

Summary of The Laramie Project Survey of Instructors December 2003

How did you hear about the Laramie Project?

- 1.) We adopted the book as our common reading in the Chapman Community
- 2.) Through BGX
- 3.) I read it about two years ago and saw the play at a local high school.
- 4.) It was announced by Donna Nelson-Beene in GSW.
- 5.) I heard about it through discussions in GSW
- 6.) Univ 100 instructor training
- 7.) I was aware of the play but only read it after it was decided that it would be our common reading experience.
- 8.) When we learned that we were using this for the common reading
- 9.) My department head, Donna Nelson-Beene
- 10.) I heard about it because I was facilitating Univ-100 and because people in my building were reading it.
- 11.) Through the BG News and BGX
- 12.) I saw the HBO special and I was given the play by Jodi Webb.
- 13.) Univ-100
- 14.) I was familiar with the story but didn't know there was a book/play until I got the course materials.
- 15.) Am on the common book committee. Had heard about it earlier from articles and reviews.
- 16.) As university success instructors we are expected to use the book as part of our curriculum.
- 17.) Because my area of specialization is drama and theater, I had actually read TLP several years ago when it first was published.
- 18.) Part of BGX program
- 19.) Univ-100 Instructor training sessions
- 20.) Through peer facilitator training
- 21.) Orientation and FYE program, Univ-100
- 22.) Chapman and Meredith Flynn (colleague and friend in Chapman)
- 23.) Through random Diversity courses, and diversity workshops, before the play and common reading experience was established at BGSU.

In which class or program did you use the Laramie Project?

- 1.) It was the common reading every Chapman student read prior to their arrival on campus in August. We then incorporated it as part of our Welcome Days Orientation. We then took all students to the play in the Joe E. Brown. Finally, my students in my literature course are revisiting it and using it as a text that will catapult them into an art installation project involving hate crimes.
- 2.) Honors Psyc101 (which is also a BGX course)
- 3.) Several CMAI presentations and my Univ-100 class

- 4.) GSW, Eng 111
- 5.) Eng 111X.004 and 111X.006
- 6.) Univ-100 (2 sections)
- 7.) Univ-100
- 8.) BGX and Univ-100
- 9.) Eng 110
- 10.) Univ-100, Honors
- 11.) BGX –Philosophy 125, Contemporary Moral Problems
- 12.) Univ-100
- 13.) Univ-100
- 14.) Univ-100
- 15.) Univ-100 and Chapman (all 150 students read it for welcome days)
- 16.) Univ-100
- 17.) English 111 (3 sections)
- 18.) BGX orientation
- 19.) Univ 100
- 20.) Univ 100
- 21.) Univ-100
- 22.) Sociology 101 (Intro to Sociology) and Sociology 316 Minority Groups
- 23.) Univ-100

Univ-100	BGX	Chapman	English	Sociology
14	4	2	4	1

Approximately how much time did you take to discuss the play with students?

- 1.) On and off for weeks
- 2.) Considerable time during BGX orientation, very little in the subsequent class. (Many of my class did accompany me to see one of the showings of the Laramie Project in the Joe E. Brown Theatre.)
- 3.) We spent four or five weeks discussing the Laramie Project and related issues.
- 4.) Three or four class periods.
- 5.) We discussed the play itself for two class sessions. The students worked on a paper evaluating the Laramie Project as an appropriate choice for the Common Reading Experience for a total of three weeks.
- 6.) We vaguely discussed the play because I utilized the book and the HBO docudrama on the Laramie Project.
- 7.) three class periods (plus part of a fourth after we saw the play on campus)
- 8.) About three class periods and during BGX
- 9.) About a week. We spent three total weeks on the paper assignment related to the play.
- 10.) classes over 3 weeks
- 11.) We spent almost a full day focusing on it during the BGX August Orientation. We spent two weeks during the semester discussing sexual orientation issues in

class. Although the discussions focused on other readings, The Laramie Project served as a helpful point of reference.

I took the entire class to the theatre production.

12.) four hours

13.) about one day

14.) 2-3 classes

15.) 2-3 hours

16.) In our class, we specifically discussed the book for three 50 minute class periods, but we integrated the topic into other discussions throughout the course.

17.) We discussed the play for approximately 2-3 weeks off and on. Part of our discussions focused on just “understanding the play”—that is, how it is structured, what Kaufman’s objectives were (based on the author’s note), etc. Part of the time, we discussed the controversy surrounding the play’s selection as a common reading experience text at the University of Maryland College Park [*Phelps paid a visit to UMCP to protest the University’s use of LP*]. And part of the time, we discussed how to select appropriate passages from the play to support student arguments re: whether this play is an appropriate text to be selected for a reading program like ours or U MD’s.

I used the book and several articles (web, periodical) to structure the second writing assignment for the course (Taking a Position). I asked the students to respond to the question: is TLP an “appropriate” text to be selected and used for the CRE program?

18.) one day plus follow up after October performances

19.) The equivalent of six 50-minute class periods (our class met once per week so 3 nights were devoted to the play). We also attended the production on campus as a class.

20.) about 2-3 periods (50 minutes each) but some was indirectly related, (i.e. diversity discussions)

21.) 5 class periods (50 minute class sessions)

22.) Not enough; integrated into several discussions, plus 1-2 class periods dedicated to the play

23.) We discussed the play over a two-week time period.

Were discussions of the play

Integrated into student’s curriculum (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23)

Part of a welcome or orientation experience (1, 2, 8, 10, 11, 15, 18)

What did you think of the Common Reading Experience selection this year?

1.) Solid, provocative, and engaging. It opened up an entire world of discussions and brought the whole issue of hate crimes to the forefront on campus.

2.) I thought that the reading selection focused attention on important issues.

- 3.) I thought it was a phenomenal selection and hope that future selections meet up to this play's standard.
- 4.) I thought it was very worthwhile and it was great to have the theatre production. Also I was able to schedule Vision to come to one of my classes. This helped to relate the issue of hate crimes to the Bowling Green experience.
- 5.) I thought it was a good choice. The issues raised were contemporary and stimulated discussion on both sides of the various issues.
- 6.) I thought the choice of topic was appropriate. It was controversial to some and matter of fact to others. The topic of hate crimes and LGBT issues in one that everyone has an opinion so discussion is easy to generate.
I thought the selection of the Laramie Project was appropriate for BGSU, although the format of the book, a play, did make it difficult to read for some of my students.
- 7.) Good—within the context of the next answer.
- 8.) I thought it was a great starting point for talking about respect for others.
- 9.) A good book, much, much better than Ron Suskind the year before. But then again, incorporating the play into a paper assignment set up some uncomfortable situations. Basically, some kids expressed bigoted views, and while they were doing this, I let my personal feelings get the best of me. In some ways, I disliked those students, and never before had I been so judgmental of my students, not in eight years of teaching.
- 10.) I thought it was a very good choice. I think people took a lot away from it.
- 11.) Excellent
- 12.) It was a great selection. It really made students think. It touched on several issues that were relevant to students.
- 13.) I think that it opened up the student's eyes about the things that can happen to other groups of people.
- 14.) I think it helped create dialogue that might not have started otherwise. Even if it seemed as though students were inundated with the topic, I do feel that it got many more to think about the way they think, act, speak and present themselves regarding issues of acceptance, diversity, sensitivity, and mutual respect. And that's a big positive.
- 15.) Excellent. Richly interdisciplinary, morally charged, highly proactive.
- 16.) I think that the play was good in that it was short and easy to read, raised awareness of different values, and was part of a campus-wide integration effort. The book, however, only addressed one major issue—homosexuality—and did not address other issues that first-year students are exposed to on a daily basis.
- 17.) I think it was a risky choice and honestly I'm surprised that there wasn't more of a backlash by faculty, students, and even parents. I think it was especially risky given the previous books which have been used. While they were perfectly acceptable choices, I think few of them (at least the ones I'm familiar with) actually challenged students to re-consider (or even consider) previously held values and beliefs. In other words, I think many of the other selections played directly into the values and beliefs that already exist in our students and therefore did not really achieve the goals of a program like this.

- 18.) Good choice—about people students’ age, topics they can all relate to, encourages critical thinking about diversity issues, campus life, etc.
- 19.) It was a good reading and addressed several important issues. I think we should be careful however, to provide a “fair and balanced” selection of readings over the years, not giving preference just to one particular (left) agenda.
- 20.) I thought it was very short and to the point, yet thought-provoking—a good selection.
- 21.) I thought it developed a platform for valuable in-class (and hopefully out-of-class) discussion. It was an easy read for students and that made discussion easy because all students did readings as assigned. Using the play as an out-of-class tie to the curriculum was outstanding. Many of my students indicated that they discussed Matthew Shepard and topics covered in class with their floor mates and families.
- 22.) I think it is great! And I love the fact there was a film version and the play produced here on campus. Lends itself to discussions of the formats, in addition to the content. I think the subject matter is compelling and draws students into discussion. (Much better than the “succeeding against all odds” type of text, especially for sociology courses).
- 23.) I felt the Laramie Project was a fabulous common reading experience. As a current RA, I believe the community responded to the challenges facing our society post the murder of Matthew Shepard. I really enjoyed the positive community response.

How do you feel students responded to the Laramie Project?

- 1.) Some cried they were so moved. It had a very meaningful impact upon the student body from what I was able to discern.
- 2.) Students seemed to respond favorably to this book.
- 3.) I believe my students were challenged by several of the ideas discussed in the text but took the opportunity to educate themselves about issues, such as hate crimes and LGBT relationships that they were previously unaware.
- 4.) It was mixed. Some students really are opposed to homosexuality and felt there was a politically correct agenda being advanced. The play does advance a pro-gay point of view. Still, even those opposed seemed to be engaged by the topic although one or two of them were feeling like, well enough already. My students wrote a paper on the subject of hate crimes and I felt this worked very well as an argumentative topic.
- 5.) The majority felt it was a good choice, as is evident from their papers.
- 6.) There was a mixed bag of reactions. Most found it engaging and educational, especially with the discussion that followed. Others found the topic distasteful or objectionable based upon their own religious beliefs.
- 7.) As it turned, several of my students really felt like the University had a hidden political agenda in requiring this as a common read. I think that this seemed reinforced when I invited a speaker on diversity issues (which I always do) to the class which followed our discussions of the play. This was all “front-loaded” in order to have the book read prior to the campus performance. The unintended

result was that for a few weeks at the beginning of the semester we focused on one issue, rather than a variety of transition issues. Thus the students' responses often turned to whatever political agenda they perceived rather than the topic of the play.

8.) Some great, some not so great. I think this would be true for any book or topic.

9.) Mostly good. But there were quite a few students who expressed bigotry against homosexuals; everyone, however, seemed sympathetic to Matthew's tragedy.

10.) I think well, I didn't see any problems arise, only good discussions

11.) In excellent fashion. Far better than they did to the Hope in the Unseen. For one thing, almost all of them read it. For another, they related better to the content and issues raised.

12.) Most very positively. A few resisted. One student in particular in my class did not read it.

13.) I think that they liked it.

14.) I think at first with my group there was some discomfort, but many learned to think and communicate their thoughts and feelings in a respectful manner.

15.) Very positively. It caught their attention and moved many to tears.

16.) My students seemed to like the book, but were definitely tired of talking about homosexuality after the first day.

17.) Most were surprisingly supportive of the text. By this I do not mean that most were "in favor of homosexuality" (as my students might put it), but rather that they seriously and genuinely tried to understand why this text was selected and how it might contribute something positive to their college experience.

18.) Some found it powerful, some found it preachy. Most at least had some discussable reaction to it.

19.) For the most part, responses were very positive. Minds and eyes were opened. Some remained resistant and rooted in their beliefs. Others demonstrated shifts in their beliefs.

20.) I felt that many chose not to read it based on the fact that it was a play and they were turned off before they ever really gave it a chance. I did think though that those who did read it really had stirred feelings.

21.) The majority of my students responded well to the play, and indicated that it made them think differently about how society views differences of all kinds.

22.) Made some of them uncomfortable; many learned a great deal more about the whole case than they knew before. I think there is so much going on in the play that students all found some way to respond to it and connect their own ideas. However, they found the book difficult to follow, too many characters, etc. And some didn't like the play format, found it hard to "visualize" what was happening. But this is something for discussion.

23.) Surprisingly, I believe that our Univ 100 students responded candidly to The Laramie Project. They were honest and excited to discuss such a provocative text.

Do you have any book suggestions for the Common Reading Experience for next year?

1.) This is a tough question. Students in my Eng 150 course will be reading **Blindness by Jose Saramago**. Choose a text involving war—that's what's current and incredibly provocative. We should be discussing what's happening in Iraq in great detail.

4.) I liked the selections of the past two years because I could work them into the curriculum of argumentative writing set by our GSW programs standards. (Hope in the Unseen resulted in papers examining the myth of meritocracy and affirmative action.) I would like a selection that would open up some burning question of our day, one relevant to students, such as these two did.

5.) Before making a recommendation, I would like to see the selection criteria used by the committee.

7.) **The Once and Future King and /or the Book of Merlin by TH White.**

(These are just a "wish"---not sure they would be at all practical...)

The United States Constitution and Bill of Rights

9.) The last two years the committee has chosen nonfiction, about Cedric and Matthew respectively, trying to find a story about a kid who is college-aged and experiencing some things in life both new and familiar to our students. Is this a trend you want to continue?

Really, this is tough. I don't think you'd want a book of fiction, as that would really pigeonhole you with some departments and fields. What about a magazine subscription, where everyone gets something like Time or Harpers or something worldly and then we could talk about it all semester and it would be timely?

12.) None in particular. The committee seems to be doing just fine with their selections.

15.) **The Alchemist, Affluenza**

16.) **Ishmael by Daniel Quinn** is an excellent book that is a little more challenging to read but fits the selection criteria much better than The Laramie Project. The book requires students to think critically about several different issues including religion, violence, and the environment, and is a great introduction to the expectations of higher education. Furthermore, the book raises important questions about the students' values and ethics, and encompasses a wide range of academic disciplines. There is also a contemporary movie based on the book called Instinct that many of the students would be familiar with and will enjoy viewing in class.

17.) I think it would be interesting to have students read the first book in **the Harry Potter** series as well as some articles about the censorship controversy surrounding that book. This would be an especially useful topic for our students, given the prevalence of education majors on our campus.

What about the **Patricia Cornwell novel on Jack the Ripper**? Ok I know that it's a bit too "popular", but think about what the book has to offer...it would get students thinking about how to put an argument together (because the book basically traces the author's attempts to piece together bits and fragments of

information to support her case)—in this sense, it would be highly beneficial to English classes; it also raises some important issues related to gender—she notes that she wanted to write this book because of the way in which the Ripper had been, in a way, valorized by British and American culture and his victims, all poor female prostitutes have faded from the historical record; classes might discuss the ways in which murder (particularly serial murder) takes on mythological status in our culture and what that says about us...plus, I think it would be a choice that students could very well want to read.

Or what about the **Da Vinci Code**? Timely, relevant, could be paired with several special programs recently shown on Discovery Channel...

18.) **Barefoot Heart by Elva Trevino Hart** (memoir of Mexican migrant worker who eventually got a college degree in computer science)

Out of the Ordinary (essays by people with GLBT parents)

Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books by Azar Nafisi (Islam, womens rights, academic freedom, the power of reading –good choice!)

20.) maybe something involving a website, movie or some other media (although I do recognize it's a common reading experience)

23.) **Caucasia by Danzy Senna**

Do you have a particular theme or issue you would like the Common Reading Experience planning committee to keep in mind when selecting a book for next year?

1.) War. We should be discussing this subject in great detail throughout campus. Also, we should be engaged in debates and discussion about this Iraq quagmire. We should be bringing people from psychology, history, literature, sociology, economics, political science, etc., together to approach this issue from a variety of different vantage points. We should be inviting professionals to give lectures and to spark discussions. Engaging students next fall in this issue will also help them better understand the presidential election, world politics, geopolitics, etc.

2.) Maintaining balance in life.

3.) Religious tolerance, students with physical disabilities.

4.) Perhaps a book on the environment, physical disabilities, or a story about a soldier in Iraq.

6.) I would suggest something controversial or something that will challenge our students to think about their own values, morals and perspective.

Perhaps something involving Islam, terrorism, poverty, inter-racial dating or cross-cultural learning.

7.) Freedom of speech in the face of an increasingly weird political environment.

8.) Gender inequity

9.) Just keep them reading. That is the best part.

10.) I'm not sure, but something that will cause good discussions. I know my freshman year it was Tuesdays with Morrie, but only Honors read it. I really like that so many people read it this year.

12.) Something related to student success (like the "Hope in the Unseen")

- 14.) Perhaps something on a more general diversity topic. In light of everything that's going on in the middle east, perhaps something that's in the news now.
- 16.) I think that Religion is a topic that needs to be addressed in a learning context like we have here at BGSU for first-year students, especially with the current events in the Middle East that affect us all.
- 19.) Money management, career planning, success (multiple definitions of it), values, goal setting and achievement.
- 20.) Maybe something about a "normal" student coming to college and not enjoying it or something else related to parent-student conflict/transitions.
- 21.) I think social responsibility and community are great themes for a common reading. I think for first year students it is really important to stress how the decisions you make individually affect the greater community. This can be tied into a lot of topics ie: acceptance, alcohol/drug use, sexual assault, academic dishonesty, safety, environment, etc.
- 22.) Diversity issues, disability issues, globalization...there are many areas that I would find useful and interesting.
- 23.) Issues related to diversity.

When would be the best time of year to offer book discussions or training sessions related to the book selection for those who decide to use the Common Reading Experience book selection in their classroom?

- 1.) Summer. Start the year off on an academic foot, with faculty prepared and excited about engaging the text with students. This is one of the elements that makes our welcome days orientation so successful.
- 2.) There is probably no "ideal" time that everyone would agree is best. Maybe early in the semester before stresses mount?
- 4.) Before the school year begins in June or July.
- 5.) The summer was not a good time for me, and I was unable to attend any of the sessions. Early in the fall semester would seem like a more appropriate time for me personally.
- 7.) Spring/summer
- 9.) Summer or even the spring semester for those folks who aren't here in the summer or on campus.
- 10.) At the end of the year or over the summer, allow them to choose the session that fits their schedule best.
- 12.) Spring and summer (spring for those who won't be here in the summer)
- 13.) The beginning of the semester when the course loads are low.
- 14.) Before fall semester—August. This is my first year so I don't know for sure.
- 16.) The spring semester seems to work well, or even over winter break.
- 17.) Spring...or perhaps even into early fall.
- 18.) May –gives folks the summer to plan how to incorporate into syllabus/course plan.
- 19.) summer
- 20.) offer numerous sessions

- 21.) mid spring depending on when book is selected or late August.
22.) Late summer, but also early fall (event September). I didn't use it until later in the semester.

Other comments and suggestions?

- 1.) Keep up the good work. Your committee is not only introducing the campus to provocative subjects, it's providing a pedagogical venue that students and faculty alike are benefiting from. Staging Laramie after we read it for orientation was excellent. Seeing the play was very important.
- 4.) Keep on making brave choices.
- 7.) Great job!!! Thanks – I am grateful for the job you are doing!
- 9.) The issue of homosexuality is something I'm glad my students faced. But again, so many students wrote papers against gay marriages, against gay adoption, against hate crime laws for gays. It was harder for me to work with them than usual. A challenge is always good, but in English 110, some students don't know that you capitalize the first letter of the first word of a sentence. Telling them why it's not cool to call people "fags" and dunk their heads in the locker room toilet is a bit much. At times. I'll just assume that I opened a few of my students' eyes, too, though those kids were the silent ones.
- 12.) Keep up the great work.
- 14.) It was really helpful to have a website and to be on the listserve. It helped to hear what others were doing and I appreciated the sharing.
- 17.) I wonder if there needs to be some greater structure to the evaluation of the program. This survey seems rather informal...and it doesn't really gauge whether or not the students have gained from the experience and if they aren't gaining, then why are we doing it? Now don't get me wrong, I do think students are gaining much knowledge from the experience, but personally, I'd like to know what they are gaining. I'd also like to know what they would consider an "important" issue to deal with in this program.
- 20.) If a play is done in conjunction again, I think more showings should be done.
- 22.) You did a great job with everything! (choice, materials, making the film available, etc, etc.) Thank you!!