

AY 2015-16 Common Reading Assessment for *Just Mercy*

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A Program of the Office of Undergraduate Education

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This report details the Common Reading Program assessment information for the 2015-16 academic year and the use of Bryan Stevenson's *Just mercy*, WSU's ninth Common Reading book.

1. Faculty use of *Just Mercy*

A faculty survey of use of the book and programming conducted in February 2016 yielded information we have not had before. While not everyone using the book or programming responded, the data from those who did respond is significant though conservative.

Student exposure to the book, either as a required text or as one that was referenced in class or used as an option text, totaled 7,000 students. This breaks down as follows:

Used as a required text:

Fall 2015	2,281
Spring 2016	1,354
<i>Total</i>	3,635

Used as an optional text/reference:

Fall 2015	1,865
Spring 2016	1,499
Total	3,364

Additionally, the surveys provided information about required and optional attendance at programming.

Number of students required to attend one or more events:

Fall 2015	1,895
Spring 2016	826
Total	2,721

Number of students in courses that offered optional extra credit for attending events:

Fall 2015	2,545 (faculty estimate of those who attended = 757)
Spring 2016	1,699
Total	4,244

While History 105 remains the primary course that uses the Common Reading, the full range of courses reporting use of the book and/or programming were:

CES 101, 201, 280
CRMJ 450, 530
ENGL 101, 402, 475
ED PSYCH 505

FA 101
GEOL 101
HD 205
HIST 105, 305
PSYCH 230, 324, 350
SDC 100
SOC 102, 361, 592
UNIV 104
UH 270
WST 101

Noteworthy is the range of classes using the book, from 100-level to graduate courses. This indicates that the Common Reading is seen as a potential campus text rather than one intended only for first-year students.

In addition, the Common Reading was used as the basis of Honors Orientation and for the spring Global Case Competition. Excerpts were also used as prompts for the timed writing section of both the placement test for first-year students and the junior writing portfolio. This exposed several thousand students to portions of the text.

The Global Case Competition was noteworthy in providing 79 students across the WSU system with an opportunity to create a document addressing arbitrary detention in the United States for an audience of the United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. The winning team of students will be travelling to Geneva, Switzerland, in November 2016 to present their brief to this UN body.

2. Range of Programming:

The Common Reading continues to be a locus of extensive programming, not only through events sponsored by Common Reading Program itself but also, increasingly, through a variety of other campus units who now regularly program some of their events to complement the year's book.

In 2015-16, the Common Reading Program sponsored 18 events (9 per semester) in addition to the Bryan Stevenson lecture in early December. This programming included speakers from Anthropology/Biological Sciences, Criminal Justice, Diversity Education, Economics, Education, English, Nursing, Philosophy, Psychology, the Whitman County Prosecutor's Office, WSU and Pullman Police Departments, and the Seattle Community Police Commission.

In addition, 40 programs and events were offered by other campus units as affiliate events for which students could receive a Common Reading stamp. Those events were sponsored by 25 different campus units:

Black Student Union
Center for Civic Engagement
College of Education
Critical Culture, Gender, and Race Studies
Diversity Education
English
Foley Institute for Public Policy and Public Service
GIESORC

History
Human Development
International Programs/Global Case Competition
Libraries
Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections
Martin Luther King, Jr. Committee
Multicultural Services
Pre-Law Resource Center
Residence Life
Roots of Contemporary Issues
Student Entertainment Board
Student Involvement
Visiting Writers Series
William Julius Wilson Committee
Women's Empowerment
WSU Performing Arts
YWCA

3. Attendance at Events:

The total attendance for Common Reading sponsored events was approximately 4,700. This breaks down as follows:

Stevenson lecture, December 1 2015	2,500-2,600
Common Reading sponsored events (18)	
Fall 2015 (9)	1,267
Spring 2016 (9)	915
<i>Total</i>	2,182

The attendance for the 40 additional affiliated events, though not verified, was also extensive, resulting in total attendance likely exceeding 6,000.

4. Assessment of Common Reading Events:

At each of the 18 events sponsored by the Common Reading Program we administered a very short paper survey to gather information on the audience demographics and response. Generally more than 60% of attendees completed the evaluation.

Who attended programming?

The majority of students who attended events were freshmen (61%) who attended because of a course assignment or for extra credit (93%), with History 105 again being the course sending the largest percentage of students (50%). Other courses that sent students were: ANTH 101; CES 101; CRM J 101 and 424; DTC 475; English 101, 105, and 302; Fine Arts 101, Geology 101; HD 403; English 101 and 108; HIST 305; PHIL 417, 470, and 520; KINES 199; POL S 201; PSYCH 350 and 445; SDC 100; Science 101; SOC 101; T&L 201; UNIV 104; and W ST 101.

How Much of *Just Mercy* did students read?

Some of the courses that sent students did not use the book as required reading, and many others used only a portion of the book. These facts influence, in part, what we know about students' actual interaction with the text. On average 60% of those attending events had read at least part of the book: 18% had read all of it, 18% had read half or more, and 23% had read less than half. These statistics, however, rose over the course of each semester. For example, at the beginning of fall semester 46% reported having read at least some of the book, while at the end 67% reported having read at least some; in the spring those figures rose from an initial 40% to 72%. These statistics are up from previous years, but encouraging more students to read at least part of the book continues an area for further improvement. Important to note, however, is that students also seem to benefit from attending events, even if they have not read any of the book.

How did students respond to programming?

We ask three assessment questions on our event evaluation form, and again those results were strong, particularly regarding the level of interest students reported in the events. The results are also noteworthy in light of the fact that only 7% report their motivation as being for personal interest rather than course credit.

- **“I found this event interesting”**: 80% of attendees responded positively (“agree” or “strongly agree”) while 4 % responded negatively (“disagree” or “strongly disagree”)
- **“I’m interested to learn more about this topic”**: 56% responded positively, while 11% responded negatively
- **“This event furthered my understanding of an issue in the book”**: 58% responded positively, while 15% responded negatively (Note: many students attending the series have not been required to read any of the book.)

The events that were rated most highly by students were those in which the speakers related personal experience: Jeff Guillory (Diversity Education on growing up in the segregated South), Carol Hinds (the mother of an inmate on New Folsom Prison), Dan LeBeau (Whitman County Prosecutor’s Office), Gary Jenkins and Bill Gardner (Pullman and WSU Chiefs of Police), and Noel Vest (a Psychology graduate student on his experience with addiction and recovery). While our series has as one of its strengths that we highlight WSU research, we will consider the impact of personal narratives in future programming as well.

5. End-of-Year Assessment of the Common Reading Program

In addition to the assessments administered at individual events, the Common Reading Program sends an end-of-year assessment survey to all first-year students on the Pullman campus. This spring 254 students responded.

Initial results reveal that in our sample:

- More than 60% of respondents had at least one class that addressed the Common Reading. A quarter of students had two or more classes that used it during their first year.
- Generally, students enrolled in courses using the common reading found it valuable; those not in classes using the book found it a waste of time and money.

- Preliminary analysis indicates that students enrolled in classes that addressed the common reading reported consistently higher rates of positive response to the four outcome questions regarding having a sense of common ground with other students, a sense of belonging in the academic community, exposure to a diversity of ideas, and an appreciation of different perspectives on a complex topic. More analysis is being done regarding the significance of these findings.
- Before the academic year started, 67% reported having read NONE of the book, while 11% had read ALL of it.
- At the end of the year, 33% reported having read NONE of the book, while 31% had read ALL of it.
- 44% reported having attended no common reading events; 56% had attended at least one; and 23% had attended three or more.
- 20% reported not knowing there was a common reading program; and 26% reported never having a copy of the book.
- 70% responded “yes” to the question “Do you think WSU should continue with its Common Reading program?”

Positive comments offered to the prompt for additional comments included:

- “The common reading program is a well put together program. It allows students to view and learn about different topics based on the theme for the school year. Learning about diverse views are able to expand one’s knowledge on current world issues.”
- “I loved how the book was used to bring up many different relevant topics.”
- “The book was very interesting but when Bryan came and spoke it encouraged me to read the book I really enjoyed his presentation and the book.”
- “I thought this common reading program really touched on an important and relevant topic for today’s students and future leaders in civil rights, criminal justice, and judiciary processes. My only suggestion would be to continue focusing on important subjects that play a large role in society and the world. It’s important to be aware of inequalities and injustice in our own neighborhoods, cities, and courts. I definitely enjoyed this program.”
- “I absolutely loved it!! I learned so much that I haven’t and don’t think I would have ever learned anywhere else. There were parts of every Common Reading event that challenged my views and ideas more than ever before! I feel that I am a much better, well versed, and open minded person because of this program. Thank you so much for all of the time and energy that everyone on the team invested into these projects! I’m looking forward to participating next year too!”
- “Great opportunity to learn more outside of the class room.”
- “I thought *Just Mercy* was a very good selection for this year’s common reading program. I think that is an extremely important book. Having the opportunity to listen to and meet Bryan Stevenson was a huge honor.”