



Article

Personal Growth, Habits and Understanding: Pleasure Reading Among First-Year University Students

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Received: 9 June 2010

Accepted: 23 Oct. 2010

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Abstract

Objectives – This study examines the reading habits and experiences of first-year undergraduate students at Dalhousie University and the University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Methods – First-year undergraduate university students (aged 18 to 20) were recruited to take part in focus group discussions and responses were analysed to examine the following topics: (1) the role of reading in their lives, both academic and personal; (2) the development of reading habits from childhood; (3) reading engagement strategies; and (4) selection strategies.

Results – This study suggests that reading for pleasure is a well-established habit amongst many first-year undergraduate students. First-year undergraduates primarily read for pleasure in order to relax but also recognize that pleasure reading can play a positive role in their academic performance, enhancing their range of background knowledge as well as their active vocabulary.

Conclusions – The conclusions of this research provide recommendations for librarians and university administration to engage students and increase rates of retention in postsecondary institutions. In particular, recommendations related to the importance of pleasure reading collections, campus reading programs, book clubs, readers’ advisory services and quiet and comfortable reading areas in academic libraries are provided.

Introduction

First-year undergraduate university students (aged 18 to 20) are at a pivotal moment in their lives. They are often moving away from home for the first time and may find university life difficult, experiencing both social and academic challenges (Kantanis, 2000). Evidence suggests that when first-year university students read for pleasure, they are taking part in an activity that allows them to continue to develop their literacy skills and to refine their sense of self (Hughes-Hassell & Rodge, 2007; Jarvis, 2003; Salter & Brooke 2003). Positive experiences with pleasure reading may assist in the transition to adulthood during the university experience and may even enhance student retention. In this study, the pleasure reading habits of first-year university students are explored to answer the following research questions:

1. How do these young adult readers see themselves as readers? What is the importance of reading, both in their personal and academic lives?
2. How has their reading habit developed since childhood?
3. How do they engage with what they read?
4. What do they read? How do they select their reading material?

On a practical level this study generates information useful for informing the development of a variety of strategies to encourage the pleasure reading habit amongst undergraduate students including the establishment of pleasure reading collections, readers’ advisory services, and campus book clubs.

Literature Review

Pleasure reading has been the focus of several national studies in the first decade of the 21st century. The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) described the state of pleasure reading in the United States as “an imminent cultural crisis” in its 2004 report, *Reading at Risk*, which found a 10% decline in the number of adult readers in the past twenty years. This report also found that reading had declined for those in the 18-24 year old age group more precipitously than for other age categories. In contrast, the *Reading and Buying Books for Pleasure* survey (Createc, 2005) in Canada indicated that the reading habits of young people, aged 16 to 24, were not experiencing a similar decline. The Canadian study indicated that 84% of respondents between the ages of 16 and 24 had purchased a book to read for pleasure within the last 12 months and that reading habits for this age group remained largely unchanged over the past two decades.

Pleasure Reading and Postsecondary Education

College and university attendance is an important step for many young people as they come of age and become independent adults. In a 2004 report conducted by Statistics Canada and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada, Lambert, Zeman, Allen and Bussiere observe that Canada has the highest level of per capita post-secondary enrolment in the world (p. 6). However, the experience of moving from high school to post-secondary education can be challenging, and Shaiensks and Gluszynski (2007) emphasize that maintaining a “positive attitude and [feeling a] sense of belonging during [the] first-year of postsecondary education is critical in the decision to continue or drop out” (p.4). Postsecondary institutions

are developing new strategies to engage students in a variety of educationally purposeful activities in an effort to attain higher levels of achievement and retention. The National Survey of Student Engagement (2009) cites a positive correlation between student engagement in such activities and whether or not students return to a second year at a postsecondary institution (p.7). The most risky time for most students is between their first and second year of study, when, statistically, most dropouts occur, so engagement activities are often focused on first-year students.

The academic benefits of pleasure reading are emphasized by Babbitt Bray et al. (2004), who argue that the more college students read for pleasure the more likely they are to develop a strong vocabulary and cultural literacy. Clark and Rumbold (2006) state that reading for pleasure is positively linked with reading achievement and writing capability as well as comprehension and grammar. They emphasize that a positive attitude towards reading also relates to stronger standardized testing scores. Ross (1999) observes that pleasure reading can provide valuable insights into personal relationships and experiences and can have a substantial impact on readers' understanding of themselves and the world. A similar argument is made by Richardson and Eccles (2007), who observe:

The reading that children and adolescents engage in for its own sake may also provide 'self-generated learning opportunities' that in turn serve to nurture and support educational aspirations, achievement motivation, occupational choices, as well as ways of understanding oneself and others (p.342).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (2009) finds that the vast majority of American college students (74-80%) read less than four books for pleasure during the academic year (p.36). This study suggests that homework and assigned readings are not entirely responsible for low levels of pleasure reading among this

group. Falk-Ross (2001) suggests that a significant number of first-year students at colleges and universities in the United States enter postsecondary education with inadequate reading skills and are under-prepared to meet the requirements of their coursework. Garfield (2008) explores strategies to support and encourage student reading in a UK university. She advocates the development of a University Reading Strategy to aid and improve student learning in the university environment, and concludes that those who attend university are often not prepared for academic study and that "deep" reading must be "nurtured, encouraged, and enabled" (p.13) in academia and that technology, programming and services should be used to assist in this process. Elliott (2007) and Trott and Elliot (2009) argue for the reintegration of readers' services in the academic library as one option to address the declining literacy rates of post-secondary students.

Pleasure Reading Collections and Reader's Advisory in Academic Libraries

Pleasure reading collections and readers' advisory are two methods through which academic institutions might attempt to engage students with pleasure reading; however, few academic institutions use either of these strategies. Smith and Young (2008) recommend such services to broaden the relationship between the library and the larger community of the institution, including faculty, staff and students. O'English et al. (2006) and Cabbage (2010) explore the value of graphic novels in academic library recreational reading collections, suggesting that graphic novels can provide support to the academic curriculum while circulating as a part of a pleasure reading collection. In this way, academic libraries can promote literacy and provide a rewarding pleasure reading experience, while also creating collections that may be used in the classroom. Sanders (2009) examines the popular reading collections at three universities in the United States and discovers that undergraduate students use these collections actively for their recreational reading.

Reading Engagement in Groups

Salter and Brooke (2007) maintain that programs and activities that promote pleasure reading are important to support reader development among college students. Reading for pleasure in a group, as a member of a book club or through participating in a common reading program, is another strategy to encourage reading for pleasure among university students. Ferguson (2006) and Boff et al. (2005) suggest that common reading experiences provide an opportunity to promote reading habits that will follow participants throughout their lives. They further suggest that such experiences may bring together students who may not have interacted with each other before, perhaps because they are from different disciplines, and furthermore, through participating, students will exchange ideas, thus improving their knowledge and critical thinking skills. Boff et al. (2005) thus conclude that common reading programs "build community among students, [and] also build bridges from the library to the rest of the university" (p.282). Reading groups can also be useful in promoting the discussion of books and reading amongst those who prefer sharing their reading with people outside of their friendship circle (Howard, 2008).

Reading and Academic Major

There is limited research on the relationship between pleasure reading and a student's choice of subject major in college or university. Chen (2007) examined data from two national surveys of the pleasure reading habits of university students in Taiwan, one addressing first-year students and the other fourth year students (Chen, 2007). The results of these surveys show that "humanities majors were reading more extracurricular material than natural science and education majors, but not necessarily more than math/computer science and engineering majors" (p.651). Karim and Hasan (2006) examined the academic and pleasure reading habits and attitudes of students at the International Islamic University Malaysia. They studied students in

both IT-based and arts-based programs and found that IT students were likely to "rely more on the web site as their reading materials and resources" (p.296). This study also found that students in the arts-based program used the library at a much greater rate than their counterparts in IT-based programs (Karim & Hasan, 2006, p.295).

Readers in a Multimedia World

Wilson and Casey (2007) attribute declines in reading among secondary students to video and computer-generated games. Lankshear and Knobel (2007) state that research in education should include digital literacy, such as gaming. Smith and Young (2008) suggest that pleasure reading is increasingly complex in a world of blogs, webrings, fan sites, and wikis: while students may be reading a great deal, their reading may be "short, unfiltered, unedited bites" (p.521) rather than sustained and immersive. Mokhtari, Reichard and Gardner (2009) examined the impact of the Internet and television on the reading habits of college students at a university in the United States and found that while watching television was a common activity among the students studied, the internet and recreational reading were described as more enjoyable (Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, 2009, p.618). They also found that the students do not feel that television viewing affects time spent on the internet but that they do feel that it decreases the amount of time they spend reading both academically and recreationally (p.618). The National Endowment for the Arts (2007) report *To Read or Not to Read* suggests that on average television consumes approximately half of daily leisure time among Americans ages 15 and older (p.38). In 2006, pleasure reading among 15 to 24-year-olds in the United States accounted for 2.6% of their leisure time (p. 40). This age group is also likely to multi-task while reading, with 35% of 7th to 12th graders using other media including television, music, or a computer while reading (National Endowment for the Arts, 2007, p. 44).

Thus, while there has recently been a renewed

interest in research into pleasure reading by various groups, few studies have specifically studied undergraduate university students even though the recreational reading habits of this age group have been identified by two large scale studies by the National Endowment for the Arts (2004, 2007) as undergoing a precipitous decline. Likewise, few previous studies have analyzed undergraduate students' perceptions of group reading activities, the potential of pleasure reading to enhance student engagement and retention, or the appeal of pleasure reading collections within the academic library. This study addresses this gap in the research literature by examining the role of pleasure reading in the lives of first-year undergraduate students.

Methods

Using focus group methodology, this study examined five groups of first-year undergraduate students at Dalhousie University and the University of King's College in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The participants in the focus groups were all 18 to 20 years of age and were all in their first-year of postsecondary education. Focus groups allowed for the gathering of qualitative data in a setting that promoted discussion among multiple participants. Focus groups were chosen to allow for more in-depth discussion than could have been achieved through a questionnaire. Gibbs (1997) states that through focus groups, attitudes, feelings, and experiences may be revealed through the interaction in a group setting as opposed to other methods such as questionnaires and one-to-one interviewing. However, Gibbs (1997) also makes clear that focus groups have certain limitations: the researcher may have less control over the data than in quantitative research and not all participants may participate equally. Furthermore, it is always possible that participants will fail to express their personal opinions and will conform to a popular opinion (p. 4).

The primary research instruments consisted of a set of focus group questions, developed from

the research questions (see Appendix). This standard set of questions was used to facilitate comparison between groups. During discussions, deviation from the questions was allowed in order to pursue topics that spontaneously arose through the discussions and to clarify ideas.

Recruitment of Participants

Once ethics approval was obtained from the Dalhousie University Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board, first-year undergraduate students were recruited through two different methods. The first approach involved soliciting participants directly through class visits to selected first-year undergraduate classes with enrolments of over 100 students in a variety of faculties. During class visits, those that were interested in the study provided their name and email address for follow up contact. Secondly, students were recruited through posters placed in high-traffic areas on the Dalhousie University and University of King's College campuses. Recruitment posters were also placed in libraries, classroom buildings, and the Student Union Building.

Students were encouraged to participate with the understanding that the discussion would only take 60 – 90 minutes of their time. While they were not compensated monetarily, pizza and refreshments were provided and those that participated were entered in a draw for a \$50 gift certificate to a local shopping mall. Readers of all types were encouraged to participate.

Sixty-four students initially indicated an interest in the study. All 64 individuals were contacted and 26 ultimately participated in focus groups. Five focus groups were conducted and two to eight individuals participated in each. Focus group discussions were digitally recorded, transcribed, and coded using QSR NVivo qualitative analysis software. Using a grounded theory approach, transcripts were independently analyzed by both researchers and emerging themes were identified. To assure confidentiality,

pseudonyms were used in place of participants' real names in the transcripts. Neither sentence structure nor grammar was corrected in the transcription process. Thirteen participants were from rural communities and thirteen were from urban communities.¹ There were slightly more male participants (14) than female (12). Twelve students were registered in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, an equal number were registered in the Faculty of Science, and two were registered in the Faculty of Management.

Results

The role of reading (Research Question 1)

In each focus group the participants were asked if pleasure reading is important in their academic and personal lives. All except one member of the focus groups indicated that they were enthusiastic and active readers who read for pleasure primarily for relaxation and enjoyment. Even the one self-identified reluctant reader mentioned that she was reading a book for a class and that she was enjoying it and discussing it with her friends. However, it must be taken into account that those who participated in the focus groups were self-selected and therefore might be more likely to have been enthusiastic about reading because they volunteered to discuss their reading habits and experiences.

Some participants found it almost impossible to separate their academic reading from their pleasure reading experiences. Several participants attributed reading to helping them become more intelligent and improving their vocabulary. Four participants commented on the fact that reading allowed them to develop intellectually and gain perspective on different topics. The possibility of learning new things and broadening perspectives was identified as a strong

motivation for reading. For example, Ashley expressed the opinion that "[Reading] expands your world. It exposes you to places you wouldn't normally be exposed to in everyday life." Several of the students in the focus groups described how pleasure reading provided them with a more thorough understanding of course material; as indicated in the following quote:

Isabella:

I'd say [when you read] you just expand your abilities in general. In reading you develop better vocabulary for writing and if you read like that's more for pleasure reading but even if you read you know information, it gives you greater knowledge, like worldly things....If you don't read then you can't have the base in order to build on. You know what I mean? You can go to lectures and listen but if you don't really understand what they are talking about from the beginning, then you don't have that basic knowledge.

The Development and Encouragement of Reading (Research Question 2)

During the focus group sessions participants were encouraged to recall their first reading experiences. Fifteen of the individuals cited the positive influence of their parents and their role in creating positive reading habits and experiences. Madison, for example, stated that "My room just always had books and that was my parents naturally said "you should go read" so I've just always been around it." Many of the participants recalled in great detail how they learned to read and the pride they felt in this accomplishment:

Jacob:

The first thing I remember was I started with a *Calvin and Hobbes* comic and I would always flip through it because I liked the pictures and the artwork and everything like that. But I

¹ Urban communities were defined as Census Metropolitan Areas (CMA) as determined by Statistics Canada.
<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/reference/dict/geo009.htm>

could never quite read the words in the bubbles and things like that and it was really frustrating till one day I was reading a panel and I was able to discern the words 'yes' and 'no.' And then it started; words just seemed to fit together after that and they started making sense. That's about the earliest thing I can remember about reading.

Participants also discussed how their pleasure reading habits had changed since entering university. Several students noted that they had an increased understanding of what they were reading and that their preferred genres had changed. These two factors may be interconnected, as Jacob explains:

Jacob:

When I got older I actually started reading a lot more because when I was younger I would read like simple stuff like comic books and things like that but once I got into high school I started becoming familiar with more words and increased my vocabulary I found I could read more fantasy, more complex fantasy novels and things like that, so I started reading more because I was like really interested.

Andrew explains that his reading habits have changed significantly since starting university and that he now only reads serious, high quality reading material because he finds it most rewarding and productive. His academic reading and his pleasure reading now intersect:

Andrew:

I think university has kind of like shoved this idea on me that my time is very valuable and when I choose a book I kind of discriminate against anything I think is trash. If I read something I want to get something out of it. Like I think what you guys read

for class I read for pleasure so it's like I'm the opposite situation as you.

Reading Engagement (Research Question 3)

The participants were asked to describe whether any books they had read for pleasure had been particularly influential on their lives. Sixty-five percent of participants felt that pleasure reading had helped them to better understand themselves and the world around them and many mentioned specific titles that had been highly influential. In the following quotes, participants describe their feelings of personal identification with their reading and the way in which their reading has given them an unexpected perspective on their own lives:

Grace:

Well, I read *Hamlet* last year and I can't believe I'm saying a piece of classical fiction changed my life but it did.... In this case it was just two words; it was just one of Hamlet's speeches. Just the two words "let be." I read that and something clicked. I don't understand, I don't know if it was the intention for that to click with every person; it was just the way I was when I was reading that it's really interesting that something meant to be read a certain way can affect people so many different ways.

Brad:

Ummm I read *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens and he had a really crappy life and yet he still maintains ... this positive look on life that things are going to look up eventually and things eventually do go his way. It just kinda gives you that [thought], you know, when things all fall to pieces to just keep moving on. It's just that whole theme. That makes you think "my life isn't so bad." I mean things like my cell phone died and my girlfriend left me. This guy just lost his house.

The participants of the focus groups described various “epiphany moments” in which reading a particular text had caused them to re-think how they understood certain issues. Much like Grace and Brad, Madison discusses the effect of *The Joy Luck Club* and how it changed her view of mother/child relationships:

Madison:

I remember being really profoundly moved by *The Joy Luck Club*. And having such a deep gratitude for my mother after that. Um, just because you realize just how much mothers will do for their children. It’s, it was, profound.

The books that some of the participants described as influencing them were not only those that they were reading solely for pleasure. Samantha mentioned that in FYP [Foundation Year Program] some of the books were helping her better understand human nature. Madison also highlighted how she related to both *Sense and Sensibility*, a book she read purely for pleasure, and another that she had read for FYP:

Samantha:

Not all of [our reading] in FYP [Foundation Year Program]. But a lot of it. A lot of what we learn about is human nature.

Madison:

Sense and Sensibility - my best friend and I are those sisters. Exactly. It was really funny reading it. I read it and I told my friend and then she read it and she was like oh my goodness. I am also St. Augustine as a teenager. It’s kinda scary.

Several participants felt that their academic reading had given them opportunities for personal development. Richardson and Eccles (2007) explain that reading can encourage

adolescents to “think about and contemplate their possible selves – who they want to be, who they are, and who they fear being” (p.354). These important connections encourage the participants to move outside the text and relate to other elements in their own lives, creating a strong sense of engagement with what they are reading. Ross (1999) argues that readers are actively engaged in constructing their own unique meaning from texts based on their own experiences and that “the affective dimension is involved throughout the process, from choosing a book according to mood to valuing a book for its emotional support in providing confirmation, courage or self-acceptance” (p.797). The participants in the current study identified with books because of their prior experiences and created their own unique meaning based on these experiences. They also felt that their reading helped them to understand their own relationships more clearly.

Two-thirds of the participants stated that they frequently discussed both their pleasure and academic reading with friends, classmates or family members. Somewhat surprisingly, however, no participants indicated that they had taken part in Dal Reads!, a campus-wide reading program initiated at Dalhousie University in the summer of 2009 and targeted at first-year undergraduates. The Dal Reads! initiative requested that students read *The Book of Negroes* by Lawrence Hill prior to beginning university; book discussion groups based on the novel were offered in the fall and some first-year classes integrated the novel or related material in lectures. This lack of participation appears connected to students’ desire to be independent readers and their dislike of being “told” what to read for pleasure, as the following quotes illustrate:

Sarah: If someone tells me to read a book, I just don’t want to.

Justin: I feel pressured and I can’t enjoy it.

The participants frequently discussed the importance of “discovering” a book and their

desire to be independent in their reading choices. In her study of young adolescent readers, Howard (2008) describes three broad types of avid readers: social (those who prefer to read the same books as their close friends), detached (those who share their reading with non-friendship-based groups such as book clubs) and solitary (those who do not discuss their reading with their peers). Both detached and solitary readers “tend to view reading recommendations from friends as unwanted pressure ... [they] see themselves as trendsetters or opinion leaders and enjoy dispensing reading recommendations to others” (p.112). In this study, participants Victoria and Carter expressed very similar views as both emphasized how they felt that they would rather “discover” a book independently than follow a recommendation provided to them:

Victoria:

I know how you guys were saying you don't like reading a book that someone was like “Here, read it!” I don't mind if someone is like “Hey you should read it *sometime*” and I might randomly pick it up. What I don't like is when books are so huge like *Harry Potter*. I like them but I don't love them because I think that if I had stumbled across it on my own I would have really liked them but because there is so much expectation behind it it's almost like pressure like you're forced to enjoy it. I'm always thinking “Do I like this right now?” I don't know [the pressure] kinda ruins it.

Carter:

It could be that psychological thing where we want to find that diamond in the rough. I would assume that people who like reading are pretty independent to begin with.

These individuals indicate that they are less likely to be interested in books that are

deemed to popular to the masses or that others recommend to them. They identify what they read with their sense of individuality. This finding implies that programs such as Dal Reads! in which students are told to read a popular and acclaimed book might not be appealing to students such as Carter and Victoria or other “detached avid readers”, as it goes against their desire to be unique and independent in their reading choices.

Despite the fact that they did not participate in Dal Reads, when they were asked if they had previously participated in a book club, 46% of participants indicated that they had done so either through their school or public library and had found it a positive experience:

Aaron:

I find that in a book club, and everyone's talking about it and discussing it and your opinion and your knowledge grows and expands out.

Grace:

And also everyone, depending on where you are in your life and what kind of lives they have, will read a book differently. So it's really interesting to get more than one mind together and just hear their different readings. They'll pick up on things and they will have read more strongly things that you glossed over. Just because of a difference in life experience. So it's really interesting to then be able to reflect on the book [together].

Selection and Reading (Research Question 4)

In the focus groups the participants discussed what they were currently reading; 50% were reading general fiction, 21% were reading various types of nonfiction (biography, autobiography, science, business), and 15% were reading science fiction/fantasy. The

remaining participants were reading other types of genre fiction. Most participants obtained their reading material from commercial sources including chain, independent, and campus bookstores. The next most popular response was that they had received reading material from a friend or relative, and the least common response was that they had borrowed reading material from a library. This is consistent with Koch and Kendall (2003), who studied 16 to 19-year-olds in the United Kingdom and found that few individuals had borrowed fiction books from the library and that the majority were purchasing them or borrowing fiction books from friends. Participants in the current study explained that they often found it difficult to find appealing reading material at the public library and didn't have a clear strategy for selecting books to read for pleasure.

Eighty-eight percent of participants indicated that they spend time reading online. Figure 1 describes their online reading habits and reveals participants do a wide variety of online reading with blogs, Facebook, web comics and anecdotal humour sites appearing

participants indicated that they owned an E-book reader or stated that they read books online.

Participants were asked to describe their impressions of the academic library. They indicated that they were impressed with the research resources, but did not feel that the academic library was a place to find recreational reading materials.

However, most participants indicated that while they remotely accessed the electronic databases provided by the academic library, they had not yet visited the library to borrow books, and when they went to the library it was typically for other activities such as working on group projects or studying. The participants were asked how they would feel about a separate pleasure reading collection within the academic library. A large portion of participants, 83% of those who responded to the question, indicated that they would use such a collection if it existed. These participants indicated that such a collection should be browsable and organized like a large chain bookstore with book displays and genre groupings in order to make book selection easier and faster.

How Participants Spend Time Reading Online

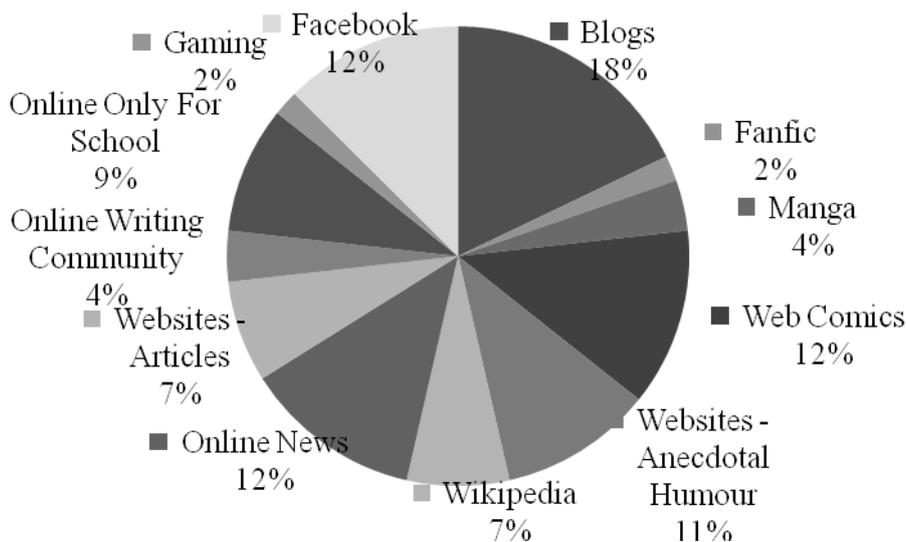


Fig. 1. Online reading habits.

Discussion

Limitations and Assumptions

This study was restricted to first-year undergraduate students attending Dalhousie University and the University of King's College. The research goal was to gain a broad understanding of some of the recurring attitudes and behaviours regarding the pleasure reading experience and first-year undergraduate students. The findings can not necessarily be generalized to first-year undergraduate students in other geographic settings although the findings may be useful to those providing programming and services to this group. The following limitations should also be noted:

- Focus group participants were self-selected. Thus, the students that chose to participate in focus groups discussing their pleasure reading experiences may not be representative of the general first-year student population at either Dalhousie University or the University of King's College.
- Because participants were self-selected, it was difficult to attract an equal number of active and non-active pleasure readers. It was also difficult to attract an equal number of participants from each discipline.
- In conducting this research, it was assumed that those who participated in the focus groups answered questions honestly. However, it is possible that participants did not always express their personal views and gave responses which conformed to popular opinion.

While the focus group participants might not be representative of the entire first-year undergraduate population, the habits and experiences that they described provide useful insight into how they view themselves as

readers and the value of reading within their everyday lives.

Pleasure Reading Collection

The individuals who participated in this focus group were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about the concept of a separate pleasure reading collection within one of the academic libraries on campus. Establishing a pleasure reading collection in academic libraries is recommended as one option to encourage leisure reading among students in an academic environment. O'English et al. (2006) and Cubbage (2010) specifically recommend graphic novel collections because of their popularity with university students. Cubbage (2010) has also developed a pleasure reading collection which can be used as an academic resource for the study of popular culture.

Campus Reading Programs

Participants appeared to resist the Dal Reads! Program because they viewed it as too prescriptive; as independent readers, they wanted to be free to choose their own reading material. This resistance to a common reading initiative might be reduced by having students take part in the selection process, therefore creating a sense of ownership over the program. Campus reading programs could also offer more than one option, so that students could select from a shortlist of three to four titles reflecting a range of subjects, genres and formats.

Book Clubs

Many students indicated that they had participated in and enjoyed book clubs. Participation in book clubs had encouraged them to meet new people and to broaden their understanding of what they read. To encourage students' further enjoyment and engagement with what they are reading for pleasure, book clubs and online reading communities could be organized by the university.

Readers' Advisory

A substantial number of participants indicated that they were currently reading material that they had purchased, received as a gift or borrowed from friends, relatives, and other acquaintances. Very few borrowed books from either the public or academic library to read for pleasure. Several participants indicated that they rarely borrowed books to read for pleasure from the public or academic library because they did not have an effective strategy for choosing appealing reading materials and did not find library collections easy to browse. The academic library could use a variety of Readers' Advisory strategies to encourage pleasure reading during university. Smith and Young (2008) suggest that readers' advisory can be an opportunity to "highlight the collections [and] to broaden the relationship between the library and the university community" (p.522). By facilitating all types of reading in the library, academic librarians have the opportunity to encourage literacy and reading enjoyment. Readers' Advisory services need not be limited to librarians; students should be encouraged to share recommendations with each other through online communities or bulletin boards placed in high traffic areas of the library.

Quiet Reading Area

Developing a quiet, comfortable reading area, perhaps near a separate pleasure reading collection, is another way to create a positive experience for university students. The creation of a comfortable and relaxing area for students to read for pleasure would encourage students to use the library for recreational reading, not just for studying or group work.

Conclusions

This study suggests that reading for pleasure is a well-established habit amongst many first-year undergraduate students. First-year undergraduates primarily read for pleasure in order to relax but also recognize that pleasure reading can play a positive role in their academic performance, enhancing their range

of background knowledge as well as their active vocabulary. Participants read books in print format although they read blogs, comics and news online. Most participants indicated that they obtained their books from bookstores, borrowed them from friends or family, or received them as gifts. Participants rarely borrowed books from either the public or academic library and indicated that they often had difficulty finding appealing pleasure reading materials at the public library whereas they felt that the academic library was only to be used for research resources, not for pleasure reading materials. Many participants also indicated that they enjoyed discussing their pleasure reading with their peers and found such discussions enhanced their understanding of their reading and also provided them with useful suggestions for further reading.

The findings of this study suggest that there is much that academic libraries could do to serve the recreational reading needs of undergraduate students. At a time when academic libraries are witnessing dramatic changes in patterns of use and are increasingly being asked to demonstrate their value and their contribution to student recruitment, retention and engagement (Association of College and Research Libraries, 2010), this study finds that the academic library could expand its role and its visibility in the university by fostering pleasure reading in addition to academic research and information literacy skills. This could be achieved through a variety of strategies including the introduction of a pleasure reading collection, the establishment of on-campus reading groups or book clubs, and the introduction of a range of readers' advisory services.

Future Research

This research study suggests several avenues of future research. First, longitudinal studies are needed to monitor changes in reading habits over time. How do the reading habits of first-year undergraduates change as they progress through subsequent years of study and do these changes vary by field of study?

Second, further research could explore the correlation between pleasure reading, academic discipline and academic achievement. Third, future research could investigate the role of reading for pleasure in the lives of undergraduate students at a broader range of post-secondary institutions in other geographic locations. Finally, if academic libraries do introduce any of the pleasure reading strategies outlined above, the success of these initiatives should be carefully assessed through follow-up studies.

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Appendix –Focus Group Questions

1. Icebreaker
 - What program are you in and where are you from? (removed from screening measures form)
2. What are your first memories of reading as a child?
 - What do you remember about learning to read?
 - How has your reading habit changed since childhood?
 - As a child, did you feel encouraged to read for pleasure?
 - Who encouraged you to read?
3. What are you reading right now?
 - What do you read for pleasure?
 - Do you read Books, magazines, blogs?
 - Are you reading this book for pleasure?
 - How did you choose to read this book
 - Where did you get this book?
 - Do you visit the public library?
 - Tell me about your experiences going to the academic libraries on campus.
 - If there were a recreational reading collection on campus, would you use it?
4. Tell me about your pleasure reading experiences.
 - When do you usually read for pleasure?
 - How would you describe your reading frequency?
 - Why do you choose to read for pleasure?
5. Why is reading important to you?
 - Why is it important in your personal life?
 - Why is it important in your academic life?
6. How do you engage with what you read? By engage, I mean how you interact, perhaps to learn more about a topic or discuss with others.
 - How do you explore what you have read and use this knowledge to understand the world around you?
 - Do you re-read media that is of interest you? Do you research topics / ideas that you come across as you read?
 - Do you discuss what you read with others? If so, who?
 - Have you ever participated in a common reading program or book club?
 - If yes, did you enjoy this experience?
 - What did you feel you gained from it?
 - If you have never participated in a common reading program or book club, why not?
 - Have you had an experience where a book helped you to develop a better sense of yourself? Tell me about this.
 - Did you participate in the Dal Reads! Initiative? Why or why not?
7. What motivates you to read?
 - Do you have goals for your own reading?
 - What prevents you from achieving these goals?
 - What would help you to achieve your reading goals?

8. How do you think that your reading habits and interests have changed since you left high school?
 - Do you see them continuing to change or stay the same?
9. How would you describe your online reading experience?
 - What do you read online?
 - Do you interact with what you read online?
10. How often would you like to be able to read for pleasure?
 - Does anything prevent you from doing so?
 - If something does, what prevents you from reading for pleasure?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to comment on about your own personal reading experience or habits?