EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has identified a list of "high-impact" educational practices that have substantial positive effect on essential learning outcomes of students. One such high-impact practice is sharing of common intellectual experience.

- The Common Reading program, administered by Undergraduate Education, strives to provide a common intellectual experience for students by selecting one book that will be used in different classes across disciplines.

- The main objective of the Common Reading program is to create opportunities for students to see how the same subject can be viewed by many different disciplines.

- The Common Reading Book for 2013-2014 was "Being Wrong: Adventures in the Margin of Error" by Kathryn Schulz. Evaluation results from 267 students indicate the following:
  - 81% of students responded positively to being able to see how the same subject can be viewed by many different disciplines
  - 49% of students suggested that WSU continue the Common Reading program
  - A majority of students rated their first-semester experience at WSU as positive

- Some recommendations are to make book purchase optional if the book is not going to be a substantial part of the class and to select the book based on broad themes for wider applicability.
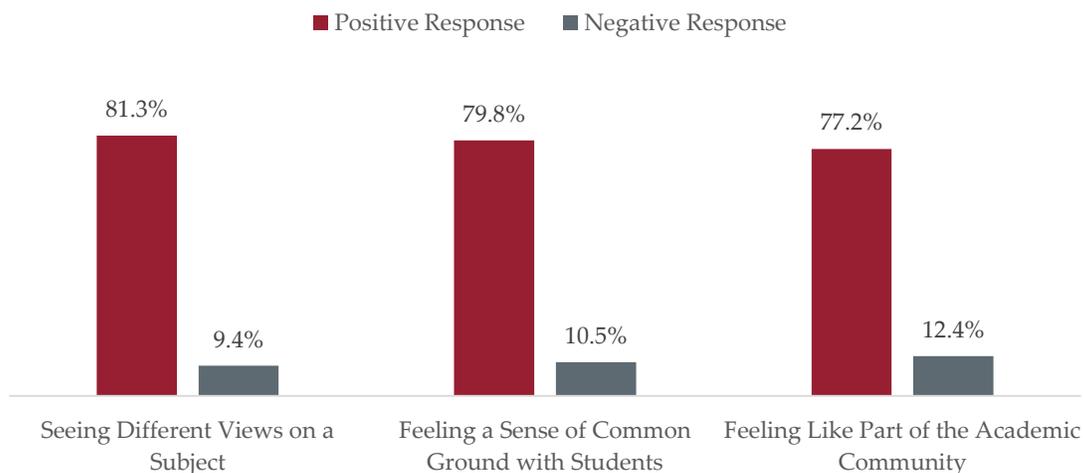

Figure 1. Main results: Students' top three positive responses to first-semester experience questions

EVALUATION

In Spring 2014, Undergraduate Education sent out an online survey to 2,764 first-year students. Participation in the program evaluation was voluntary. The survey included items assessing key areas of student engagement: 1) first-semester experience; 2) book reading; 3) interest in the book; 4) use of Common Reading in classes; 5) attendance at Common reading events; and 6) students' suggestions. The response rate for the survey was approximately 10% (267 students).
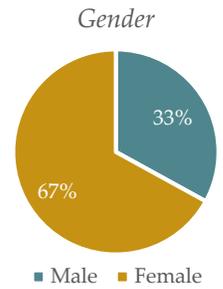
Gender

■ Male ■ Female

Figure 2. Participant demographics

EVALUATION FINDINGS

How did the students rate their first-semester experience at WSU?

Students rated their first-semester experience on a 5 point scale (ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). We categorized student response into three broad categories: positive (strongly agree and agree), negative (strongly disagree and disagree), and unsure/data missing. We have provided more details on positive and negative responses in figure 3.
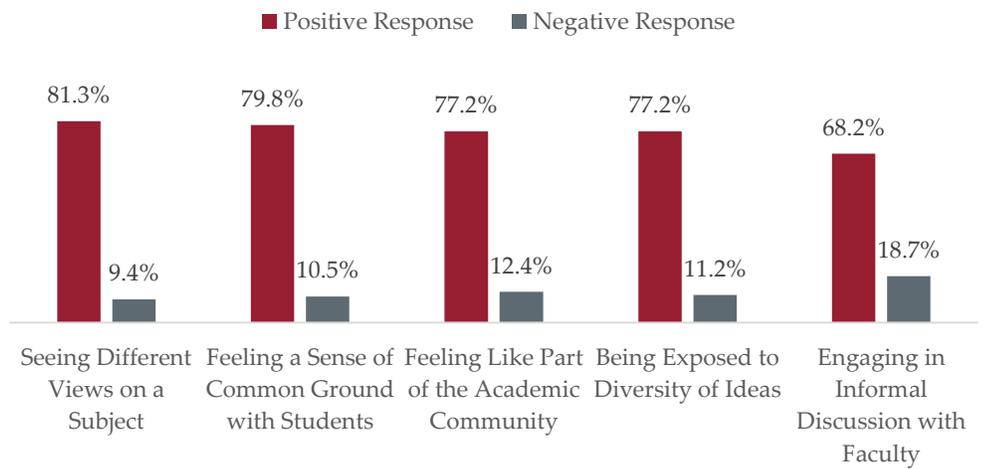

■ Positive Response ■ Negative Response

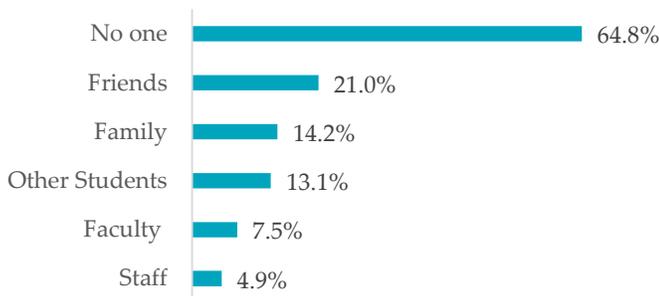Figure 3. Students' response to first-semester experience questions

Other Findings

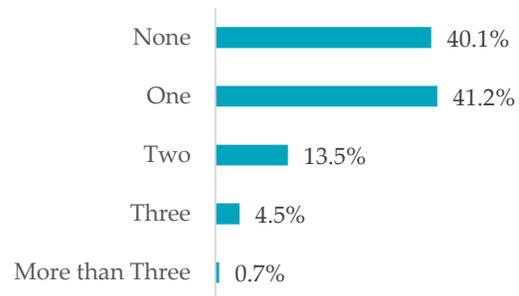Figure 4. Students had out-of-class conversation about Common Reading with…

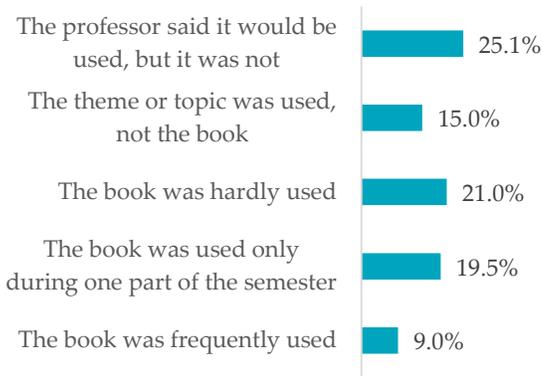Figure 5. Number of classes that addressed Common Reading

The professor said it would be used, but it was not	25.1%
The theme or topic was used, not the book	15.0%
The book was hardly used	21.0%
The book was used only during one part of the semester	19.5%
The book was frequently used	9.0%

Figure 6. Frequency of Common Reading book usage in class

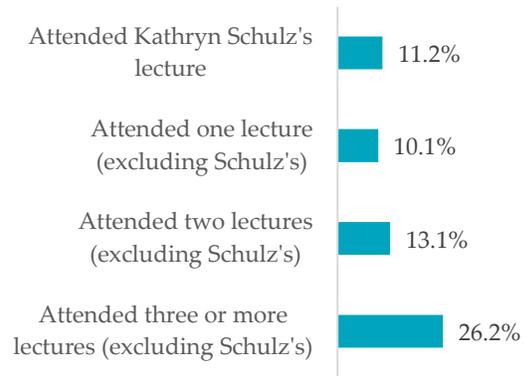|	
Attended Kathryn Schulz's lecture	11.2%
Attended one lecture (excluding Schulz's)	10.1%
Attended two lectures (excluding Schulz's)	13.1%
Attended three or more lectures (excluding Schulz's)	26.2%

Figure 7. Student attendance at Common Reading Lectures

Students' Suggestions for the Common Reading program

In 2013-2014, 49.4% of students suggested that WSU should continue Common Reading. Students had a variety of responses regarding the Common Reading program.

Suggestions:	• Events	o Make the events more interactive and fun
		o Provide extra credit for attendance
		o Implement events in the residence halls
		o Implement more events
		o Integrate into the ALIVE! sessions
	• Classroom usage	o Incorporate the book in the class
		o Incorporate group discussion
		o Use in class or don't use at all
		o Make it a required reading in English classes
	• Raise more awareness about the program	o Give some description about the book/event in the fliers
		o Change the perception that Common Reading is for English majors
		o Advertise the events
	• Change program structure	o Make the program optional
		o Make the program mandatory
		o Turn it into a book club
		o Make the book a "Suggested Reading"
		o Have a Common Reading theme with multiple books as options
	• Discontinue the program	
	• Provide free books/subsidize them	
	• Suggested book type	o Interesting
		o Shorter
		o Relatable
		o Less philosophical
		o Less political agenda
Concerns	• Lack of use in class	o Buying the book was a waste of money
		o Reading the book was a waste of time
		o Reading the book is not important
	• Lack of relevance to students' major	

DISCUSSION

The Common Reading program has achieved its main objective of helping students see how the same subject can be viewed by many different disciplines, with four out of five students responding positively to the question. More than half the students (60%) attended at least one Common Reading event. The evaluation results also show that students have out-of-class conversation about Common Reading mostly with their friends and family. The results highlight that the Common Reading program has been able to move class-related topics into the social lives of students. These results also show that the Common Reading program not only creates common experience between students but also between students and their parents.

For most part, the Common Reading book was not a substantial part of the classes in which they were used. The qualitative comments indicate that students have concerns about the lack of Common Reading book usage in class and the lack of applicability of the book to their major or their life.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Raise more awareness about the program as well as the events. Some students did not know about the events while other students thought that the program is for English majors only.
2. Use ALIVE! sessions to let parents and students know that the Common Reading book can provide a common experience for them and encourage the parents to read the book.
3. Find alternative ways of using Common Reading in the classes without requiring purchase of the book if the book is not going to be a substantial part of the course. On a similar note, some students who attended ALIVE! were under the impression that the book purchase is mandatory; however, the book was not used in their classes.
4. Inform faculty of students' perception that the Common Reading is not applicable to their courses and their areas of study. Encourage faculty who use Common Reading to explicitly address the importance and applicability of the Common Reading book/theme.
5. Make Common Reading events more interactive to increase student interest and attendance.
6. Use different methods to increase survey participation such as providing incentives to students for survey completion, sharing the results of the evaluation with the students, partnering with faculty to give extra credit for survey completion.

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