



Reading is Cool: The Benefits of Organizing a Student Reading Group

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Despite popular opinion, a recent study indicates that young adults are actually more likely to have read a book in the past 12 months. “Overall, 88% of Americans under 30 read a book in the past year compared with 79% of those age 30 and older” (Zickuhr & Rainie, 2014). In addition, “college freshman report spending less time hanging out with their friends than they have in the past three decades...the only thing today’s college freshman appeared to be doing more of was a solitary activity: spending time online” (Otani, 2015). In an effort to appeal to and incentivise students’ reading habits and encourage them to spend more time with their peers socially, we developed a student reading group.

Innovative Approach or Practice that Merits Sharing with Others. Research suggests that “we become more successful when we are happier and more positive (Achor, 2010.) In addition, a 2009 study by the University of Sussex found that reading for just six minutes can reduce stress levels by up to 68% (The Telegraph, 2009.) Plus, “countless studies have found that social relationships are the best guarantee of heightened well-being and lowered stress” (Achor, 2010.) Combining the research from these studies, creating a reading group seems to be ideal for bettering the lives of our students both academically and personally.

Purpose for Identified Audience

The purpose of this presentation is to introduce how a student reading group can be implemented at various colleges and universities in curricular and co-curricular programs while also meeting important and universal learning objectives. More importantly, the purpose of this presentation is to unite reading groups across the country in hopes for a larger conversation amongst diverse students across apparel and textile disciplines.

Implementation of Practice Clearly Delineated

Students apply to be part of the reading group by answering the following question: Anna Quindlen says that she 'majored in unafraid' at Barnard. Tell us about a time when you majored in unafraid. In addition, students were asked to upload their favorite GIF. A GIF is an image file that supports both animated and static images. One student stated, “I loved that I got to show my personality” in response to the unusual application process. Over time, we found the optimal number for full participation is seven students. In a semester, students will read two books and meet eight times - approximately every two weeks in a sixteen week semester. The meeting times are decided on after the students are selected. Students are given a small stipend to spend at the chosen meeting place, which is often a coffee shop. We found the meeting spot to be important when establishing the social aspect of the reading group.

Description of Success of Practice in Fostering Desired Learning Outcomes. The success of this practice can best be described through the voice of the student participants:

“Overall, I feel that I have genuinely benefited from being in this group - there’s something immensely enjoyable about being able to simply sit and discuss not only topics

relating to business and education, but also topics relating to life in general with such a diverse array of students and professors as those participating in this class. The conversations always flow naturally, even when disagreements occur, and I think I have grown as a person from having the opportunity to see and hear such different perspectives on social and political issues”
-Student One

“I love that our reading group gives an opportunity to connect with professors and get to know them on a personal level. I think there is a great benefit to meeting at an alternate location to a classroom. Reading such a controversial book with a diverse group of students has given me new perspectives on issues relevant to being a young woman. Other students often bring up things about the book and life that I would have never considered on my own. This reading group gives me an excuse to take time to read in college. I enjoy that the books we read are relevant, but not directly related to the program. This has probably been the most unique and enjoyable "class" I have taken in college.” - Student Two

“I love how comfortable the reading group is and how I can truly express my own feelings in a non-judging environment. From this you learn to gain your voice and confidence in that voice. This not only helps in the college environment but when you choose a career upon graduation” - Student Three

Indication of Plans for Continuation, Revisions or Follow-Up. We do plan to continue offering the student reading group with a few minor changes. We found that sophomores, juniors, and seniors respond to the unstructured meetings better than freshman and will therefore no longer allow freshmen to participate. In addition, we found we were less effective as discussion moderators when when offered more than one reading group; therefore, we will only offer one group going forward. Finally, we believe we have had the most consistent participation among all members when the group was limited to seven students. In the future, we would like to design a systematic study to see if our reading group is in fact lowering student stress levels and increasing their overall well-being.

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