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Another Cornerstone Collaboration: The Common Read and the “Not Just Any Book!” Club

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Another Cornerstone Collaboration: The Common Read and the “Not Just Any Book!” Club

Part of the journal section “Forum: Cornerstone” [Contribution to Cornerstone: An Experiment in Interdisciplinarity and Community]

Emily Borcharding and Ellen Neuhaus, “Another Cornerstone Collaboration: The Common Read and the ‘Not Just Any Book!’ Club”



As part of the maturing of the Cornerstone efforts, there have been more opportunities for collaboration between different campus units, such as the Rod Library and the Academic Learning Center. The more campus collaborations which have developed have led to a greater variety of resources and services for students to have a richer Cornerstone experience.

The common read is one portion of the overall Cornerstone experience. Over the last few years, an online LibGuide for each common read book has been developed by Ellen Neuhaus, a reference librarian. In the past, Rod Library developed guides for specific subjects to help students and faculty locate library resources. When Rod Library acquired the LibGuide software, Springshare’s easy-to-use Content Management System, it was a natural extension of existing library services to create a common read LibGuide each year for the new Cornerstone program. The goal of these guides is to serve as a central place where Cornerstone students and faculty can go to locate information related to each common read book and its associated themes.

The earlier common read LibGuides contained basic information about each common read book, including information about the author, book reviews, and information on how to locate articles and books related to the books’ themes. Later common read LibGuides contain more collaborative information from a variety of campus groups regarding activities and resources

related to the common read, such as information about the campus author visit and associated activities, as well as information about the related campus film and discussion series, the related play produced by the Theatre Department, and the related film series held at the local public library.

A natural collaborative relationship developed between Rod Library and the College Reading and Learning Center (CRLC), one component of the Academic Learning Center, with the common read program. As the CRLC developed specific tools, such as character lists or term lists, for each year's common read book, in addition to offering workshops focused on the common read book, this information was posted to each common read LibGuide. The information posted in the common read LibGuides has become richer in breadth and depth as stronger campus connections developed over time.

In Spring 2014, Rod Library and CRLC staff met to think of additional ways the two units could collaborate on other projects related to Cornerstone and the common read book. The main question we asked was how to engage students in reading the common read book over the summer when they are not in a structured academic setting. It was decided to try out an online summer book club for this year's common read book, *Ready Player One*, by Ernest Cline. The book is a dystopian novel which takes place in the year 2044 where the real world is an ugly place. The main character, Wade Watts, is a teenager who spends most of his time plugged into the OASIS, a sprawling virtual utopia that lets you be anything you want to be. Everyone is hunting for the ultimate lottery ticket that lies hidden somewhere within the virtual world of OASIS.

Once ideas were in place for the online book club, during the Summer of 2014, the College Reading and Learning Center (CRLC) piloted a program designed to help Cornerstone students prepare not only for the common read book, but more importantly for their year at the University of Northern Iowa. The main goals of the program were to assist students in reading *Ready Player One*, connect to other students at UNI, and help them become familiar with eLearning/Blackboard. CRLC student staff members Breanna Flater and Lauren Welser began to develop, implement, and coordinate the book club project with guidance from Emily Borcharding, the CRLC Coordinator. In eLearning, discussion groups, assignment and question submission tools, and zoom video conferencing sessions were included. The decision to use eLearning was intentional so as to help students learn the eLearning system before their arrival to campus. As peer leaders, Lauren and Breanna helped make the book club more appealing to the first-year students.

The CRLC created a self-enrolling eLearning course that offered students the ability to join in discussions about the book, watch short videos, and print off reading guides. Information regarding the book club was posted to the common read LibGuide. Overall, 25 students enrolled, as well as 4 CRLC staff members, 2 Cornerstone professors, a Rod Library staff member, and 2 Cornerstone peer mentors. After looking at data, some of the most popular items for students were watching the "80 Seconds in the 80's" videos, which were short videos to introduce the book club and to introduce 1980's references found widely throughout the book, and downloading the reading guides. Throughout the summer, we had 136 views to the Discussion

board, 152 views to the reading guides, 70 logins or views to the interactive Zoom chats, and 159 views to the “80 Seconds in the 80’s” videos.

To conclude the program, two sections of Cornerstone, as well as all the students who participated in the eLearning course, were asked to fill out a survey. The students who did not enroll in the program recommended advertising through email in the future. Many of the students stated that they did read the flier that was in their common read book when they picked it up at University Book and Supply and were interested but never enrolled because they forgot by the time they had access to a computer. Another recommendation was that we should have more emphasis on what Cornerstone is and how students themselves benefit from the summer online book club at orientation. By providing more staff to answer questions and explain this to them, students might have understood more of what the summer online book club offered to them, especially if they felt they were already sufficient readers.

There was some follow up collaboration to prepare for the author visit in October. The College Reading and Learning Center staff hosted a “Meeting the Author” workshop to help prepare students for professionally meeting the author and asking questions. Also, the students who participated in the summer book club were sent personal email invitations to an informal author chat held at the Book Bistro cafe in Rod Library.

The CRLC and Rod Library hope to continue this program and make improvements for the upcoming years, as well as further develop our common read collaboration. Ideas for future collaboration include organizing themed activity-based events related to the common read book and working more closely in developing future online common read LibGuides and other online resources.

[Go to the narrative [Cornerstone: An Experiment in Interdisciplinarity and Community](#) article.]



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