book; speakers' fees associated with the author or experts on the text).

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