

Toward a “Lifetime of Literacies”: Library Reading Circles for College Students

Authors:

Dr. Mary M. Howrey
Director of Library Services
 DeVry University South Florida
 Miramar, FL
 mhowrey@devry.edu
 Work Phone: 954-499-9851

Esther S. Rachelson
 Assistant Professor of Liberal Arts & Sciences
 DeVry University South Florida
 Miramar, FL
 rrachelson@devry.edu

August 2, 2009

DeVry University South Florida
 2300 SW 145th Avenue
 Miramar, FL 33027-4150

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Abstract

This qualitative case study of the ReadDeVry reading circles program identifies the theoretical and practical considerations for reading circles programs serving college students. As designed, the program addresses a number of the issues raised recently by national organizations such as the American College Testing Program (ACT), the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), and Strong American Schools, regarding reading proficiency, preparedness for college, and reading habits for life-long learning.

Negotiated from the diverse viewpoints and needs of faculty, librarians and students, the ReadDeVry program fosters a joy of reading, media appreciation/visual literacy, literary and cultural values, and information literacy. As readers, viewers, and writer-critics of the common books and films selected, the ReadDeVry participants have an active learning partnership. Faculty and librarian mentors are guided by the belief that students need a healthy balance between their personal, social and career/professional roles to build a "lifetime of literacies."

Toward a “Lifetime of Literacies”: Library Reading Circles for College Students

Introduction: Media Report a Gap in Reading Skills for Life-Long Learning & Literacy

Student achievement, college readiness and life-long reading habits made the headlines in 2007 and 2008. As reported by the national media, promoting life-long literacy and instilling a love of reading among high school and college students are important action items for American educators and librarians in our digital society.

Major Organizations Point to Aliteracy As an Issue for College Educators and Librarians

First, the American College Testing Service issued its report on high school student college readiness, *Rigor at Risk*.¹ The report questioned both the quality and intensity of the current core high school curriculum for college-bound students across the United States. Findings from the report indicate that “three out of every four ACT-tested 2006 high school graduates who take a core curriculum are not prepared to take credit-bearing entry-college courses with a reasonable chance of succeeding in those courses.”²

The ACT report ties the core high school curriculum directly to future success in school and life--

Students who are not ready for college are less likely to enroll in college, more likely to need remedial coursework during their first year of college, less likely to succeed in their college courses, and less likely to earn a college degree. There is no question that improved college readiness leads to greater success in college.³

Second, the findings of a Zogby International poll of 502 college instructors released by the Association of American Publishers reinforces the ACT report.⁴ Fifty-five percent of college instructors surveyed reported that the 2006-2007 entering freshmen class were not ready for college-level studies. The figure reported in the Zogby/AAP survey is even higher for two-year colleges, where 75 percent of faculty members consider incoming students to be unprepared.

Forty-five percent of the college faculty also reported that over the past four years, student preparedness has gotten worse, while 38 percent reported that it has remained the same. As a direct response to student preparedness for college, faculty are supplementing their classroom instruction. According to Patricia Schroeder, president and CEO of AAP, “Too many college students are not ready for college work, and they need new types of learning tools to succeed.”⁵

Third, an Associated Press-Ipsos poll, released on August 21, 2007, reported that “27 percent of U.S. adults surveyed (N=1,033) say they read no books at all in the past year.”⁶ People who had not read a single book in the past year were typically male, older, less educated, low-income, minority, from rural areas, and less religious. On a positive note, the AP poll found that book enthusiasts abound. “Many in the survey reported reading dozens of books and said they couldn’t do without them.”⁷ Among those who said they had read books, the median figure for women was nine books and for men five books in the past year.

Fourth, in their comprehensive and timely report of U.S. reading trends, the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) publication, *To Read or Not to Read*, makes a convincing case that both U.S. youth and adults are reading fewer books.⁸ From 1992 to 2002, “non-required” reading is down 7% for all adults and 12% for 18-24 year olds. The report also indicates that college attendance is no longer a guarantee of active reading habits. Thus, even among college graduates, reading proficiency has declined at a 20-23% rate.⁹ By the time students become college seniors, one in three read nothing at all for pleasure in a given week.¹⁰

Finally, Strong American Schools released a report in September 2008, *Diploma to Nowhere*, which reveals that: nearly four of five remedial students had a high school grade point average of B or better; more than half the students taking remedial classes in college say they were good students in high school who always completed their assignments; and nearly six of 10

remedial students say they should have been challenged more in high school.¹¹ This report is another indicator that high school students are unprepared for college-level studies and that the costs of remedial education are astronomical for American colleges and universities, running between \$2.3 billion and \$2.9 billion annually.¹²

For educators and librarians, these media reports point to a serious problem with aliteracy among incoming, freshmen college students. Agee, a library science distance educator with Emporia State University in Denver, Colorado, defines “aliteracy” as “...the choice not to practice literacy skills.”¹³ Birkerts notes that aliteracy is tied to “a lack of interest” on the part of students.¹⁴ Aliterate students avoid independent reading and perceive reading as “work” rather than as a pastime adding value to one’s life and fostering wisdom. According to Wilson and Casey, “a child’s attitude, motivation and self-esteem toward reading play an enormous role in the choice to read for pleasure and recreation.”¹⁵

In addition to student attitudes, it has been suggested by a number of authors that aliteracy is related to the replacement of the reading of physical books, magazines and newspapers with online reading. Authors such as Carr, Crain, Johnson, and OCLC report that computer screen reading has replaced novels and newspapers for the “digital natives” as well as for all adult Internet users.¹⁶

According to Dr. Maryanne Wolf, a professor of child development at Tufts University and director of the Center for Reading and Language Research, computer screen reading isn’t the deep reading required for study and knowledge acquisition.¹⁷ Instead, Bauerlein notes that recent research on screen reading by web researcher Jakob Nielsen has found that teens expect to be entertained when using the Internet.¹⁸ “Teens have a short attention span and want to be

stimulated. For them, the Web isn't a place for reading and study and knowledge. It spells the opposite.”¹⁹

Dr. Gary Small, UCLA psychiatrist, argues that daily exposure to digital technologies such as the Internet and smart phones can alter how the brain works and people interact with others.²⁰ Small believes that social awkwardness is strongest among the digital natives and that this group of learners needs to improve their social skills to succeed. Wolf believes that digital natives who spend their time gathering superficial information fast will need instruction designed to improve reading comprehension in the digital world.²¹ While the multimedia digital environment aids learning, website readability levels (grade 8 and higher) often make students' reading experience frustrating and burdensome.²²

A Call to Action: Instilling a “Joy of Reading”

As librarians and educators, we need to build bridges for students to successful information seeking, critical thinking, and lifelong learning skills. Danielson & Rogers and McMillan argue that literacy doesn't stop with data and information alone—we need to encourage pleasure reading for the fulfillment of personal desires, career aspirations, and building a sense of community.²³ According to Agee—

The individual experience of reading, for work or pleasure, improves reading skill and fosters independence that allows the reader to gain value and knowledge. The challenges of providing stimulating materials, nurturing environments, suitable coaching, and rewards for readers are fundamental responsibilities of librarians and educators...²⁴

As librarians and educators, we need to take note of the reasons why people read less and less. Hughes identifies three factors that contribute to the lowering of reading rates in the United States—television, a faster-paced lifestyle, and misplaced values.²⁵ As Hughes writes on the “Books & Reading Forums” website about our misplaced values--

“We do not value education and intellectuality much anymore. Instead, we value entertainment and athletics. Perhaps it is because technology and development have eliminated a great deal of our need for intelligence. Perhaps we feel secure that our needs have been met and feel that we no longer need to work as a society towards major goals. As a result, we just want to lay back and gossip about Paris Hilton and cheer for our favorite sports team.”²⁶

Working in partnership, librarians and faculty at DeVry University South Florida actively demonstrate their core values through reading circles programming.

Researchers have shown that college students themselves report issues with college reading and preparedness. In a series of interviews with first-generation community college students, Byrd and MacDonald found that “college reading was an area in which participants felt particularly underprepared. Reading skills mentioned included vocabulary level and the amount of reading required.”²⁷ Despite the lack of preparedness for college, Terenzini and others found that first-year students made significant gains in their reading during their freshmen year in a sample of 825 students at 23 diverse institutions.²⁸ Given effective intervention, faculty and librarians can make a difference in developing college student reading skills.

With this professional challenge in mind, strong values in support of reading and intellectual development, and a call to action from major organizations like the ACT, Strong American Schools, and the NEA for promoting life-long learning and instilling a “joy of reading,” the ReadDeVry program at DeVry University South Florida campus (Miramar, Florida) has a strong reason for its operations.

Since 2003, librarians and faculty members involved in the Academics Department’s Library Committee have worked in partnership as concerned educators and librarians to create a “common reading program” to reach the career-focused students attending our university.²⁹ While our program is labeled “reading circles,” the professional literature reviewed uses a

variety of descriptors for reading groups--literature circles, book clubs, book discussion groups, and reading circles.

Theoretical Basis and Educational Rationale for Reading Circles

General Learning Theories

Reading circles are based on a number of educational theories. For example, in working with English-as-a-Second Language students, Hsu notes that the effectiveness of reading and literature circles are tied to the concepts of mentoring, the “zone of proximal development and scaffolding,” social learning theory, the reading-writing connection, reader-response theory, and independent learning theory.³⁰

Bandura’s social learning theory is basic since it focuses on observing and modeling the behaviors, attitudes and emotional reactions of others and on the concept of self-efficacy.³¹ Social learning theory explains the dynamics that occur in these small reading groups as students observe and model their professors and peers and develop self-confidence as learners.

The potential for cognitive development in reading circles depends on Vgotsky’s “zone of proximal development,” a level of development attained when learners engage in social behavior.³² The range of skill that can be developed with adult guidance or peer collaboration exceeds what can be attained alone. Participants in the reading circles accelerate their learning curves through the reading circles social interaction, writing, film viewing, and sharing of ideas.

Shanahan discusses the importance of emphasizing communication to an audience in the reading-writing process and the teaching of reading and writing in meaningful contexts.³³ The dynamics of reading circles embed communication, sharing and meaningful group interaction into the learning process which makes the reading circles an effective instructional context for our faculty in all curriculum areas.

Gibbons and Shoffner apply social cognitive theory to working effectively with first generation students.³⁴ Social cognitive theory examines how career and academic interests mature, how career choices are developed, and how these choices are turned into action. Student growth is accomplished through a focus on three primary mechanisms: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals.

Through the reading circles, students can build confidence in their ability to read, think critically and reach their academic goals through reading and writing. To overcome any perceived barriers to academic success, faculty and peers in the reading circles serve as role models and help establish a resource and communication network for students to succeed.³⁵

In working with many of first-generation DeVry college students, it is important to note that there can be significant attitudinal barriers to overcome. Snell, an academic advisor and adjunct instructor at a four-year university, comments on the “dark side” of the emphasis on the work ethic for college attendance in relationship to first-generation students, social class and literacy.³⁶

According to Snell, for the families of first-generation students, college is seen as a means to a good job not an end in itself--

“The dark side rests on the premise that education exists solely to improve work opportunities and salary. Socially, going to college is often tolerated only insofar as it provides added value to work. Pedagogically, the classes that count are those in a major and those that can add employment value to any degree.”³⁷

Snell takes this point further and links the declining independent reading habits of college students to the “dark side” of the work ethic in higher education. In looking at the ACT, NEA and the National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) 2006 Report on literacy achievement, Snell notes that a—

...cross-cultural gap exists between faculty, who generally read literature for pleasure, and their students, who read less and less and generally do not read literature for pleasure. This gap implies that students lack exactly the intellectual practice and involvement that faculty require and expect for academic success. Students coming from households where no one reads can be expected to be at a disadvantage.³⁸

Consistent with this author's perspective, it is critical that information literacy programs such as ReadDeVry work to bridge the gap between faculty expectations, the student's home environment, and student engagement in the total academic culture. A "lifetime of literacies" is clearly the direction needed for students unprepared to deal with the rigors of academe.

Information Literacy Theory Applied to Reading Circles

Eisenberg, Lowe and Spitzer define information literacy broadly to include visual, media, computer, digital, network and basic literacy as part of their information literacy skills model.³⁹ Information literacy has an independent learning component which allows the student to self-regulate and choose meaningful learning tasks and outcomes.

Beaupre believes that a combination of traditional reading, media, and Internet information is necessary in today's educational world to bridge cultural differences, engage students' realms of experience, and promote academic and cultural literacy.⁴⁰ Some of Beaupre's ideas about student preparedness for higher education parallel those discussed by Snell (2008).

"Our students often come to basic writing classes as academic outsiders, literate in their neighborhoods, often technologically socialized, but lacking the literacy of higher learning."⁴¹

Hsu believes the group dynamic features, mixed ability levels, and students' diverse cultural and ethnic identities in reading circles allow students to create more meanings when they approach and examine texts.⁴² Personal meaning derives from a person's response through literature, and this is a primary benefit of reading circles programming.

Read DeVry Evolves to Fill the Gap in Life-long Literacy for College Students

For over five years, the ReadDeVry program has been operating on our campus and is the main thrust of library programming. The reading circles program has evolved to bring together local authors, influential business leaders, media professionals, faculty, staff, and most importantly, students at DeVry University South Florida. The program began in July 2003 when Trudy Evans, strategic business consultant and local Florida author, was invited to conduct a book talk on her new leadership book, *The Pied Piper Principle*.⁴³ An audience of 30 business management, technology and CIS students, faculty and staff gathered in the University Commons to hear this inaugural book talk. The purpose of the event was to expose undergraduate students to effective leadership principles and practices and to ask questions of an expert in the field.

During Fall Semester 2003, small group discussions on several books were held in the library on the topic of “the college experience”—*Chicken Soup for the College Soul* and *Tuesdays with Morrie*. Short video segments from *Chicken Soup for the Soul Live!* And from the feature film, *Tuesdays with Morrie*, were introduced to students to promote an active learning environment, to heighten interest, and to encourage further discussion. These books and videos were chosen so that students could see themselves in the stories, interacting with other students and significant teachers, past and present, as part of their academic experiences.

Stuart McIver, local Florida author and historian, presented a book talk on Florida Visionaries for National Library Week on April 14, 2004 to illustrate the role technology and innovation played in the economic growth of Florida.⁴⁴ Business faculty encouraged students to attend this program to understand the contributions of entrepreneurs to Florida’s economy.

Over the course of the ReadDeVry program, the DeVry University South Florida Library Committee, consisting of faculty and librarians, has met and continues to meet several times during an academic session to discuss book selections and how to effectively market the reading circles and film showings to undergraduate students. (See Figure 1)

FIGURE 1

Chronology of the ReadDeVry Program and Common Book Selections

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Book Selections/Events</u>
Summer Semester 2003	<i>The Pied Piper Principle</i> Book Talk with Trudy Evans
Fall Semester 2003/2004	<i>Chicken Soup for the College Soul</i> <i>Tuesdays with Morrie</i>
Spring Semester 2004	<i>Florida Visionaries and Inventors</i> (Book Talk) with Stuart McIver
Summer Semester 2005	“Globalization: Can America Compete?” with Doreen Hemlock (based on the book, <i>The World is Flat</i>) (10/2005)
Fall Semester 2005/2006	<i>Who Moved My Cheese?</i> Book Talk with Trudy Evans
Spring Semester 2006	<i>Freakonomics</i>
Summer Semester 2006	<i>The DaVinci Code</i>
Fall Semester 2006/2007	<i>The Success Principles</i>
Spring Semester 2007	<i>The Covenant with Black America</i>
Summer Semester 2007	<i>Freedom Writers Diary</i>
Fall Semester 2007/2008	<i>An Inconvenient Truth</i> and Global Warming Debate Forum
Spring Semester 2008	<i>Jonathan Livingston Seagull</i> <i>I Am Legend</i> (Student-led Reading Circle) <i>The Pursuit of Happyness</i>
Summer Semester 2008	<i>I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings</i> <i>The Outsiders</i>
Fall Semester 2008	Stephen King Short Story Festival <i>One-Minute Manager</i> Book Talk with Trudy Evans <i>The Case for Christ</i>
Spring Semester 2009	<i>The Last Lecture</i> with Dr. James Kirk <i>Oh, the Places You’ll Go!</i>
Summer Semester 2009	<i>Mountains Beyond Mountains</i>

Student input on book selections is sought at the reading circles themselves, and our experience has shown that faculty offering incentives to students (such as “extra credit points”) and word-of-mouth advertising by students are our most effective marketing tools for increasing student attendance at the reading circles. The library has also sponsored raffles with free book give-aways, and trivia contests with gift certificates to build excitement about the reading circles program.

Now in its sixth year of operation, the ReadDevry program continues to promote reading of common books by students, faculty and staff. By offering a variety of reading and viewing selections, the librarians and faculty Library Committee members seek to nurture a love of reading and to foster a lifetime reading habit among our career-focused student body. The reading circles program has involved many faculty and administrators in the planning and implementation process. (See Figure 2)

FIGURE 2

Key Participants in Reading Circles Planning and Program Delivery

Academic Faculty, Administrators and Librarians

Campus/Metro President (1)
Dean of Academic Affairs (1)
Dean of General Studies (2)
Dean of Student Affairs (1)
Director of Community Relations (1)
Director of Career Services (1)
Director of Information Technology (1)
English Faculty (5)
General Studies Faculty (3)
Business/CIS Faculty(3)
Technology Faculty (2)
Librarians (2)
Academic Support Center Manager (1)
Student Activities Coordinator (1)
Bookstore Manager (1)
Total Faculty/Staff Participants= 26

Local Authors & Media Professionals as Presenters

Stuart McIver, Local Florida Historian and Author (2004)
Trudy Evans, The Raven Group (2003-)
Kim Weiss, HCI Books (2007)
Sherri Winston, *Sun-Sentinel* (2008)
Linda Spitzer, Storyteller (2008)
Cindy Goodman, *Miami Herald* (2004)
Doreen Hemlock, *Miami Herald* (2005)

Students

Total Involved in ReadDeVry (as of August 1, 2009)= 575+

Our educational philosophy stresses that reading for information and enjoyment contributes to independent, self-directed learners. A second element of our educational philosophy concentrates on a “writing-reading connection” with students encouraged to post written comments on the ReadDeVry blog found on the Web at <http://readdevry.blogspot.com>. In particular, English faculty ask students to write short papers on the book discussions and films so that the students engage in an active learning experience to enhance their writing, research and critical thinking skills as part of a writing center methodology.⁴⁵ We also invite local authors and media professionals as ReadDeVry presenters to introduce our students to the broader visions of applied learning available to them in South Florida.

Benefits of Reading Circles and the Program Impact As Reported by Students and Faculty

Lin identified a number of benefits of reading circles—community building, opportunities to create connections between texts and personal experiences, the ability to listen to various interpretations presented by others, taking ownership of one’s own learning through discussion and sharing with others, and deepening one’s understanding and enjoyment of the texts.⁴⁶

To obtain feedback from program participants, an informal survey was conducted with students and faculty involved with the ReadDeVry program. The survey was distributed to students and faculty via e-mail and in the book discussion groups in August 2008. A total of ten responses were received. Six students and four faculty provided feedback through written comments. (See Figure 3)

FIGURE 3
Informal E-Mail & Book Discussion Group Participant Survey (August 2008)

Date: August 27, 2008

Dear DeVry South Florida Students, Faculty & Staff--

The Library Committee seeks your input on the Library Reading Circles program.

We are very much interested in selecting books that are high-interest and can stimulate thoughtful discussion. The Library Committee hopes you can assist with evaluating the past success of the Library's Reading Circles Program and with contributing to future directions.

Here are the questions to answer for the Library Committee today--

(1) Did you attend one of the Library's Reading Circles programs offered this past year?
YES NO

(2) If you answered YES, which of the programs did you attend?

Book Discussion of--

Film Showing of—

If you answered YES, what motivated you to attend a Reading Circles program?

(3) Describe your viewpoint related to the value of the Reading Circles program to your DeVry educational program experience.

(4) How can the Library improve the Reading Circles program? For example, what types of programs are needed to encourage reading, improve reading comprehension, and lead to a better appreciation of fiction and nonfiction books?

(5) What are some books and films you recommend for future Reading Circles offered at DeVry University South Florida?
List your suggestions here....

(6) Additional comments you'd like to make about the Library Reading Circles program-

Thanks for your input and sharing of ideas!!

Student Participant Reactions to the Reading Circles Program

Students responded to the informal e-mail survey that included six questions about the ReadDeVry book selections, film showings and perceived benefits of the reading circles. The student views of the reading circles are positive and pragmatic as reflected in their written comments--

“It is a great experience. It opens one’s eyes to different perspectives on important everyday and philosophical topics.”

“They are a great way to encourage people to get into the habit of reading.”

“I see it as a positive opportunity to enhance my literary and linguistic skills.”

“The reading circle is fun and brings students together for friendship.”

“A stress reliever.”

“I feel strong about [recommending] *In the Time of the Butterflies* because it is based in my family’s country and most of my family suffered...because of Trujillo’s dictatorship.”

“The value, in my opinion, is to learn and acquire more knowledge of literature. Select fiction books that can have an impact on students.”

Faculty Feedback to the Reading Circles Program

Faculty responded favorably as well but offered additional suggestions for improvement in the delivery of the program. From their written comments, one can see that faculty expect students to both read and write about their learning experiences, and this perspective represents the faculty’s belief in the reading-writing connection learning theory.

“The value is paramount. Reading is connected to writing and that is clearly and consistently showing up as a deficiency. Let the students make the selections and show the film first to generate more interest. Seek greater endorsement and support by Deans and faculty.”

“These are invaluable as a part of a well rounded education. Being able to talk about other’s opinions in a safe environment helps spur discussion, helps all to look at the world in a different way, and are very much a part of the Socratic method of learning. This is a great thing for the campus.”

“We need to continue this [program] to be an example to students about reading, and what academics do: read and discuss books, and write about them if possible.”

“Blogs have been used for past Reading Circles books in addition to the face-to-face discussions. We need to expand the Reading Circles to ”virtual discussions” through the use of Webcam/real time discussions to increase our attendance and interest.”

“Have a group of students pick a book and assign them an advisor/leader. Make it more like a book club. I liked the *DaVinci Code* book best among the reading selections.”

Future Directions and Program Recommendations— Opportunities for Process Improvement

Based on the ReadDeVry programming experience, a number of recommendations for future programming directions were identified working cooperatively with faculty, students and staff.

1. Use Technology to Reach More Students

One strong faculty recommendation is to use technology to reach remote students, faculty and staff in a distance learning setting and using social networking websites (eCollege Information Literacy Resource Shell, ning.com or Facebook social networking websites, and web conferencing).⁴⁷ Faculty in the technology and general studies departments have encouraged this future direction and are deploying WebEx and ElluminateLive! to reach our off-campus students attending university centers or needing remote access from home as recommended by Cavanaugh.⁴⁸ The ReadDeVry Blog provides students, faculty and staff with the opportunity to critically comment and post ideas about the books and films introduced each session at the book/film discussion groups. Cavanaugh suggests that reading can be promoted by developing a video booktalk kiosk to inform and motivate students to read.⁴⁹

Available for sale on February 23, the new Kindle 2 electronic book reader stores 1,500 books, newspapers, magazines and blogs with a dictionary for definitions of words, the ability to

adjust text size and the ability to vocalize text.⁵⁰ Libraries are loaning the readers for access to best sellers and books requested on interlibrary loan, and DeVry University South Florida Library is planning to purchase five Kindle 2 readers to encourage student recreational reading through this newest reading technology.⁵¹

2. Read Aloud During the Small Group Discussions

A second suggestion to improve the program is to have participants read aloud sections of the books throughout the university curriculum. Reading aloud benefits students of all ages and contributes to continued reading habits. McPherson summarizes the benefits of oral reading for students as: develops and increases vocabulary base; interest in reading; comprehension; linguistic skills; syntactic and semantic literary registers; knowledge of narratives; social and cultural knowledge; reading achievement; proficiency and quality in writing; general literacy skills; and a lifelong love of story and learning. “When we engage students in story through read-alouds in our school, we are not only modeling powerful, strategic, meaningful reading habits, but we are also imparting the gift of lifelong learning.”⁵² As of August 2009, DeVry University is adding NetLibrary e-audiobooks to the resources available with MP3 downloads to support reading-out loud. Researchers Duchein & Mealey worked with 90 freshmen in a developmental reading and study strategies class to maintain reading journals to enhance skills.⁵³

3. Expand the Reading Circles into Larger Cultural Events

Make “reading a contact sport” as suggested by Fister, an academic librarian, and sponsor a collaborative cultural event with the community-at-large as recommended by college librarians Brinkman & Yates.⁵⁴ A Stephen King Short Story Festival, held in October 2008 at DeVry, highlighted three Stephen King horror stories with film clips as part of the Halloween Student Activities calendar and attracted a total of 28 students and faculty to the reading circles. The

library has celebrated in May, “Get Caught Reading” Month, found on the web at <http://www.getcaughtreading.org> to show faculty, staff and administrators reading their favorite books in photos projected on the campus multimedia projection system.

4. Build a Public Library-University Partnership

With the opening of a new Miramar Public Library in September 2008, the Library Director has joined the Miramar Public Library Friends group which is a partnership-building opportunity for both libraries. The DeVry Library staff is encouraging students to obtain public library cards, to check-out leisure reading materials, and to take field trips to the public library for local author events or computer training. The National Endowment for the Arts Big Read and American Library Association’s “One Book, One Community” programs are opportunities to promote reading cooperatively with our local branch library and the Broward County Library System.⁵⁵

5. Promote Student-Led Reading Circles

Students organized and led the reading circle in Spring Semester 2008 on the book and film, *I Am Legend*. The student-led groups attracted 12 students, and student leadership and promotion of the reading circles was a desirable outcome of the discussion sessions.

6. Focus on a “Triad-Literacy” Model for Life-long Learning

DiPardo and Sperling discuss a “triad-literacy”—reading for personal satisfaction, for vocational preparation, and for civic participation—first introduced in 1917 by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the National Education Association (NEA).⁵⁶ This NCTE/NEA perspective continues to be relevant for our discussions today about literacy-learning needs. The need to work on aliteracy was also noted by Cramer and Castle, who wrote that, “...aliteracy may be an even greater problem than illiteracy.”⁵⁷

The foundation of our democratic society and global economy is built on a literate and competitive people. The mission of promoting the joy of reading lies at the ethical core of our professional practice and calling as educators and as librarians. Useful suggestions for reading professionals who work with youth and adults to encourage the reading habit are found in Sebesta.⁵⁸

7. *Share Best Practices*

ReadDeVry serves as a model for other colleges and universities of positive action in building information literacy, promoting reading, and stimulating intellectual growth. The program has been an important investment in the future of our career-focused college students. Over the past five years, best practices have been shared with the DeVry University campus librarians and with the Associate Council members of the Southeast Florida Library Information Network (SEFLIN).

8. *Identify Role Models in Common Reading Selections and Highlight Their Accomplishments*

The Freedom Writers Diary by Erin Gruwell is an excellent example of role models in literature and in real life for college students.⁵⁹ This particular book reflects the reading-writing connection and social learning theories described earlier. The book itself was an undertaking of teacher-mentor, Erin Gruwell, and her 150 high school students who attended Wilson High School in Room 203 and were labeled “failures” and “at-risk.” This story of high teacher expectations shows how student learning and engagement led to student retention and graduation from high school. Many of the Freedom Writers planned on attending college as well. The book is a compilation of excerpts from the student journals written over the course of their four years attending English classes in Room 203 and the evolving student views on diversity, tolerance and world peace.

Other common books discussed in the reading circles program illustrate the lives of successful role models such as Mitch Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Chris Gardner's *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Randy Pausch's *The Last Lecture*, and Tracy Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, about Dr. James Farmer.⁶⁰ Our ReadDeVry student participants have opportunities to socialize, read, discuss, research, view and write which empowers faculty and librarians involved to build a "lifetime of literacies" among our career-focused college students. Ultimately, the program model contributes to the enjoyment of reading, development of friendships, building of self-esteem, and creation of an enriched learning environment for those students and professionals that seize the opportunity for sharing and growth.

Reflections on the Future of a "Lifetime of Literacies"

Glazing into the crystal ball to see our human future, "literacy" will be transformed by technological advances and their impact on our brains. For example, recent brain science research conducted by Dr. Gary Small, Director of the UCLA Memory and Aging Research Center, points to changes in how the brain works and impacts learning as a consequence of digital technologies.⁶¹ Ridley, Library Director at University of Calgary, Canada, argues that we are moving toward a new era of literacy called "post-literacy."⁶² "Post Literacy" is a phrase used "to capture the possibility of rich human communication that exceeds and replaces visible language, such as writing and reading, as the dominant means for the understanding and exchange of ideas."⁶³ "Post Literacy" represents "the beginning of a transformational capacity as yet unimagined."⁶⁴

As projected by a research team of students at the University of Guelph, neuroscience will advance to the point that a pill will supplement knowledge acquisition and alter the way we

learn. Technology will further alter learning through a brain-computer interface (BCI) developed in the field of cybernetics. BCI is the ability for the brain and computer to interact without external aid.⁶⁵

With the evolution of BCI, the society of the future can expect to see the development of “techlepathic technologies” that permit a new human to connect with people via an online neural network. By connecting to this neural network, every person on the planet is linked to one collective consciousness with instantaneous access to knowledge available worldwide. Like the Internet, “techlepathy” would allow people to tap an internal network composed of billions of human profiles (similar to our current social networking sites, Facebook and MySpace), with communication through electric impulses. “No words, no text, no literacy.”⁶⁶ Is this prediction science fiction? Only time will tell.

The present picture of young adult and adult reading habits is improving. According to the latest NEA national survey, there has been a significant increase among virtually every age group measured.⁶⁷ The youngest age group (ages 18-24) has undergone a major transformation--from a 20 percent decline in reading in 2002 to a 21 percent increase reading in 2008. This gain in reading may be a result of the methodology employed since a new question was introduced in the 2008 NEA reading survey. Online reading could account for the increase in NEA reported reading among 18-24 year olds.⁶⁸ For as Thompson writes in the *Washington Post*. “the percentage of American adults who report reading any book not required for work or school during the previous year is still declining—from 56.5% in 2002 to 54.3% in 2008.”⁶⁹

As reported by NEA in January 2009, the advocacy of parents, librarians, teachers, civic leaders and the media is making a significant difference in American reading habits. Dana Giolia, Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, believes that this recent rise in

reading is not a school-based trend but a broader, community-wide phenomenon.⁷⁰ Millions of parents, teachers, librarians, civic leaders, adults and teens in 500 communities with over 21,000 organizational partners have taken action in support of reading literary fiction through the NEA’s Big Read grant-funded program.⁷¹

Across America, thousands of programs, large and small, have been created or significantly enhanced to address the decline in reading and the challenge to a “lifetime of literacies.” To address the problem of student aliteracy, families, teachers, librarians and civic leaders “need to create occasions of exposure—meaningful, charged immersions” to motivate students to read.⁷² The 2008 NEA report states that increased reading by Americans points to literary reading being a higher priority for families, schools and communities. Programs like ReadDeVry, outlined in this article, are critical to maintaining the gains in fiction and nonfiction books as reported in the national media.

To assist families, librarians, community and educators in promoting a “lifetime of literacies,” the authors have compiled a reading circles resource guide based on the ReadDeVry teaching-learning experience. (See Figure 4)

FIGURE 4
Literature Circles Online Resource Guide

Websites

Book & Reading Forums <http://onlinebookclub.org>

Book Group Buzz: A Booklist Blog <http://bookgroupbuzz.booklistonline.com/>

“A one-stop book group resource, and our corps of bloggers will be talking to you about books that worked well (or books that bombed) and providing organizational tips, read-alike comments along the lines of, “if this worked well with your book club, try this,” and more. We’ll also be pointing you to Web sites that offer book club ideas, reading guides, and other useful stuff.”

American Library Association Book Discussion Groups

http://wikis.ala.org/professionaltips/index.php/Book_Discussion_Groups

American Library Association Great Stories CLUB (and Grants for Underserved Teens)

<http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/ppo/programming/greatstories/club.cfm>

Book Movement <http://www.bookmovement.com/>

Gives book clubs a way to recommend books to each other on a national level.

Book-Clubs-Resource <http://www.book-clubs-resource.com>

“A guide to book clubs and reading groups.”

Circles Literature Build Excitement for Books! *Education World*

http://www.education-world.com/a_curr/curr259.shtml

Get Caught Reading <http://www.publishers.org> and <http://www.getcaughtreading.org/>

Association American Publishers annual promotion, May

Library of Congress, The Center for the Book “One Book” Reading Promotion Projects

<http://www.loc.gov/loc/cfbook/one-book.html>

LiteratureCircles.com <http://www.literaturecircles.com>

“A web resource for educators interested in student-led book discussion groups.”

Literature Circles Resource Center <http://www.litcircles.org>

“Information and resources for teachers and students in elementary and middle school.”

John Tyler Community College Literature Circles

http://www.jtcc.edu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=461

National Reading Group Month (October)

<http://www.nationalreadinggroupmonth.org/index.html>

NEA Big Read Creating a Nation of Readers <http://www.neabigread.org/>

“Inspiring people across the country to pick up a good book. Listen to radio programs, watch video profiles, and read brief essays about classic authors.”

Reading Group Choices <http://www.readinggroupchoices.com/>

This website selects discussible books and suggests discussion topics for reading groups. The company produces a printed guide annually that is distributed nationally to libraries, reading groups, book stores, community book festivals, and individuals. Its popular website offers interesting, informative, fun, and interactive material of interest to book clubs.

Reading Group Guides <http://www.readinggroupguides.com/content/index.asp>

“The online community for reading groups”

Sun-Sentinel Online Book Club http://weblogs.sun-sentinel.com/features/arts/offthepage/blog/2009/01/sunsentinels_first_online_book.html

“Off the page” A Blog about cultural life , both inside and outside the covers.

Technorati Blog Search Engine <http://technorati.com/>

(1,345 hits on “book clubs” 6/22/08) (296 hits for “literature circles” 6/22/08)
(65 hits for “reading circles” 6/22/08) (59 hits for “reading clubs” 6/22/08)

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