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An Exploration of First-Year Students’ Engagement in a Postsecondary Common Reading Program

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An Exploration of First-Year Students’ Engagement
in a Postsecondary Common Reading Program

by

Kali L. Morgan

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Curriculum and Instruction
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Abstract

This study used the narrative engagement framework from the communication discipline to explore first-year college students’ engagement in common reading program events and activities, engagement with the text’s narrative, and students’ affirmation of attitudes espoused in the text’s narrative. A total of 325 first-year students enrolled at Texas State University responded to a web-based survey of about their experiences with the 2016-2017 Common Reading Program book, *What It Is Like to Go To War* (Marlantes, 2011). The book, a memoir of Marlantes’ experiences as a Marine Lieutenant during the Vietnam War, features scholarly reflections on the nature of war and its consequences on a society and its soldiers. The results of this non-experimental, exploratory quantitative study indicated that students were moderately engaged with the narrative itself, and large variability existed among students’ engagement with the common reading program. In contrast, there was little variability in students’ prior experiences with the military and war; in fact, most students had only minor prior experiences. An orthogonal four-factor model, originally developed by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009), fit the data in this study and were explained by the higher order factor of narrative engagement. The multivariate analyses conducted for this study suggested the presence of differences between students’ prior experiences with the themes on the program engagement and narrative engagement variables, but not in the affirmation of story-consistent beliefs. No differences existed among students’ intended majors on narrative engagement, program engagement, or story-consistent beliefs. The analyses identified differences among gender identities on story-consistent beliefs, but not program engagement or narrative engagement. Finally, multiple
regression found no relationship between students’ affirmation of story-consistent beliefs and their program and narrative experiences.
Chapter 1

The first year of college is a pivotal time in how students will succeed; thus, institutions devote much attention to improving students’ experiences in that time frame (Barefoot, 2000). The many initiatives directed at this first-year, collectively known as first-year experience programs, include orientation, first-year seminars, service learning, and advising initiatives (Barefoot, 2000). The overarching goal of these programs is to provide the necessary supports that help students succeed in their challenging new environment of higher education (Upcraft, Gardner, Barefoot, & Associates, 2005). Increasing numbers of schools are launching a common reading experience as a new component of their first-year experience portfolio (Grenier, 2007; Liljequist & Stone, 2009; Randall, 2016; Thorne, Turscak, & Wood, 2014). Typically, these programs hold official names such as “summer reading program,” “common read,” “core book,” and “one book” (Boff, Schroeder, Letson & Gambill, 2007, p. 272).

These reading programs typically feature one contemporary, nonfiction text selected for all incoming first-year students to read before they arrive for fall semester (Randall, 2016). The programs continue with myriad events, programs, and assignments, all related to this central text, its themes and the global issues raised therein (Laufgraben, 2006; Nadelson & Nadelson, 2012; Randall, 2016). These learning activities provide the opportunity for students and faculty to engage in focused, healthy discourse, sometimes lasting throughout the entire academic year (Laufgraben, 2006; Nadelson & Nadelson, 2012). Through these curricular and co-curricular components of the common reading program, colleges and universities seek to create a community among their first-year students, provide an introduction to college-level academic
expectations, improve students’ reading and learning strategies, and explore social issues raised by the text (Boff et al., 2007; Daughtery & Hayes, 2012; Ferguson, 2006; Ferguson, Brown, & Piper, 2014; Goldfine, Mixon-Brookshire, Hoerrner, & Morrissey, 2011; Randall, 2016; Soria, 2015; Thorne et al, 2014). Even though these programs are continuing to increase in popularity (Randall, 2016), few empirical studies have explored these programs (Soria, 2015).

Background

Laufgraben (2006) asserted that the value in these programs results from expanding beyond a singular assignment to fully integrating the text and its themes into the students’ curricular and co-curricular experiences. Most commonly, institutions offer opportunities like essays, ceremonies, faculty panels, community service, creative contests, films and debates (Corbin, 2005; Gracie, 1997; Laufgraben, 2006; Liljequist & Stone, 2009). In any of these co-curricular programs, common reading scholars believe that “small-group discussion” is an important element in the learning activities (Ferguson, 2006, p. 8). Though these valuable conversations most often occur inside the classroom, such conversations in co-curricular or orientation programs also develop community among first-years as intended (Edington, Holmes, & Reinke, 2015; Ferguson, 2006; Liljequist & Stone, 2009). Author visits, however, in the form of lectures, book signings, and meet-and-greet type opportunities, are often the focal point or “culminating” event, as well as the most attended by students (Liljequist & Stone, 2009, p. 89; Moser, 2010; Thorne et al., 2014).

Through curricular and co-curricular experiences, common reading programs often seek to support the transition of students to university through structured opportunities to make connections with their peers, learn about social issues raised in the selected text, enhance learning strategies, and deepen reading appreciation in students (Goldfine et al., 2011).
Primarily, common reading programs seek to use the shared experience to create intellectual or learning communities (Fidler, 1997; Laufgraben, 2006; Randall, 2016; Throne et al., 2014). Their ability to accomplish this outcome, however, is disputed. Two studies have found that these programs did not create a sense of community among first-year students (Ferguson et al., 2014; Liljequist & Stone, 2009), while other studies found evidence in support of the program’s success in this outcome (Daughtery & Hayes, 2012; Edington et al., 2015; Goldfine et al., 2011).

Another way these programs support students’ transition to university is by providing an example of and orientation to college-level academic expectations (Daughtery & Hayes, 2012; Ferguson, 2006; Gracie, 1997; Laufgraben, 2006; Thorne et al., 2014). One component of these academic expectations is a genuine interest in and “intellectual engagement with different ideas” from myriad perspectives (Ferguson, 2006, p. 8). Not only is such an expectation a long-held, highly esteemed value in higher education (Lucas, 2006), but this expectation is a central purpose of liberal learning (American Association of Colleges & Universities, 1998). Indeed, a report espousing the purposes and aims of student affairs work in higher education identifies the enhancement of “cognitive complexity” as a main outcome of higher education (Keeling, 2004, p. 21). This outcome is marked by the development of reasoning abilities in students as they move from total reliance on external sources in a search for certainty toward incorporating multiple perspectives with their own while simultaneously leaving room for uncertainty (Kitchener & King, 1981; Perry, 1968). This developmental progression occurs through continued exposure to societal issues that do not possess simple solutions (Kitchener & King, 1990; Kitchener, Lynch, Fischer, & Wood, 1993). In these exposures, students should practice reflecting on consequences of possible solutions, as well as learning to explore and reconcile contradictory perspectives (Kitchener & King, 1990). Active participation in common reading
programs events, such as structured debates or a lecture by the author of the text, provides these practice opportunities.

**Issues with selection of common reading text.** To achieve the above outcomes, institutions must select a book capable of becoming the heart of a common reading program, that is, a book that provides ample opportunities for all disciplines to explore its ideas in sufficient depth (Laufgraben, 2006; Liljequist & Stone, 2009). Though sometimes one individual or a standing first-year or general education committee selects the book, institutions typically charge a common reading selection committee with this task (Boff et al., 2006; Laufgraben, 2006; Nadelson & Nadelson, 2012). The selection committee often consists of faculty, student affairs staff, student representatives, and sometimes librarians (Boff, et al., 2007; Laufgraben, 2006; Nadelson & Nadelson, 2012). Some institutions intend to choose a text that relates to a particular theme or issue that is of particular relevance to the institution at that time. A study by Grenier (2007), however, found this approach to be rare among the institutions he sampled. Instead, the author found that books with “political issues” as the pervasive theme were most common.

From a broader perspective, Grenier (2007) found that books with “macro-level” or “social” issues were used far more frequently than those addressing “micro-level” or “personality” issues (p. 78). Regular surveys conducted by the National Association of Scholars (NAS), such as those by Thorne et al. (2014) and Randall (2016), confirmed Grenier’s (2007) findings. For example, Thorne et al. (2014) noted that the subject categories of books for the 2013-2014 academic year were most frequently multicultural in nature, whereas the previous academic year showed an equitable split between science and multicultural subject categories as the most popular (Thorne, Wood, Plum & Carter, 2013). Though these reports are used to
advance their organization’s stance on common reading programs, their nation-wide data
collection about program designs, operations, and selected texts proved useful in understanding
relevant trends.

Also to be considered in the selection of the text is the “book length and reading level”
(Liljequist & Stone, 2009, p. 103). In their longitudinal study of a common reading program at
one institution, students indicated valuing the program less as the challenge and length of the
book increased. Consequently, the authors recommended books that are not overly long and do
not require higher level reading skills, a notion Nadelson and Nadelson (2012) later endorsed.
Prior to Liljequist and Stone’s (2009) study, Gracie (1997) offered an important consideration in
text selection: some students may be attempting the common reading assignment—their initial
college academic task—alone. To avoid challenging students beyond their abilities, Gracie
(1997) urged institutions to provide support, such as discussion guides, for students attempting
this reading task without familial assistance. This advice echoed Sanford’s (1966) assertion that
college and universities must balance academic challenge with appropriate support structures to
promote students’ development and success.

Yet, the lack of challenge offered by most common read books serves as one of the
NAS’s major critiques of these programs (Thorne et al., 2014). Their reports consistently urged
institutions to select time-tested books that they believe will provide a greater challenge to
students, thereby truly introducing them to college-level expectations (Randall, 2016; Thorne et
al., 2013; Thorne et al., 2014). Furthermore, these reports accused institutions of using common
reading programs to push a particular philosophy or set of values, namely “progressive” ideals,
onto first-year students (Randall, 2016, p. 7; Thorne et al., 2014). This content debate on
common reading selections has also surfaced outside the academy. Recently, two South
Carolina institutions purportedly suffered a reduction in state funding granted by the legislature as a type of punishment for their selection of controversial common reading texts (Roldan, 2014). In the post-September 11th context of the early 2000’s, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill received severe public criticism for two consecutive years over their selections, one of which explored the Islamic faith (Laufgraben, 2006).

These challenges to text selection, however, provide unique and valuable “opportunities to discuss important issues such as academic freedom, freedom of speech, and censorship” (Laufgraben, 2006, p. 40). To this end, Laufgraben (2006) and Gracie (1997) encouraged institutions to select common read books that may challenge prevailing patterns of thoughts. Strothmann and Van Fleet’s (2009) study provides support for their position: they found that books that “inspire” individuals are often the same books that have been censored or challenged by society at some point in their history (p. 165). Intentionally eschewing controversial selections could mean institutions lose the opportunity to inspire their students, as well as those valuable opportunities to discuss issues of free thought and censorship.

Specifically, Strothmann and Van Fleet (2009) analyzed the reasons individuals nominated books for their annual “Books That Inspire” (BTI) display (p. 165). Their results revealed themes that speak to the abilities of the books to provoke strong reactions in the following ways: introducing a reader to an experience outside of her own world; informing ways of living, interacting with society, and building relationships with others; evoking a powerful emotional response; and suggesting alternate ways of viewing the world or specific issues. Additionally, one theme found that these nominated books “opened their eyes to important issues that they had never previously considered” (p. 174). Selecting a common read text that incites any of these responses supports the stated goals of programs; certainly, texts introducing new
issues or perspectives on those issues provides students with the aforementioned practice opportunities supporting cognitive development (Kitchener et al., 1993). Of particular interest in Strothmann and Van Fleet’s (2009) findings, however, is the text’s ability to arouse an emotional response. For BTI nominated books that had also been censored, the authors compared themes in nomination reasons with published reasons for the censorship. They found that books nominated based on their emotional evocation properties were more frequently challenged than books nominated for other reasons; the published reasons for censorship were also more frequently based on emotional, albeit opposite, reactions.

**Readers’ responses to narratives.** The role of emotion in the responses of readers to texts is intricately connected with the empathy readers develop toward characters in the story, known as identification, and how immersed the reader becomes in the story itself or transportation (Cohen, 2001; Green & Brock, 2000). The prior experiences readers have had with the subject of the story may influence their ability to identify with characters or be transported into the story (Chung & Slater, 2013; Cohen, 2015; Green, 2004). In turn, the transportation and identification experienced by the reader influence the effect a story will have on the reader. One possible effect is the serious consideration or adoption of attitudes or beliefs suggested by characters or implied in the meaning of the text; these are known as “story-consistent beliefs” (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 705). Through their connection with emotional response, transportation, identification, and the related attitudes consequently play an important role in the impact a book makes on the individual or society, either toward censorship or inspiration. Yet, the reading experience of students and the nature of their responses to common reading program texts have not been studied. Instead, existing studies effectively reduce students’ reading experience to a binary indication that they did or did not read the text
Traditionally, reader response theories have been used to provide insight into the nature of these interactions with and responses to texts (Sadoski & Paivio, 2007). Yet, existing measures undergirded by reader response theoretical frameworks are limited by their focus on fictional literature (e.g., Literary Response Questionnaire, Miall & Kuiken, 1995). The related field of study known as narrative engagement draws from elements of reader response theory, such as empathy (Oatley, 1999), to similarly explore the aforementioned topics of individuals’ reactions to storylines (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Green & Brock, 2000). In contrast to reader response theories, the well-researched theories of narrative engagement apply to fiction and non-fiction works alike, including both written texts and multimedia presentations featuring a storyline (Green & Brock, 2000; Mangen & Kuiken, 2014). Because universities tend to select non-fiction works for their common reading programs (Randall, 2016), narrative engagement thus offers a more suitable lens than reader response theories through which these programs can be studied.

**Research on common reading programs.** Further research on common reading programs is needed because of the dearth of existing literature on these programs (Soria, 2015). Much of the current scholarship explores the achievement of specific program learning outcomes; consequently, little is known about how students are involved in common reading programs. Goldfine et al. (2011) identified gender differences in common reading engagement, a finding which aligns with the gendered nature of reading behaviors of college students for un-assigned readings (Burak, 2004; Burgess & Jones, 2010; Gauder, Gigliano, & Schramm, 2007). Similarly, the pleasure reading behaviors of college students vary by academic major (Applegate
et al., 2014; Chen, 2007; Jeffries & Atkin, 1996). The relationship between the academic majors of students and common reading program engagement has been studied very little (Ferguson et al., 2014). These gaps in the literature coincide with the aforementioned lack of exploration into the interaction students have with the text itself. With challenges to selected texts and public attention mounting, learning more about common reading programs is imperative.

**Statement of the Problem**

The issues surrounding common reading programs are clearly at the forefront of the minds of student affairs practitioners and administrators: researchers at the National Association of Scholars (NAS) noted a total of 14 presentations at the 2014 Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience (Thorne et al., 2014). Additionally, the popularity of programs continues to increase. The NAS found a total of 341 institutions which had selected a total of 231 different books for the 2013-2014 year (Thorne et al., 2014). These numbers represent a substantial increase from the 2012-2013 study finding 309 institutions with 190 books assigned (Thorne et al., 2013). Publishers have taken note of the rapidly increasing popularity of common reading programs, as well. As far back as July 2006, Grenier (2007) estimated that $3,600,000 was spent on books for these programs at only 90 institutions. Using Grenier’s (2007) calculations and assuming constant growth, the amount spent between the current 341 institutions likely is approximately $13,640,000. Thorne et al. (2014) point to publisher-sponsored luncheons appearing at the Annual Conference of the First-Year Experience, publisher-developed lists marketing suggestions for common read texts, among other recent developments in support of their suggestion that “common reading books have become a genre in themselves” (p. 17).

Though the stakes are high for the new publishing genre industry, institutional stakes are higher. For example, Grasgreen (2014) tells the story of Purdue University’s common reading
program that costed $75,000. Institutional assessment data provided inconclusive findings about the program’s success in accomplishing its stated learning outcomes. Consequently, a budget reduction from the state resulted in the program being eliminated in favor of resources that promised a more certain positive effect on new students’ transition. Though Grasgreen (2014) described a fight from faculty to restore the program, this incident highlights the expensive nature of common reading programs. When cost considerations are coupled with the dearth of scholarship exploring common reading programs, these first-year initiatives may be at risk of discontinuation across the nation.

**Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore first-year students’ engagement in common reading program events and activities, engagement with the text’s narrative, and students’ affirmation of attitudes espoused in the text’s narrative. The results of this study may be used to inform the faculty and staff responsible for designing and executing these programs by contributing an understanding of the nature of student engagement with the selected text, as well as the related curricular and co-curricular learning activities. Furthermore, the in-depth understanding of students’ engagement with the text and learning activities may inform state legislators and leaders possessing fiscal or curricular control over university initiatives about the potential educational value of common reading programs. Finally, the study expanded the body of knowledge on this particular first-year experience initiative.

**Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following research questions:
1. To what extent are first-year students engaged with the narrative presented in the common reading program text, as well as program-related events, courses, and discussions?

2. To what extent do first-year students report prior experiences with the text’s main themes, and to what extent do first-year students affirm beliefs in alignment with those espoused in the common reading program text’s narrative?

3. How well do the first-year students’ narrative engagement behaviors fit the four-factor model of attentional focus, narrative presence, emotional engagement, and narrative understanding?

4. What are the differences in first-year students’ narrative engagement, program engagement and story-consistent beliefs among self-reported prior experiences with the CRP text’s main issue?

5. What are the differences in first-year students’ prior experiences with the text’s themes, narrative engagement, program engagement, story-consistent attitudes among students’ genders and majors?

6. What is the relationship between first-year students’ narrative experiences (narrative engagement, story-consistent beliefs, and prior experiences with the themes) and their program engagement?

Limitations

This study should not be generalized to institutions of a different type, or with common reading program structures, vastly different from that at the site of this study. Similarly, the results should not be generalized to common reading books exploring themes and issues different
from the common text featured in this study. Finally, the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study was not intended to show causation.

The main delimitation of this study was its focus on the nature, as opposed to the causes, of students’ engagement with the common reading text and program. The study attempted to account for individuals’ prior experiences and two relevant demographic factors (gender, major), yet these factors could not explain why students chose to participate or interact with the text in certain ways. Furthermore, the saliency of students’ various identities or the intersectionality of those identities was not explored. Finally, this study neither identified counterarguments created in response to the common reading text, nor explored their role in the development of students’ story-consistent beliefs.

**Definition of Terms**

Based on the myriad terms with similar meanings for central concepts of interest, this study employed the following operational definitions:

**Common reading program (CRP):** a university curricular and co-curricular initiative for first-time-in-college students based on the reading of a book in common prior to students’ matriculation; designed to build community among first-year students, academically support their transition to college, and promote cognitive development (Goldfine et al., 2011; Randall, 2016).

**Theme:** a repeated point of the common reading text, featured explicitly or implicitly, and often addressing a societal microcosm or issue (Green, 2004). Examples include specific geographical regions, and “environmentalism” (Thorne et al., 2014, p. 35).

**Program engagement:** a composite representation of students’ attendance at CRP-related events, completion of mandatory or voluntary assignments related to CRP text and its themes,
and participation in community-focused aspects of the CRP (Ferguson et al., 2014; Liljequist & Stone, 2009).

**Narrative engagement:** the interaction students have with the CRP text, including hypothesized factors of “attentional focus,” “emotional engagement,” “narrative presence,” and “narrative understanding” (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009, p. 335).

**Story-consistent beliefs:** attitudes about the CRP text’s themes that align with the views implicitly or explicitly espoused by the text; hypothesized to be a result of narrative engagement (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 705).

**Prior experiences:** students’ pre-existing “familiarity” with the CRP text’s themes as a result of their personal histories and/or relationships with individuals deeply connected to the themes (Green, 2004, p. 260).

**Chapter Summary**

Common reading programs are becoming more popular and gaining more attention from the general public, as well as from the publishing industry. These programs seek to support the transition of students to college by building community and introducing students to college-level academic expectations such as thoughtful consideration of ideas from multiple perspectives. Yet, very little is known about the ways in which student engage with the text and the related curricular and co-curricular experiences. Narrative engagement and its related concepts, like transportation into a storyline, provide a lens through which the interaction students have with common reading texts may be studied. Thus, the purpose of this study was to explore the engagement of first-year students in common reading program events and activities, engagement with the text’s narrative, and affirmation of attitudes by students in alignment with those espoused in the text’s narrative.
Chapter 2

The purpose of this study was to explore first-year students’ engagement in common reading program events and activities, engagement with the text’s narrative, and students’ affirmation of attitudes espoused in the text’s narrative. Chapter 1 explained the need for this study. This chapter reviews the related literature and begins with a discussion of the conceptual framework chosen for this study. The relevant scholarship is then organized into three major topics: common reading programs as part of the first-year experience, college students’ reading habits, and the nature of narrative engagement.

Conceptual Framework

Until this point in the empirical study of common reading programs, researchers have operated, mostly implicitly, from a framework based on Astin’s Theory of Involvement (Astin, 1999; Daughtery & Hayes, 2012; Goldfine et al., 2011; Liljequist & Stone, 2009; Soria, 2015). Including both “physical and psychological energy” in the definition of involvement, this theory posits that college students’ involvement varies by individual, among specific activities, and over time (p. 519). Additionally, Astin asserted that both the “quantitative and qualitative features” of students’ involvement are relevant in effecting the achievement of outcomes intended for the experience (p.519). Finally, this theory stresses that the “effectiveness of any educational policy or practice is directly related to the capacity of that policy or practice to increase student involvement” (p.519).

Developed for the purpose of providing an integrative framework to a rapidly expanding body of literature that lacked cohesion (Astin, 1999), this theory has been widely used in student
development research. Yet, the recent dialogue in student engagement literature contains some significant critiques of the most common ways in which student engagement is measured and researched (Kahu, 2013; Porter, 2011). Scholars agree that “engagement” has incredibly positive impacts on college students; the definition and characteristics employed in the study of “engagement,” however, are overbroad and confusing to surveyed students (Kahu, 2013; Porter, 2011). Specifically, Kahu (2013) believed that the act of engagement itself is confounded by or combined with its “antecedents” and “outcomes” (p.758).

In her critique, Kahu (2013) perceived and identified four frameworks through which student engagement research is conducted: “behavioral,” “psychological,” “socio-cultural,” and “holistic” (p. 758). Astin’s Theory of Involvement, as well as other engagement research, fall under what Kahu called the behavioral approach, noting its position as “the most widely accepted view of engagement in the higher education literature” (p. 759). The author described this approach as a research paradigm focusing on the behavior, including the cognitive processes, of both students and faculty. She asserted that the behavioral approach to student engagement research provides important information about how specific behaviors are connected with outcomes. Yet, the major limitation is that this approach does not measure or acknowledge the role of attitudes and emotions and their association with the learning process (Kahu, 2013).

In contrast, the psychological approach incorporates the study of attitudes and emotions in tandem with the aforementioned behavioral concepts (Kahu, 2013). Kahu described three dimensions found in this psychological approach to student engagement literature. The first is the behavioral dimension as previously described. The second is a cognition dimension, which includes aspects of the behavioral dimension like the use of “self-regulation” or “deep learning strategies,” and then expands into additional areas including “motivation, self-efficacy and
expectations” (Kahu, 2013, p. 761). The third dimension of this psychological approach encompasses issues of affect, such as belongingness and “enjoyment and interest in the task” (p. 761). The limitation in studies employing a psychological approach to engagement research is the confusion across studies in the nomenclature, articulation and measurement of the three dimensions. Yet, the author believed the broad perspective of engagement presented by this perspective provides the adequate, full voice for the students’ experiences in such a way as to overcome the identified limitation.

The third approach, the sociocultural approach, incorporates the context in which the student engagement and learning occurs (Kahu, 2013). In some examples, the campus community or a political climate serves as this context; in other examples pointed out by the author, the individual student’s identity or identities and interactions with their surroundings form the basis of the context. The posited strength of this approach is the depth to which the “’why’ students become engaged or alienated at university” is explored and explained (p. 764). Finally, the holistic approach is, as the name suggests, an attempt to integrate the aforementioned three perspectives. Like the behavioral approach, the author believed research conducted from this recently popular perspective has obfuscated the lines between engagement and its outcomes.

Kahu (2013) integrated these perspectives on student engagement into one model; though similar to Astin’s work in its unifying and clarifying intent, the model acknowledges greater complexity in student engagement. In Kahu’s model, the causes of engagement, along with the acts and feelings of being engaged, are connected to yet distinct from the intended outcomes of that engagement. Furthermore, the author suggested that these all occur within the socio-cultural context. Calling attention to the “bi-directional arrows,” the author stressed that “engagement is not an outcome of any one of these influences, but rather the complex interplay between them”
For this study, using Kahu’s comprehensive view of student engagement as a framework will allow for exploration of students’ affective, cognitive, and behavioral interactions with the common reading program text and related learning activities.

The First-Year Experience

Many colleges and universities offer an extensive array of programs and initiatives for their first-year students designed for the purpose of improving student retention by strengthening their connection with the university (Upcraft et al., 2005). Commonly, the list of first-year programs includes programs such as first-year interest groups, a first-year seminar, peer mentoring, learning strategies support, outreach for families of first-year students, health and wellness education, specialized academic and career advising, convocations, learning communities, first-year seminars, and common reading programs (Upcraft et al., 2005). These programs are primarily designed to support students’ cognitive and psychosocial development. In addition to their focus on building community, common reading programs most directly address students’ cognitive development. Thus, this section discusses cognitive development in the first-year and the scholarship about common reading initiatives.

Cognitive development in the first-year experience. Cognitive development theories seek to explain how individuals “make meaning” of the experiences and the world around them (Love & Guthrie, 1999, p. 2); in other words, these theories describe “changes in the way people think but not what they think” (Evans, Forney, & Guido-DiBrito, 1998, p. 11). One foundational cognitive development theory guiding student affairs practice is Perry’s Scheme of Intellectual Development (King, 2009; Perry, 1968). Perry developed his theory to explore how college students’ cognitive development continued beyond adolescence, the point at which Piaget’s work
concluded (Love & Guthrie, 1999; Perry, 1968). Based on interviews with males enrolled at the prestigious institutions of Harvard and Radcliffe, Perry (1968) identified nine positions that other authors have collapsed into four major groups (Love & Guthrie, 1999). In this scheme, individuals progress along a “continuum” beginning at a position characterized by “dualistic” thinking (King, 2009, p. 603). In these initial two positions, individuals demonstrate a complete reliance on what is called “Authority”—those powerful individuals or organizations who know the “Truth” (Perry, 1968, p. 59). Furthermore, individuals functioning from these positions believe that this “Truth” is “Absolute” and can be known with certainty, but only by an Authority (p. 59). The individuals themselves believe they should not or cannot generate knowledge or solutions, as these are tasks to be performed only by Authority (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

As individuals progress from these dualistic positions, they gradually accept the increasing frequency of occasions in which knowledge is not currently certain (Perry, 1968). These progressive stages are named with varying gradations of “multiplicity” (Perry, 1968, p. 89). Individuals operating from these positions believes that a Truth will eventually be uncovered in instances of uncertainty (Love & Guthrie, 1999). Until these Truths are available, individuals are allowed to form opinions. Individuals begin to develop the ability to evaluate the validity of personal opinions, asserting that some opinions may be more or less defensible than others (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

Development beyond these multiplistic positions requires what Love and Guthrie (1999) called “the great accommodation” (p. 81). That is, individuals must perform a significant shift in thought from incorporating new perspectives into their existing thought structures to completely reorganizing their knowledge. Perry (1968) described this shift as “the radical reperception of all
knowledge as contextual and relativistic” (p. 109). As a result of this shift, Authority now becomes open to question and no longer viewed as the keeper of Truth; authority may now derive from multiple sources. While authorities may have experiences that support their views or possess a greater depth of knowledge on a particular subject, their assertions are still subject to evaluation in the same ways as an individual’s claim. Perry’s (1968) findings suggested to him a grouping of positions beyond this relativistic stage that he called “the evolving of commitments” (p. 58). In these final positions, Perry described individuals’ ways of functioning, such as methods for making decisions and taking action, in their environment that is now fraught with uncertainty requiring constant evaluation (Love & Guthrie, 1999).

Though a major influence in the world of student affairs research, this theory was criticized for many reasons. One major line in the critiques of Perry’s (1968) work addresses his assertions about the positions in which students most commonly matriculate college or university (Love & Guthrie, 1999). Specifically, Perry (1968) believed from his interview that many first-year students began college in a multiplistic position. Yet, Love and Guthrie (1999) described consistency among findings at less selective institutions that college students tend to enter somewhere between dualistic and multiplistic and then graduate between multiplistic and relativistic. Additionally, Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) developed a theory asserting that women come to know in ways different from men, standing in opposition to the all-male nature of the sample from which Perry’s theory (1968) was built. Like Belenky et al.’s (1997) work, other critiques similarly yielded developmental theories (Evans et al., 1998).

One of these critiques-turned-theories centered on the content of Perry’s positions; King and Kitchener believed that the final positions in Perry’s scheme represented a diversion away from students’ cognitive development and instead described ethical development (King, 2009;
Love & Guthrie, 1999). Consequently, they conducted their own study to explore developmental patterns prior to and beyond Perry’s relativism; this study produced their Reflective Judgment Model (Kitchener & King, 1981). In this theory, the authors posit descriptions of ways individuals approach what they call “ill-structured problems,” that is, those issues that evade simplistic definition, and for which no simple or widely acceptable solutions exist (King & Kitchener, 2004, p. 5). Their descriptions of individuals’ approaches form seven stages, or “sets of assumptions that develop at about the same time, apparently because they are logically interrelated” (Kitchener & King, 1990, p. 160). Individuals progress through these stages linearly, only “skipping” over stages extremely rarely (Kitchener, King, Wood, & Davison, 1989, p. 87).

Their findings mostly aligned with Perry’s scheme through his relativistic position that the authors equated to their Stage 5 (Love & Guthrie, 1999). At that point in students’ cognitive development, they identified two different phases. In the first (Stage 6), students recognized that ill-structured problems required in-depth consideration to reach “individual conclusions” (King & Kitchener, 2004, p. 7). The final stage is aptly summarized by Love and Guthrie (1999):

> Although an absolute reality cannot be assumed, one can synthesize interpretations of evidence and opinion into reasonable, cohesive, and justifiable conjectures…It is believed that based on available evidence the process of inquiry will lead to the most complete, plausible, or compelling solutions for ill-structured problems. (p.48)

Though these final two stages may be the goal educators hope their students will achieve, data suggest that these patterns of reasoning are “rare” in undergraduate students (Kitchener et al., 1989, p.87).
Researchers have frequently studied The Reflective Judgment Model, providing educators with a solid understanding of how it may be applied to help students develop cognitively (Love & Guthrie, 1999). Lending further support to the notion that increases in cognitive complexity correspond with increasing education levels, one study also found empirical support for the sequential nature of the model’s stages (Kitchener et al., 1989). This finding is valuable to educators as the “consistency” and progressively complex patterns with which students respond to ill-structured problems are helpful in “describing learner characteristics” (p. 87). Building upon these findings, Kitchener et al. (1993) applied Fischer’s (1980) skill theory to the Reflective Judgment Model. In this study, the researchers found that students can perform at higher levels when they are provided with high levels of support and opportunities for practice. In alignment with Fischer’s theory, after students have performed at higher levels of reflective judgment, however, they will return to a lower level of performance, or their “functional level,” when that support is no longer provided (p. 893). Furthermore, they discovered the presence of “developmental spurts” (p. 900) that represent short periods of time characterized by intense amounts of growth. Yet, there are also periods featuring “developmental discontinuities,” and an apparent “ceiling,” which represents a level beyond which a student of a certain age cannot perform, regardless of the amount of support and practice provided (p.901).

Within the respective possible levels of development, the authors stressed the role of both practice and support for improving students’ progressing toward reflective judgment (Kitchener et al., 1993). An earlier Kitchener and King (1990) chapter described such practice opportunities that would help students transition specifically from each stage to the next. They began with Stage 3, where their data suggested most students enter college as first-years, and which
resembles Perry’s (1968) multiplistic positions (Love & Guthrie, 1999). To support students’ progression toward Stage 4 reasoning, the researchers encouraged educators to present students with opportunities to examine and “use evidence” in their arguments about ill-structured problems, and to confront “multiple perspectives” (p. 169). In these exercises, educators must also provide support, like “modeling good use of evidence” (p.170), in alignment with Sanford’s (1966) notion of challenge and support.

Exploring the potential efficacy of similar assignments, Neely (2014) studied changes in epistemological beliefs of first-year students in entry-level English composition classes. In these classes, students received “instruction in analyzing and constructing arguments” (p. 160). To conduct this study, Neely collected both writing samples and students’ responses to surveys questioning their epistemological beliefs at the beginning and end of the semester. Through her analysis, she found significant growth in students’ epistemologies and reasoning beliefs, as evidenced in the surveys, but not writing samples. She called out the “unexpected” nature of this finding, since cognitive development is typically described as a long-term process through which changes are not usually noticeable in the short term (p. 159). While the author did not claim direct causality between the first-semester English classes and shifts in epistemologies, she asserted that these classes may be one component contributing to these massive shifts in thought patterns. Certainly, the exercises described in her article reflect the practice opportunities encouraged by Kitchener et al.’s (1993) study; furthermore, she studied students in the age range that Kitchener et al. (1993) found to be a “developmental spurt” (p. 900). Though further study is needed, situating practice opportunities during a developmental spurts, like the first college year, may augment or expedite students’ cognitive development.
**Common Reading Program designs.** In a monograph detailing issues in the administration of one such first-year experience initiative, Laufgraben (2006) asserted that common reading programs exist most commonly in one of five forms: “orientation-based,” “in-semester,” “year-long,” “course-based,” and “community-based” (p. 16). Of these forms, the first three refer to the time period in which students are engaged with the program, while the last two center students’ program experiences in these specific campus-based contexts. While these formats each possess benefits and disadvantages, programs in which the book is used solely during orientation may be perceived by students as less relevant or lacking in purpose (Ferguson, 2006). At the time of Fidler’s (1997) survey of common reading programs, most programs aligned with what Laufgraben (2006) later described as in-semester or year-long programs based on their inclusion of the text in courses and other first-year experiences. Thus, in-semester or year-long programs are both the popular and the recommended program design (Ferguson, 2006).

For those programs extending beyond orientation, the co-curricular experiences of a common reading program include essays, ceremonies, community service, creative contests, and films, with the focal point often being the author’s visit to campus for a lecture, discussions, or a book-signing event (Corbin, 2005; Gracie, 1997; Laufgraben, 2006; Liljequist & Stone, 2009; Moser, 2010). The author’s visit is frequently an important feature in both the program design and the selection of the text (Liljequist & Stone, 2009; Thorne et al., 2014). Simply, Liljequist and Stone (2009) found that talks by the author were the most attended event related to the common reading program and that the majority of students did not attend the other events in any significant number. In a description of her institution’s common reading program, Moser (2010) explained what she believed to be the reason behind the success of author visits:
For the great majority of our students, the experience of hearing an author read from a work they have read and discussed in class, of asking questions of the writer, of engaging in discussion with someone who has written and published a work of literature, is something entirely new, a festive initiation into a community of readers and writers of which they are not likely to have imagined themselves as members. (p. 92)

Still, “small group discussion,” either inside or outside the classroom, is the featured learning activity for many common reading programs (Ferguson, 2006, p. 8). For example, at Wofford College, students engage in this small-group discussion while eating dinner at a local restaurant with their humanities section and instructor (Corbin, 2005). This experience builds community among students and allows them the opportunity to explore the text’s issues, thus accomplishing multiple program goals at once (Corbin, 2005). In a study comparing large- and small-group discussion pilot programs, Edington et al. (2015) found the small-group discussions to be most effective in accomplishing their overall program goals.

Some researchers, however, argue that small group discussion is more likely to occur in classroom environments, thereby making course- adoption of the common reading program text crucial in the success of the program (Liljequist & Stone, 2009). Yet, course-adoption is distinct from the Laufgraben (2006) course-based description of a program in which a particular department may elect a book for students in all sections to read. Instead, course-adoption of the common reading text involves faculty members, primarily those teaching first-year courses like English composition and first-year seminars, choosing to use the text as the basis for some assignments in the course (Ferguson, 2006). Stone et al. (2004) found that students were “more satisfied” with the common reading program experience when the book was used in at least one course (p. 431). Similarly, their further research found that students reported the program was a
“more valuable experience” when the common reading program book was included in at least one course (Liljequist & Stone, 2009, p. 103). Additionally, students in the initial study also reported believing the common reading program was a “waste of time” when the book was not incorporated into a course (Stone et. al, 2004, p. 431). Ferguson et al. (2014) also found support for the notion of course-adoption in their mixed-method study of student and faculty perceptions of the common reading program. Though the total number of students’ courses integrating the book appeared to have no influence on their reading of the text, the researchers found that students were more likely to have read the text when the faculty teaching in their major had adopted the book.

Course-adoption of the text essentially mandates student reading, but the idea of institutions formally requiring all new students’ participation in common reading programs has been the subject of debate. Laufgraben (2006) recommended that programs use “expected” in the official language, especially after adverse reactions to two, sequential controversial selections at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill (p. 42). One of these selections included religious themes, which prompted public outcry that such reading was being “required” at a public institution (p. 42). In the NAS survey of common reading program designs and text selections, Randall (2016) identified that the majority (ranging from 71-72%) of institutions with common reading programs require their students to participate. The author does, however, strongly call out the language most often used to describe the requirement as “noncommittal,” essentially accusing institutions using expectations to intentionally “avoid[s] an imperative” (p.13).

Though clear communication of the program’s status may positively impact students’ participation in related events (Stone et al., 2004), operationalizing this reading requirement prompts even further debate. The NAS strongly believes that the reading requirement should be
enforced with a test (Randall, 2016; Thorne et al., 2014). Yet, in a discussion of first-year composition programs’ collaborative efforts with common reading programs, Benz, Comer, Juergensmeyer, and Lowry (2013) opposed the idea of testing matriculating students on the common text. The authors based their assertion on the need for teaching “effective writing and critical reading practices among first-year students” (p.28). Even though the common reading program as a requirement debate continues to rage, researchers have conducted empirical studies to begin building a base of knowledge about these programs.

**Goals and outcomes.** Consistently, the extant literature identifies and seeks to measure the outcomes of students’ involvement in common reading programs in an attempt to determine the educational value of these programs. Goals and outcomes for common reading programs include topics ranging from “model academic behaviors,” “foster involvement,” and “promote more meaningful learning” (Laufgraben, 2006, p. 2-5) to multicultural awareness and appreciation (Boff et al., 2007; Soria, 2015; Thorne et al., 2014). Though outcomes vary among institutions depending on campus culture, two broad goals—creating community and assisting first-year students with the transition to college—appear to be at least one purpose in the vast majority of common reading programs (Goldfine et al., 2011; Moser, 2010; Randall, 2016). As goals are a focal point in the literature, much of the scholarship is naturally based on institutional assessment data.

In one such assessment-based study, Stone et al. (2004) developed a survey that broadly explored students’ perceptions of program value and satisfaction with each element (the book itself, the author lecture experience, the book as a discussion tool, and as part of the first-year experience) of their common reading program. The data collected in this initial year indicated students enjoyed the program, both in terms of reading the book and hearing the author’s lecture,
but they did not “value” their experiences with the program. Consequently, students appear to
distinguish between the terms. Although students’ specific definitions of these two terms is
unknown, the strength of Stone et al.’s (2004) study is its recognition of student enjoyment of the
program. While enjoyment is an important component in the study of narrative engagement
(Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010), student satisfaction with the program does
not provide insight into the nature of students’ engagement with the text or the achievement of
learning outcomes. To remedy this problem, researchers adjusted their methods in future studies
by expanding measures for more specific goals of common reading programs and students’
program-related engagement.

Community. First and foremost, common reading programs strive to form a learning
community based on the shared experience of a common reading text (Daughtery & Hayes,
2012; Ferguson, 2006; Gracie, 1997; Laufgraben, 2006; Randall, 2016). Stone et al. (2004)
noted that it is this community aspect in which administrators are probably interested, as research
shows formal learning communities positively impact retention rates. Additionally, Barefoot
(2000) described the known value of students interacting with each other, especially upper-
classmen, and with faculty, in the improvement of first-year experience initiatives. For example,
Miami University’s common reading program, in operation since 1980, substantially
incorporates student interaction with upper-classmen and faculty as small-group discussion
leaders (Gracie, 1997). Additionally, the university invites the geographic community to
participate (Gracie, 1997). Consequently, Gracie (1997) claimed that this is “one of [their] most
conspicuous examples of the university as an intellectual community” (p. 39). Yet, studies exist
both in support of (Daughtery & Hayes, 2012; Edington et al., 2015; Goldfine et al., 2011) and
against (Ferguson et al., 2014; Liljequist & Stone, 2009) the claim that common reading programs can build community among first-year students.

A five-year study by Liljequist and Stone (2009) provided data suggesting that the common reading program was not effective in the creation of a learning community. Specifically, the common reading program in their study succeeded in developing a “common academic experience,” yet failed when measuring students’ connections with others about the book outside of the classroom (p. 101). Thus, the authors asserted that the program studied did not exemplify a learning community (Liljequist & Stone, 2009). Ferguson et al.’s (2014) study of a common reading program’s pilot year similarly found that students did not feel a stronger community connection as a result of reading the book. The faculty, however, believed the program may be able to forge these connections as the program continued.

To measure specifically this outcome of common reading programs, Daughtery and Hayes (2012) developed a five-item scale to measure students’ feelings of integration with the campus community, the “Community Connection Scale” (p. 36). Students responded to each item on a four-point Likert scale, then the researchers calculated a mean of responses to those five items to score students on the unifactorial scale. For their sample ($n = 97$), the observed internal consistency was high ($\alpha = .84$). This Community Connection Scale was then combined with other measures for the purpose of creating one instrument with which participants could interact that also addressed all the researchers’ questions. The researchers subsequently found that students who had read the book more strongly experienced a feeling of community than those students who had not read.

Goldfine et al. (2011) also explored community, among other constructs, on their 48-item scale. Instead of an integrated scale like Daughtery and Hayes (2012), these researchers used
individual-item measures. Yet, the items presented focused on students’ conversations having been facilitated by the common reading program and the roles (students, faculty, etc.) of the participants in those conversations (Goldfine et al., 2011). Where this study falls short is the lack of inquiry into the nature and topics of those conversations reported by students. Because Stone et al.’s (2004) instrument included an item asking if students perceive the pre-entry assignment to be a fair requirement, it is conceivable that students’ conversations interpreted by researchers as an experience of community could in actuality be discussions about the requirement itself, instead of the ideas and issues raised in and by the text’s content.

Nevertheless, the results reported that students felt the book “helped them connect with their peers” (Goldfine et al., 2011, p.102). This exact phrase was also used by Edington et al. (2015) in their study of students’ experience of community resulting from the engineering-focused common reading program. Chi-squared tests in revealed that females were more likely than males to agree that the booked facilitated connections, as were members of university-established learning communities than students not affiliated with one such learning community (Goldfine et al., 2011). Additionally, the authors found that members of learning communities were also more likely to report conversation about the book “with other students outside of the classroom” (p. 102). In the Edington et al. (2015) study, students also reported that the common reading program “helped [them] feel a stronger connection with the ...engineering community” (p. 4).

In all these studies, community is viewed as an outcome (Daughtery & Hayes, 2012; Edington et al., 2015; Ferguson et al., 2014; Goldfine et al., 2011; Liljequist & Stone, 2009). Yet, Kahu’s (2013) model of engagement suggests that community could instead be viewed as part of the engagement process itself, given her differentiation between the psychological and
behavioral dimensions of engagement. As aforementioned, the affective dimension of the psychological approach to student engagement research includes the notion of belongingness. This notion of belongingness possibly functions similar to the community outcome discussed by Daughtery and Hayes (2012), Edington et al. (2015), and Goldfine et al. (2011). Yet, the frequency with which students participate in community-driven aspects of common reading programs, such as social media, may be viewed through the behavioral lens and consequently should be measured slightly differently. Ferguson et al.’s (2014) study incorporates both perspectives, thus providing an illustrative example of the distinction. They found that students who had engaged with the program’s social media (behavioral) reported a stronger sense of community (affective) than those students who did not interact with the relevant social media. Both the behavioral and affective dimensions provide valuable insight into the nature of community in common reading programs. A community-oriented behavior, however, should not be construed as an affective sense of belongingness that would therefore be interpreted as the program outcome of community.

Transition to college-related outcomes. Incorporating a common reading program into the first-year experience can also introduce students to college-level academic expectations and the college environment; these academically focused goals are often cited as a major goal of the program (Randall, 2016). Liljequist and Stone’s (2009) empirical study found support for this idea that common reading programs can serve as one of many transition-support initiatives. In their study, students reported distinguishing between the roles of their high school teachers and their college faculty as a result of the common reading program. Furthermore, students also reported that the common reading program helped them to internalize the expectation to actively
take ownership of their own college experience. Finally, the study found that students tended to participate “simply because it is encouraged and expected” (p. 100).

Ferguson et al. (2014) also explored students’ development of college-level expectations in relation to their participation in certain co-curricular opportunities within the common reading program. They found that students who entered the voluntary essay contest were more likely to endorse the common reading program as an introduction to these new academic expectations. Furthermore, these same students who participated in the essay contest, along with those who completed at least one writing assignment related to the common text, were more likely to believe the program had enhanced their literacy skills. While these findings seem to contradict the notion expressed by Gracie (1997) that students expect a grade for any assignment, participation in such academically oriented, optional programs is only one of the many expectations to which students are being introduced through the common reading program. In fact, Barefoot (2000) supports using academic experiences during this transitional time to model the “attitudes and expectations” desired by the university of their first-year students (p. 17).

Some common reading programs seek to support development of cognitive skills, broadly and specifically, and intercultural competencies needed for success. For instance, Goldfine et al. (2011) used an individual-item approach to study students’ “ability to see multiple sides of an issue” as a result of the common reading program (p. 102). The outcome described here aligns with the multiplistic viewpoints in both Perry’s (1968) and Kitchener and King’s (1981) cognitive development models. Most students reported agreement with this result, implying that this common reading program is contributing to students’ cognitive development, as progressing toward multiplistic thought is an appropriate goal for first-year students (Kitchener & King, 1990). Yet, in the Goldfine et al. (2011) study, members of university-established learning
communities believed in this outcome significantly more so than non-members. When viewed in combination with other results from their study, the authors suggest that the learning communities’ structures could support cognitive development, but urge further research.

Focusing on specific sets of skills, Daughtery and Hayes (2012) and Soria (2015) used components of existing scales or instruments to measure the outcomes of study strategies and academic skills. Daughtery and Hayes (2012) used 13 items from the Motivational Beliefs and 11 items from the Self-Regulation Learning Strategies subscales of the Motivated Student Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ), developed by Pintrich and de Groot (1990). Presumably to align more closely with their Community Connection scale, Daughtery and Hayes (2012) adapted the MSLQ to a five-point response scale from seven-point response scale. In this portion of their study, they found that students who read the common book reported increased use of deep learning strategies, which the authors support as most effective for college success, when compared against non-common book readers. To strengthen their study, the researchers also controlled for students’ prior academic history. Therefore, their results suggested that reading the common book supported students’ academic success, but the authors stressed that their study was not designed to prove causation.

Likewise, Soria (2015) explored the “academic skills” and “multicultural appreciation and competence” outcomes using items of the Student Experience in Research University (SERU) survey managed by University of California Berkley (p.29). She conducted principal components analysis and identified five factors, each with high internal consistencies (alphas ranging from .79 to .87). Of these five factors, two factors, composed of nine total items, related to the “academic skills” and “multicultural appreciation” outcomes identified in her research questions (p. 29). The items in these factors were self-reports of students’ perceived abilities or
attitudes. For example, one item loading on the “academic skills” factor is the “ability to be clear and effective when writing” (p. 36). Similarly, a “multicultural appreciation” example is about students’ feeling “comfortable working with people from other cultures” (p. 36). Soria (2015) then correlated these two factors with students’ responses to their self-reported participation in a common book program. After controlling for students’ pre-college characteristics and participation in other high impact practices in her sample from six universities ($n = 1237$), she found that students’ participation in a common reading program was positively associated with self-reported improvements in their academic skills and multicultural appreciation. Ferguson et al.’s (2014) earlier findings help to corroborate students’ feelings about multicultural appreciation as a result of a common reading program. The faculty they interviewed believed this outcome was key to a program’s success, but was only accomplished as a direct result of the book selected.

Measurement of active participation. The most significant flaw in the current body of common reading program literature is the pervasive use of overly simplistic measures for the core of these programs: the reading of the common text. Multiple studies reduce the extremely complex process of reading and its responses (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Oatley, 1999; Reichl, 2009; Schiefele et al., 2012) to a binary indicator of having read the common text or not (Ferguson et al., 2014; Soria, 2015; Stone et al., 2004). One study designed as an assessment of Welcome Week programming did not even ask students if they had read the book; assuming students read the book, the instrument simply asked students to rate the related events as well as the book itself (Pouchak, Kelleher, & Lulay, 2008). One challenge with these simplistic measures is that students may interpret “read” in myriad ways. Students may define “read” as read the whole book in detail, skimmed the whole book, or read thoroughly selected chapters
while skimming the rest, for example. This multitude of possible interpretations, especially those interpretations that are facilitated by poorly defined terms, is extremely problematic in the design of surveys (Fowler, 2009).

Daughtery and Hayes (2012) avoided this problem by asking students to indicate “the extent to which” the students had read the book on a four-point scale (p. 35). Yet, the authors then collapsed these four response categories into two: “engaged readers” who had read the whole book, and “non-engaged readers” who had read parts or none of the book (p. 35). Thus, not even Daughtery and Hayes (2012) avoided the second challenge plaguing common reading program studies: a binary categorization reduces the amount of variability in responses, thereby reducing the reliability (DeVellis, 2012). Future studies should avoid these pitfalls by employing designs based on a general understanding of college students’ reading behaviors and reading processes, such as the ways in which students interact with a text and its storyline.

Reading Behaviors in College Students

To understand college students’ reading habits, this section will explore relevant research about the amount students read, the motivation behind their selective reading habits, the skills required for college-level reading, and finally, readers’ responses to texts.

Quantities and frequencies in college students’ reading habits. Studies of college students’ reading behaviors indicate that students regularly spend time reading for both academic and leisure purposes (Burgess & Jones, 2010; Huang, Capps, Blacklock & Garza, 2014; Mokhtari, Reichard, & Gardner, 2009). The amount students read, however, tends to vary by purpose, with students spending more time on academic reading. In a study exploring group differences in 209 college students’ reading habits, at least 75% of students read books academically at least twice per week (Burgess & Jones, 2010). Comparatively, only 24% of
surveyed students reported reading as frequently for non-academic purposes (Burgess & Jones, 2010). A study of 539 college students using time-diaries for data collection found similar results about the frequencies with which students read (Mokhtari et al., 2009). Only slightly fewer students in their study read one to two times per week for academic purposes (65%), but a greater portion read as frequently for leisure purposes (34%). These time-diaries indicated students spent 2.17 hours daily dedicated to academic reading, as compared with 1.14 hours daily spent on recreational reading. In another self-report survey study of 1,265 college students, Huang et al. (2014) found students spent fewer hours per week reading: only 7.72 hours for academic reading and as little as 4.24 hours for extracurricular reading.

Yet, the above studies and estimates of reading were conducted on students enrolled in the U.S., with relatively homogenous samples. Participants in all three studies tended to be female and Caucasian. A self-report survey about extracurricular reading habits of students enrolled in Taiwanese colleges and universities suggested Taiwanese students spent far more time on leisure reading than U.S.-based students (Chen, 2007). First-year students in Taiwan institutions reported spending an average of 1.53 hours per day, but third-years reported spending even more time on leisure reading, an average of 1.83 hours daily. The author, however, calculated that the apparent difference between U.S. and Taiwanese students may solely be due to the survey’s categorical time ranges. Chen’s observation about influence of survey design in reading behavior results echoed that of Gallik (1999) during the discussion of his survey of 139 college students’ reading behaviors. Citing both the U.S. and Taiwan as English-speaking countries, Chen (2007) postulated greater differences in reading behaviors may exist between other Eastern and Western countries.
Gender also seems to be a factor in the amount college students report reading, particularly in leisure reading (Burgess & Jones, 2010). A study of undergraduate students designed to predict college students’ reading behaviors found that females indicated greater intent to read for pleasure on semester breaks from school (Burak, 2004). No gender differences, however, were found in students’ reading intentions for leisure time during an academic semester. Similarly, in a program designed to increase student reading outside of class for sophomore students at university, females participated more than males at a rate of 3 to 1 (Gauder et al., 2007).

Furthermore, attitudes toward reading may also be perceived as gendered. Burak’s (2004) study also found that females were more likely to endorse reading for pleasure as a favorable activity. On a broader scale, Fuller and Sedo (2013) described reading as feminine activity as viewed by American society. Chen (2007) similarly attributed gender differences in his study to Taiwanese societal perspectives and histories. Yet, in his study, the genders were reversed: males engaged in leisure reading more often than females, even though the effect size suggested only a “trivial practical difference” (p. 646). Cultural and identity connections with reading are logical based on the “socially constructed” nature of both “identity” and the “mind,” which are applied both in “learning and using literacy” (McCarthey & Moje, 2002, p. 228). In their conversational exploration of literacy and identity, the authors described a multi-directional connection between the two. According to these scholars, not only can reading shape how individuals “understand themselves,” (p. 229), but reading, particularly purposeful choices of “socially acceptable” reading content, can also be a method of “performing particular identities” (p. 231).
The nature of reading among college students may be related not only to their gender, but also to their academic experiences. Though Gallik’s study (1999) revealed no differences in the reading frequencies between first-years and college seniors, Chen’s study (2007) found a small practically significant difference between first- and third-year students ($t = -6.621$, $d = .14$). In Taiwan, the type of institution (public, private, or technological) was also related to the amount its students reported reading recreationally (Chen, 2007). In a study of newspaper readership and media consumption of 261 traditional- and nontraditional-aged undergraduates enrolled in introductory communications courses, Jeffries and Atkin (1996) reported that humanities majors reported reading more books than others majors. These same humanities majors, however, were not the most avid readers of other materials, such as magazines or daily and weekly papers. Business majors reported reading the fewest books, but the highest number of hours listening to the radio. Chen’s study (2007) similarly found that humanities majors read recreationally more than other majors, namely natural sciences and education, though the practical differences were small, with first-year and third-year major comparisons ranging from ($d = .11$ to $d = .17$).

The observation that education majors do not read as much as humanities majors has also been studied in the United States. Applegate and Applegate (2004) noted what they called a “Peter effect,” drawing upon a Biblical reference that the pre-service elementary teachers they studied would be called upon to stimulate a passion for reading in their future students when they did not possess that passion themselves (p. 554). Expanding their study to a larger sample size, multiple institutions, and other academic majors, an updated study of sophomore students found similar trends: approximately half of education majors (49%) were classified as “unenthusiastic readers” (Applegate et al., 2014, p. 196). The authors defined this lack of enthusiasm as a range of students encompassing those who may or may not have completed assigned readings, but
certainly expressed “dislike” or complete avoidance of reading, even when academic in nature (p. 192). Of all majors studied, the authors found that only 46.6% could be classified as “enthusiastic,” a range inclusive of students who read at least one book over the summer to those who read far more and quite broadly (“avid”) (p. 192). Of these enthusiastic readers, only 5.7% could be considered “avid.” On the other extreme, 9.6% of students surveyed were classified as “unwilling,” those who avoided reading in any way possible (p. 193).

Regardless of academic major or gender, books are not necessarily the preferred mode of college students’ recreational reading. Gallik’s (1999) study reported magazines as the most popular medium, and comics the least popular. Since then, technology has created additional reading opportunities. Yet, Huang et al.’s (2014) study reiterated students’ preferences toward reading materials other than books: namely, their first choice was online reading materials, with magazines coming in second. The popularity of comics and graphic novels were rated as the third most popular, representing a definitive increase from prior studies. Similarly, both first- and third-year Taiwanese students prefer newspapers and magazines, with different types of non-assigned novels falling near the bottom of their preference list (Chen, 2007). Of those college students who do select books for their recreational reading, nonfiction—that is, the genre of choice for most common reading programs (Randall, 2016)—does not top college students’ preferences. In 2010, Burgess and Jones found that nonfiction as a genre is ranked near the middle of students’ reports of enjoyment of a genre; nonfiction fell below mystery or thriller, crime and horror. Classics, a genre urged by the NAS and occasionally selected for common reading programs (Randall, 2016), was the absolute least preferred genre of students in the Burgess and Jones (2010) study.
In addition to their recreational reading habits, these new modalities of reading and communication could also impact students’ reading behaviors within academic contexts. Thus, Nadelson et al. (2013) explored students’ perceptions of these new modalities, under a theoretical framework positing multiple forms of literacy. In this study, students indicated a preference toward traditional forms of reading, like textbooks or novels. Furthermore, students did not perceive other forms of text interaction, like text messages or social media, to be reading, even though they used these forms most frequently. In future coursework, students preferred to use the more traditional forms of reading, presenting what the authors believed to be a “value-based relationship between traditional print-based forms (and their online counterparts) and reading importance” (p. 81). The authors posited that to students, importance is equated with learning, thus explaining their preference for traditional materials in academic contexts.

Reading motivation. Reading motivation is a complex notion that has inspired many studies. A psychologically focused meta-analysis of both quantitative and qualitative reading motivation studies identified two major lines of this research: varying “forms” of motivation and “preconditions” of motivation (Schiefele et al., 2012, p. 429). Studies in these two lines of reading research generally assert that reading motivation can be both general, as applied in a broad spectrum of settings and tasks, and specific to individual tasks or texts. Furthermore, the meta-analysis highlighted varying results in studies attempting to predict competency and motivation variances among groups, such as gender, age, reader strength, or ethnicity. Aside from these two areas, the meta-analysis found some topics on which studies tended to produce more consistent results.

Forms of reading motivation. Overall, the meta-analysis suggested the most common topic of reading motivation debates is the impact of “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” motivators (p.
The authors identify these motivators as two higher order factors, each of which encompass multiple smaller constructs, such as “curiosity, involvement, competition, recognition, grades, compliance, and work avoidance” (p. 458). Intrinsic motivation is the more influential of the two, based on its stronger connection to individuals’ reading quantity and use of strategies to read effectively. The authors also carefully articulated a distinction between motivation, which is indicative of the reader’s behavioral intentions, and the more affectional idea of attitude toward reading. The studies included in the meta-analysis, however, suggested the two ideas are closely linked.

Demonstrating this link between reading attitudes and behavioral intentions, Burak’s study (2004) sought to predict college students’ reading behaviors using the theory of reasoned action as a conceptual framework. The data suggested that students’ attitudes were the strongest contribution to predicting students’ reading behaviors and those students who had positive attitudes toward “leisure reading” were more likely to intend to read during the semester or breaks (p. 150). Underlying these positive attitudes toward reading were the beliefs that “leisure reading reduces stress, engages their imaginations and is not a waste of time” (p. 150). Her model also addressed other constructs in alignment with the theory of reasoned action such as beliefs about the results of reading and perceptions of others; as a result, the model explained between 35-38% of the variance, depending on time of academic year, in students’ reading intentions. Though these predictive values are smaller than the framework usually produces, the author believed these data suggest recreational reading may not be influenced by the perceptions of others, supporting the intrinsic nature of reading motivation.

Of course, the formation of these influential beliefs and attitudes, as in the Burak (2004) study, may have been molded earlier in life by the influence of other individuals, including
teachers and parents. Encouragement from and positive examples set by parents and teachers stayed with students classified as “enthusiastic readers” in college; in fact, enthusiastic readers even cited these individuals as major influences on their own reading behaviors and attitudes (Applegate et al., 2014, p. 192). In a similar but more abstract measure, parents’ educational levels were also found to be a significant predictor in college students’ extracurricular reading habits (Chen, 2007). Even though students’ habits and attitudes may be largely formed by college, Huang et al. (2014) found that college instructors can still have a major influence on their students’ reading “interests and motivation,” particularly if they have shared their own passion for reading during class (p. 460).

Yet, even students who are motivated to read encounter obstacles to enacting their reading intentions. For example, Burgess and Jones (2010) found that females reported not finding the time to read was the primary reason that prevented them from leisure reading. In contrast, this same study found that males and remedial students of either gender chose to use their discretionary time on activities other than reading, particularly video games. Use of the Internet, however, appears most frequently in research concerning activities detracting from reading time (Huang et al., 2014; Mokhtari et al., 2009). Students do spend significant amounts of time using the Internet (Huang et al., 2014). The approximately 2.47 hours daily Internet time is .3 more hours daily than students spend on academic reading (Mokhtari et al., 2009). Furthermore, these students reported enjoying Internet use more than reading academically or recreationally (Huang, et al. 2014; Mokhtari et al., 2009). Instead of the Internet consuming time previously available for reading, Mokhtari et al. (2009) found some support for what is known as the “efficiency hypothesis” (p. 610). In this hypothesis, the Internet increases individuals’ “efficiency” in conducting daily tasks, thereby creating additional discretionary time, rather than
becoming a competing factor in time use. Lending further support to the efficiency hypothesis, students reported a portion of their daily Internet and social networking use facilitates their class assignments and group projects (Huang, et al., 2014).

**Preconditions of reading motivation.** As aforementioned, the second main group of constructs explored in reading motivation research are its “preconditions:” individuals’ reading abilities, perceptions of their abilities, and the anticipated values and outcomes of reading (Schiefele et al., 2012, p. 429). Even though the constructs are emphatically distinct in the literature, reading ability, or “reading competence,” is overwhelmingly found to be connected with intrinsic motivation to read, “even when controlling for a variety of relevant cognitive factors” (p. 458). What is not yet certain is the “causal direction” of these relationships, along with other mediating variables, which all remain “inconclusive” (p. 459). In support of the correlation between reading ability and intrinsic motivation, students enrolled in developmental reading courses were found to be “less likely” to read recreationally (Burgess & Jones, 2010, p. 497). No differences existed for academic reading behaviors between developmental and non-developmental students.

Two oft-cited studies contradict Schiefele et al.’s (2012) findings connecting reading ability and intrinsic motivation, and thereby recreational reading habits, but both authors provide reasons for their results. First, Gallik (1999) attributes his non-significant results connecting reading amount and ability level, as measured by students’ affiliations with either the Honors or Learning Support Programs, to the small sample size in his study. Similarly, Chen’s (2007) study of students enrolled at Taiwanese colleges and universities suggested contradictory findings. However, the measures of ability employed in this study were less precise than those used in other studies: grade points from students’ high schools and selectivity of the higher
education institutions in which they were enrolled. No measures of students’ academic performances or abilities during college were used. Furthermore, Chen (2007) attributed these contradictory findings to cultural perspectives in Taiwan that view recreational reading as a potential distraction from academic performance, in contrast to U. S. where it is viewed to “broaden one’s knowledge” (p. 651). In their explanations of their findings, both Gallik (1999) and Chen (2007) reinforced the belief that ability and motivation are strongly linked in reading.

**Reading abilities and responses.** For students entering college, reading should be a complex process in which students are able to apply specific strategies to integrate information from the text with other perspectives and their existing knowledge, while simultaneously “extract[ing] more than just surface meaning” from the text (Springer, Wilson, & Dole, 2015, p. 302). To this end, common reading programs’ emphasis on the productive debate of ideas relies heavily on students’ abilities to understand and interact meaningfully with a text. These two abilities, “comprehension” and “response,” are in alignment with two major lines of existing reading research, as described by Sadoski and Paivio (2007) in their article calling for a “unified theory of reading” (p. 341). Thus, this section will briefly explore the relevant research on college-level reading abilities and reading responses.

Manarin, Carey, Rathburn, and Ryland (2015) conducted an extensive study of students from their introductory-level general education courses in their four respective disciplines at a Canadian university. Students who volunteered to participate allowed the faculty to conduct in-depth analysis on all of their written assignments at the close of a term. Manarin et al. (2015) found that college students can read “nonfiction text in a variety of forms” for comprehension (p.87), but have trouble with more complex reading functions which the authors designate as “critical reading” (p. 4). To these authors, critical reading requires both the ability “to evaluate
assumptions and make relevant inferences” (p. 87). In addition to these common skills of critical reading, other elemental skills of critical reading vary according to the two reading purposes most commonly asked of students: for “academic purposes” and for “social engagement” (p. 7). Briefly, critical reading for academic purposes is associated with skills for reading within a particular discipline, including more mechanical reading skills like “identifying patterns of textual elements” and “distinguishing between main and subordinate ideas” (p. 47). Reading for social engagement, however, goes beyond these basic skills to leverage “analysis of knowledge as a step toward participatory action” (p. 7). Some common reading programs may address critical reading for academic purposes through their programs’ focus on becoming acclimated to their intended major or discipline (for example, Edington et al., 2015). Yet, most common reading programs appear to focus on this reading for social engagement, as indicated by the overwhelming selection of texts centering global and multicultural issues (Thorne et al., 2013; Thorne et al., 2014) and the prominence of co-curricular activities as way to engage students with these identified issues outside the classroom environment (Ferguson et al., 2014; Laufgraben, 2006).

In their analysis of students’ assignments from the social engagement perspective, the researchers found a “taxonomy of absence” in the skills and behaviors for critical reading for social engagement that students were not demonstrating through their writings (Manarin et al., 2015, p. 70). The first two levels, compliance and comprehension, are both self-explanatory and the areas in which the researchers found that students demonstrated frequently and with minimal apparent difficulty. The second two levels, however, were more likely to be absent and if present at all, appeared in ineffective or problematic ways. In these two levels of identifying the issue and generalizing to the world outside the text, researchers connected the absence or
ineffective demonstration of these skills to students’ cognitive development positionality. For instance, the problem with identification of the main issue in the text seemed to occur when students encountered a “complex, ambiguous or contradictory” text (p. 73). The students could not reconcile the text’s uncertainty with their expectation of the text’s authoritative perspective; the authors noted the direct alignment with the dualistic positions in Perry’s (1968) scheme (Manarin et al., 2015).

In addition to this common first-year student developmental perspective, students’ approaches to and beliefs about reading may have contributed to their lack of identification (Manarin et al., 2015). Here the authors referred to a theory that suggests two different reading approaches: transmission and transaction (Schraw & Bruning, 1996). The data collected in the Manarin et al. (2015) study suggested that students may be largely employing transmission beliefs in their reading. Readers using transmission beliefs view the text as the source of knowledge, whereas readers employing a transaction model expect to co-create the text’s meaning in tandem with that text (Schraw & Bruning, 1996). Elaborating on Rosenblatt’s (1978) transaction model of reading, Schraw and Bruning (1996) developed a way to measure individuals’ beliefs about the reading process. Using factor analysis, they identified that these two models are not mutually exclusive of one another; instead, they are two separate approaches to reading a text, each with their own continuum.

Though use of either model does not connote a particular level of reading competency, individuals’ use of transaction beliefs has been found to elicit emotional engagement, influence their interpretation of a text, and support connection of the text to external concepts and experiences (Schraw & Bruning, 1996; Mason, Scirica, & Salvi, 2006). Furthermore, the Applegate et al. (2014) study found that enthusiastic readers were more likely to demonstrate
transaction beliefs. Also, enthusiastic readers reported enjoyment in identifying with characters in a story and becoming immersed in the story’s world. These undergraduate students’ experiences are characteristic of Rosenblatt’s “aesthetic stance” (Applegate et al., 2014, p. 195). This aesthetic stance is part of her reader response theory that describes both “cognitive” and “affective” components of readers’ reactions and interactions with a written text (Rosenblatt, 1978; Sadoski & Paivio, 2007, p. 348). These cognitive and affective responses to common reading program texts are, as yet, unexplored.

While Sadoski and Paivio (2007) posit that Rosenblatt’s reader response theory has some current and promising future support, they note the primary measure developed to study Rosenblatt’s theory, the Literary Response Questionnaire (LRQ) by Miall and Kuiken (1995) is designed for literary reading in particular. Indeed, references to “fictional characters” and various genres of fictional writing occurred frequently in their description of developing the LRQ (p. 41). Additionally, they identified factors such as “Leisure Escape,” in which individuals’ respond to questions about their purpose for reading. This factor, along with others, are not applicable to the study of common reading programs, which are largely considered mandatory. Yet, Sadoski and Paivio (2007) note that Miall and Kuiken (1995) identified “a higher order factor they called experiencing, the dimension of being absorbed in a literary work,” explaining readers’ responses to texts (p. 349). This “experiencing” factor describes “empathic personal involvement” and “attention to vividly imagined narrative elements” (Miall & Kuiken, 1995, p. 50). These ideas of absorption, emotional engagement in the story, connections with characters and feeling present in the narrative are also explored in communication literature as “narrative engagement” (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Cohen, 2001; Green & Brock, 2000). Yet, the communication discipline’s measures for studying these absorption experiences may be
applied to both fiction and nonfiction texts alike, in written and other media (Green & Brock, 2000). Consequently, the study of narrative engagement provides an ideal lens through which students’ interaction with common reading program texts may be studied.

Narrative Engagement

The extent of an individual’s immersion into a storyline, feelings about characters in a selected text, and an individual’s prior experiences with the themes of a text are believed to influence the impact of a story on an individual, for example, the extent to which they report “story-consistent beliefs” after reading a story (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 705). Thus, this section will explore the relationships between the ideas of transportation, identification, prior experiences with the story themes, and the potential outcomes of narrative engagement.

Transportation. Green and Brock (2000) conducted a series of experiments that became the foundational article in the study of transportation, or “absorption into a story” (p. 701). They likened transportation to Nell’s (1988) foundational work entitled Lost in a Book. Additionally, Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) highlighted the concept’s derivation from Csikszentmihalyi’s (1997) research on flow. The basis for Green and Brock’s (2000) study was their belief that the pervasiveness of “public narrative[s],” such as is found in “novels, films, …stories in newspapers” possesses incredible potential for influencing public opinion (p. 701). Indeed, the authors blamed censorship of certain texts on the powerfully influential nature of such narratives, an idea also asserted by Strothmann and Van Fleet (2009). Green and Brock (2000) defined a narrative as a “story that raises unanswered questions, presents unresolved conflicts, or depicts not yet completed activity; characters may encounter and then resolve a crisis or crises” (p. 701).

Given this definition, the authors sought to develop a scale measuring individuals’ transportation into a storyline and explore the effects of transportation on individuals’ beliefs.
Through a series of experiments in which individuals read texts following myriad instructions about how they should read and what they were reading, the authors found that transportation does in fact influence individuals’ “story-consistent beliefs” (p.705). That is, those individuals who were more highly transported into the story were more likely to endorse beliefs both proximally and distally related to the story after reading it, even if those beliefs were not stated explicitly in the story. For instance, the individuals who read a piece called “Murder at the Mall” were more likely to endorse items in alignment with “the world is not just” because of the “fact that the victim was an innocent child” (p. 705). Furthermore, they found that individuals who were highly transported into the story were less likely to “counterargue,” or cognitively find fault with the positions implied as desirable by the story (p.702). This finding the authors attribute to the notion that transportation is a “qualitatively different” process than other communication theories that emphasize the cognition reception of persuasive arguments (p. 702). Next, the varying reading instructions that individuals received included both conditions where the same text excerpt was introduced to different groups as either fiction or fact. Comparative analyses revealed that transportation and story-consistent beliefs were not different for individuals depending on their instruction set. Finally, transportation was also found to influence positively individuals’ “evaluation’ of characters” (p. 703). In summary of their findings, the authors conclude that transportation is influenced by “affect, imagery, and cognition” (p. 718).

Further research on transportation as a construct found empirical support for transportation’s ability to influence readers’ attitudes toward alignment with those in the story (Dal Cin, Zanna, & Fong, 2004). In this study comparing individuals’ experiences reading two different texts, the researchers also found that individuals may have different “transportabilities,” that is, some individuals appeared to be more likely to become deeply immersed in the narrative
reading experience than others (Dal Cin et al., 2004, p. 183). Furthermore, the two texts used appeared to be able to transport individuals to varying extents. Similarly, Green and Brock (2000) found that texts listed as “bestsellers” or part of the “literary cannon” transported readers at higher levels than generic texts (p. 708). Slater, Rouner, and Long (2006) unexpectedly obtained results that also suggesting that text-specific qualities may influence transportation and the promotion of story-consistent attitudes. To study the influence of pre-existing ideological beliefs on transportation and story-consistent attitudes, the participants in the Slater et al. (2006) study viewed two different television narratives, each centered on a controversial issue. They found that only one of the two narratives was effective in altering participants’ beliefs to align more consistently with the story. Considering possible explanations for these results, the authors pointed out that the persuasive narrative “may have reframed the issue” in a context that appealed “to those for whom the message would normally be counterattitudinal” (p. 249). Thus, the nature of the narrative itself may be a factor in the alteration of readers’ or viewers’ beliefs toward those presented in the narrative.

Modality of reading may also influence the extent to which individuals may experience transportation. Mangen and Kuiken (2014) conducted a two-by-two experiment exploring the medium for reading texts (electronic or paper) and the nature of text (fiction or non-fiction). In this experiment, all participants read the same text, albeit with differing instructions as to the text’s nature of origin and with different equipment. Then, their participants completed surveys about their prior technological experiences, their engagement in the narrative (including transportation experiences), and physical experiences with the reading medium. Non-fiction, electronic (specifically, a Kindle app on an iPad) readers experienced what the authors called “interface interference,” or distractions relating to the electronic medium on which their text was
presented (p. 158). These interferences resulted in the readers feeling less transported into the story and less sympathy for the story’s characters than non-fiction readers reading from the booklet format. The authors stressed, however, that non-fiction iPad readers who did not report interface interference were able to experience transportation. This interface interference effect did not appear for the fiction readers using either medium. Consequently, the authors do not believe the reading on an iPad generally precludes transportation and other narrative engagement experiences.

Identification. Embedded in Green and Brock’s (2000) transportation work was a construct they called “evaluation” of characters. In a comparably foundational article, Cohen (2001) conceptually described readers’ interactions with and responses to characters presented in a narrative. In this piece, he defined identification with characters as “an imaginative process through which an audience member assumes the identity, goals and perspective of a character” (p. 261). He directly connected his definition to that offered by Oatley (1999). Oatley described the same experiences for readers of fictional literature using the term “empathy,” which he highlighted is distinct from sympathy (p. 446). In his article, he asserted that authors can select differing points of view from which the story’s narrator will speak, pushing the reader toward differing levels of identification. Though he mainly discussed readers’ responses to fiction, he believed that non-fiction may accomplish identification as well. In this way, identification functions as an anchor on one end of a continuum as opposite to a “pure spectator role” (Oatley, 1999, p. 446).

Cohen’s (2001) article sought to disentangle this notion of identification, based on Oatley’s (1999) empathy, from communication discourse pertaining to other types of character interactions and responses. To do so, Cohen elaborated on the reason for differences between
identification, character judgments and other character-engagement outcomes like “fandom” (p. 249). The distinguishing factor is the position from which the audience member or reader views the storyline. To Cohen, evaluating a character, as mentioned in Green and Brock (2000), requires the reader to maintain their sense of self, thus viewing the character from the outside. Identification, however, requires that the reader lose themselves into the story, and view the story’s experiences from the character’s point of view.

Expanding on his definition of identification, Cohen (2001) suggested four theoretical “dimensions” (p. 256). The first aligns with Oatley’s (1999) idea of empathy, or as Cohen describes, “sharing the feelings of the character” (p. 256). The second, perspective-taking, is similar to empathy, but in a more cognitive way, in that the reader “understands the character” (p. 256). Next, the motivational dimension entails goal-sharing with the character. Finally, Cohen includes “absorption,” or transportation as described by Green and Brock (2000), as a dimension of identification. Though Cohen (2001) did not refer directly to Green and Brock (2000), he posited this potential connection between transportation and identification, in that the latter depends on the former. In addition to this connection to transportation, Cohen (2001) asserted that the outcomes of reader identification are similar to those of transportation: enjoyment and attitude change. To this end, he even suggested that identification is what makes a narrative format of a persuasive message more effective than non-narrative formats. Oatley (1999) offered similar commentary in support of identification’s role in determining the power of a book for the reader, and potential attitudinal changes.

**Differentiating identification from transportation.** Because of the conflation of these two constructs, several authors have explored the intersection of and differences between transportation and identification (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Cohen, Tal-Or, & Mazor-
Tregerman, 2015; Mangen & Kuiken, 2014; Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010). First, Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) collected all items, totaling 40, in the published scholarship pertaining to the transportation, identification and their related constructs. They sought to develop a scale that would measure “a more fundamental set of engagement sensations that may be confounded with other constructs in other scales” (p.342). In a series of experiments yielding three data sets, the participants in these experiments viewed television shows, then responded to surveys measuring these concepts. After conducting exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, the researchers found a four-factor model, with a total of 12 items, best fit the data and explained one second order construct they called narrative engagement.

The first of these four factors explaining narrative engagement related to transportation, or “narrative presence,” and explains the extent to which a viewer enters “the story world” created by the narrative (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009, p. 331). The second factor, “attentional focus,” described viewers’ lack of “distractions” from the program (p. 341). Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) called the third factor “emotional engagement,” explaining both viewers’ sympathy and empathy toward characters. This factor aligns with Cohen’s (2001) dimension about experiencing feelings, but does not address the cognitive factor of Cohen’s perspective-taking. This cognitive component is explained by Busselle and Bilandzic’s (2009) final factor, “narrative understanding,” which checks comprehension of the storyline, viewers’ perceptions of how realistic the storyline is, and perspective-taking. In addition to other tests of reliability and validity, the authors confirmed that their scale also could predict viewers’ enjoyment and story-consistent attitudes, as would be expected for a properly functioning measure of these constructs. As a result, these authors believe that transportation and identification are distinct concepts that had been conflated in prior forms of measurement.
Using the Narrative Engagement Scale in their study about electronic reading media, Mangen and Kuiken (2014) administered the original 40 item-survey to their participants, and then conducted their own factor analyses. They found three factors, instead of the four found by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009). Two of Mangen and Kuiken’s (2014) factors mirrored those of Busselle and Bilandzic (2009): “narrative coherence,” which included the realism and perspective-taking dimensions (Mangen & Kuiken, 2014, p. 158), and “empathy/sympathy” (p. 159). Their third and final factor, however, featured both the loss of self-awareness and narrative presence constructs as one, unified factor; they called this factor simply “transportation” (p. 159). Though Busselle and Bilandzic had this one construct separated into two factors (“attentional focus” and “narrative presence”), both studies distinguished transportation as separate from identification. An experimental study in which details of a film were intentionally altered to change only transportation or identification also obtained this result of transportation and identification as “distinct” aspects of narrative engagement (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010, p. 406). They arrived at this conclusion because they found the two constructs may influence enjoyment, as an outcome of narrative engagement, but in different ways. Specifically, transportation, “when controlling for identification,” influenced enjoyment, whereas identification, “when controlling for transportation,” did not impact enjoyment (p. 414). Additionally, the authors learned that identification may be stronger when characters are portrayed in positive lights.

Cohen et al. (2015) continued to explore this idea of positive character portrayal as an influence on identification. To do so, the researchers conducted a two-by-two experiment in which participants were presented with a two-sided narrative about a controversial issue, featuring one main character on either side of the issue. After reading the narrative, assigned based on participants’ pre-study attitudes about the controversial issue, the participants again
completed surveys pertaining to their issue-related attitudes, as well as narrative engagement measures. Among other findings about pre-study attitudinal influences on identification, Cohen et al. found a different type of support for the distinction between transportation and identification. This time, the two “appeared to work in opposing directions,” even though the two usually promote similar outcomes (p. 254). Specifically, participants who identified with the character aligned with their original views reported stronger attitudes on the issue after reading the narrative; in other words, the process of “identification with a concordant character was associated with making attitudes more extreme” (p. 254). In contrast, readers who reported stronger transportation into selected storylines, despite their pre-study attitudes, experienced a “tempering” of their attitudes (p. 254). Though the authors offered no explanation for the reason the tempering did not occur for all instances of their study, the lack of variance by pre-study attitude differences suggests this is not an ideologically based cause. Nevertheless, the oppositional nature of transportation and identification’s effects provides further support for the conceptual distinction between the two.

**Multi-factorial nature of identification.** The Cohen et al. (2015) study also offered some support for the multi-factorial nature of identification. The researchers conducted one analysis using empathy alone, as opposed to in tandem with other identification-related items. These analyses suggested that readers could report experiencing empathy with a character who did not align with their pre-study attitudes, and that such experiences of empathy could act to temper their attitudes in the post-study surveys. Consequently, empathy in this study appears to function separately from other dimensions of identification described in Cohen’s (2001) original article. These findings align with those of Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) and Mangen and Kuiken (2014). In their factor analyses, both studies found that the cognitive component of
identification, perspective-taking, loads onto a separate factor from the affective aspects of identification, empathy and sympathy.

Chung and Slater (2013) sought to explore a multi-factorial depiction of identification, but they employed a different grouping of its constructs. Participants in this study viewed one of two films; telling the same story, these films each featured a main character who belonged to a societal group that was stigmatized to differing extents. These authors found empirical support for the aggregation the affective and cognitive components of perspective-taking, which had been isolated in Busselle and Bilandzic (2009), Mangen and Kuiken (2014), and Cohen et al. (2015). Because of their variables of interest, the authors argued that the common separation of perspective-taking was not necessary in this instance. In their analyses, however, they found that perspective-taking as one of the three factors appeared to function differently and more significantly with respect to several predictors and outcomes. Clearly, whether aggregated or isolated into its affective and cognitive components, identification is distinct from transportation and plays an important role in narrative engagement, its antecedents and its outcomes.

Prior experiences with narrative themes. One such antecedent is the set of views and attitudes about, knowledge of, and experiences with a text’s subject possessed by and that accompany a reader into their initial engagement with a narrative. The ability of this set of experiences to exert actual influence on the narrative experience itself is complex, but not yet conclusive. Green’s (2004) study provided the initial exploration of, and support for, prior experiences as influential on transportation and identification. In her study, undergraduate participants read a short story about a man planning to participate in a fraternity alumni event a few years after his graduation. His fraternity brothers, however, were previously unaware that he was gay, a fact he was now intending to share with them. Prior to reading this story, Green
Green’s (2004) results indicating the influential nature of prior experiences on narrative engagement were not immediately replicated. Dal Cin et al.’s (2004) study showed that though participants’ prior attitudes were associated with their post-reading attitudes, their prior attitudes had no impact on the extent to which they were transported into the storyline. Later, Slater et al.’s (2006) study produced mixed results. For the narrative that proved effective in persuading viewers toward story-consistent beliefs, levels of engagement with the narrative were not related to their prior beliefs. For the ineffective narrative, however, participants whose beliefs aligned with those espoused in the show were more engaged with the narrative than those participants who had indicated oppositional beliefs prior to the show.

Two recent studies have found evidence more closely aligning with Green’s (2004) initial findings that prior experiences can serve as an influential factor. Yet, both Chung and Slater (2013) and Cohen et al. (2015), as previously discussed, found that prior experiences, attitudes in particular, can impede individuals’ narrative engagement. Specifically, Chung and Slater (2013) found perspective-taking, the cognitive component of identification, to be “reduced” in
individuals who reported less favorable attitudes toward the stigmatized group during the pre-
tests (p. 906). The key, however, is that the authors highlighted that perspective-taking was not
entirely impossible for individuals with unfavorable attitudes. Instead, individuals who were
able to understand the character, in spite of their attitudes, reported increased likelihood of
“social acceptance” (p. 907). Similarly, Cohen et al.’s study found identification with a character
espousing attitudes in opposition to the reader’s was a less likely, and indeed, more difficult
process. Yet, simply growing to understand such a character was a sufficient experience for
readers’ attitudes to be softened from their pre-study state, thus replicating Chung and Slater’s
results (2013). Though these examples demonstrate a gradual trend toward a consensus about
the power of individuals’ prior experiences to influence their engagement with a narrative, more
research is needed to understand the nuances and complexities of the relationship.

**Potential outcomes of narrative engagement.** The relationship between narrative
engagement and story-consistent attitudes, however, is clear: engagement with a narrative, either
by means of transportation or identification, tends to result in the reader or viewer espousing
attitudes or beliefs consistent with those presented or implied in the narrative (Chung & Slater,
2013; Cohen et al., 2015; Green, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000). This relationship appears to be
effective whether the story-consistent attitudes pertain to reducing prejudice against a particular
group (Chung & Slater, 2013), or to endorsing a specific position on a public issue (Cohen et al.,
2015; Slater et al., 2006). Additionally, narrative engagement appears to impact individuals’
behavioral intentions. Murphy, Frank, Chatterjee, and Baezconde-Garbanti (2013) applied the
notion of narrative engagement to a health communication setting encouraging women to receive
early cervical cancer screenings. In their experimental study, women viewed either a narrative or
non-narrative format of a film on this subject, and then responded to questions about their
experience with the film and intentions to seek a cancer screening. In alignment with prior studies, the researchers found that narrative format showed power over the non-narrative format, and that deep engagement with the narrative impacted the women’s attitudes and intention to be screened. They identified a “ceiling effect” for the behavioral intentions, however, due to the very small number of women who could “increase” in this portion of the post-test (p. 125).

Oliver, Dillard, Bae and Tamul (2012) designed a study to extend a step beyond behavioral intentions: in this experiment, participants were provided an opportunity to demonstrate the behavior itself. The researchers conducted an experiment in which participants were assigned to read one of two newspaper article formats (narrative, or non-narrative) about one of three groups of people (“elderly persons, immigrants, or prisoners”) (p. 209). After reading the article, participants responded to a survey questioning their narrative engagement experience and their attitudes about the topics presented in the article. At the end of this survey, participants were given the option to either signify their completion of the study or click on a link that directed them to websites and organizations acting as advocates for the group of people about whom they had read. Authors termed this final portion of the experiment “information-seeking behaviors” (p.205). Recognizing that the act of clicking a link is a weak measure of behavior, Oliver et al. (2012) still obtained telling findings as a result of their unique study design. No differences in engagement existed among the participants who read about different groups of people; significant differences existed, however, between the narrative and non-narrative format readers. As expected, the narrative format proved more powerful in producing “empathic attitudes,” which in turn influenced participants’ behavioral intentions, and subsequent information-seeking behavior (p. 213). Though further study is needed, these initial findings suggest that deeper engagement with a narrative may have the potential to encourage
individuals to act upon their attitudes. In this way, deep narrative engagement aligns with the aims of critical reading for social engagement (Manarin et al., 2015).

Intense narrative engagement is also hypothesized to lead to an outcome that is undesirable in the context of higher education: reduced counter-arguing. Counterarguing is a cognitive process in which a reader “disbelieve[s]…story claims” (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 702). The reason that counterarguing is believed to be reduced, or even “eliminated,” as a result of narrative engagement is that “critical scrutiny of a message is incompatible with the suspension of disbelief associated with processing a narrative if engagement occurs” (Slater et al., 2006, p. 236). This “critical scrutiny” is akin to critical thinking, a foundational goal and process of higher education (Lucas, 2006). Consequently, changes in students’ attitudes and beliefs because their critical thinking was inhibited in response to engagement with a CRP narrative is problematic; in higher education initiatives, changes in attitudes and beliefs should come as a result of increased cognitive complexity as put forth in Perry (1968) and Kitchener and King (1981).

Though this is some support for the counterargument reduction hypothesis (Green & Brock, 2000; Slater et al. 2006), evidence is far from conclusive. In 2010, Moyer-Gusé and Nabi conducted an experiment in which participants were assigned to view either a narrative or non-narrative television show about teen pregnancy. After viewing the show, the participants then completed post-test surveys about the engagement in the narrative, including their internal thoughts during the show, and their attitudes. They also completed a follow-up survey two weeks following the original experiment and post-test. Participants viewing the narrative format who identified with a character engaged in less counterarguing; yet, stronger transportation into the storyline of narrative resulted in more counterarguing. Clearly, the corresponding increase in
counterarguments along with transportation stands in stark contrast to what was then the pervasive hypothesis. Taken together, these results suggested complexities in the operational relationships between transportation, identification, and the production of counterarguments. Offering possible explanations, the researchers proffered that the “closed-ended” survey measurement tool may be the cause (p. 45). At the very least, they noted that this tool does not differentiate “with what viewers counterargued:” the characters, the issue of teen pregnancy, or the warning messages focused on teen pregnancy’s consequences (p. 45). Therefore, this study may have produced initial results subverting the commonly accepted counterargument hypothesis, but the uncertainty of measurement methods has left the issue unresolved.

In his dissertation, Johnson (2011) explored narrative engagement’s nomological network, including counterarguments. His experiment required participants to complete a pre-test, surveying their attitudes and behavioral intentions related to health topics salient to college students, the sample from which his population was drawn. Participants then viewed a television show related to those health topics. After viewing, they cataloged their thoughts about the show itself, as well as a character of their choice featured in the show; these catalogs constructed Johnson’s counterargument measures. Johnson (2011) asserted this counterargument method is more traditional than the close-ended survey questions used by Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010); he later argued, however, that these measurement methods still need improvement. Finally, participants completed post-test surveys about their attitudes and behavioral intentions.

Among his results pertaining to interactions with the characters other than identification, Johnson (2011) found that “like transportation, narrative engagement did not significantly influence cognitive elaboration or counterarguing” (p. 63). Furthermore, counterarguing was related only to a construct called parasocial interaction, and not related to other narrative
engagement experiences. “Similar to friendship,” parasocial interaction involves “a psychological attachment between the viewer and the character” in which the viewer maintains their sense of self and “lead[s] to interaction with the character” (Cohen, 2001, p. 253). Consequently, Johnson (2011) suggested that this relationship between parasocial interaction and counterarguing could be a result of individuals’ self-selections for their counterargument catalog of a character about whom they were thinking “with greater cognitive complexity and abstraction” (p. 91). He continued with offering that “counterarguing, then, might actually reflect a deeper level of involvement” (p. 91). Johnson’s experimental design mirrors the design and procedures of other studies in the narrative engagement scholarship; furthermore, many of his analyses and results aligned with other theoretical expectations, such as narrative engagement’s ability to influence behavioral intentions and attitudes. Thus, when considered in tandem with the similar results from Moyer-Gusé and Nabi (2010), Johnson’s (2011) findings may indeed suggest a different role for counterargument in the narrative engagement process than previously was believed.

**Chapter Summary**

Colleges and universities design common reading programs to support first-year students in their cognitive and psychosocial development throughout this transitional period from high school to college. Cognitive development theories, like those by Perry (1968) and Kitchener and King (1981), suggest students reason through problems in increasingly complex ways by gradually reconciling multiple and contradictory perspectives to ultimately offer their own suggestions for the world’s unsolvable issues. Specifically, common reading programs seek to build community and model college level academic expectations for learning strategies and critical thought. These programs provide an opportunity to engage in
academic discourse with their peers and faculty by interacting with the global or social issues presented in a common reading text. Yet, existing research about the community development component of common reading programs is inconclusive. Furthermore, this small body of knowledge simplifies students’ experiences reading the text to a binary indication of completing the reading assignment or not.

Insight into college students’ reading habits and abilities may improve the design of future common reading program studies. Studies suggest that though reading for pleasure may be a gendered activity that also varies by major, college students can comprehend academic reading assignments. Many students, however, may struggle with more complex reading skills, potentially because of their cognitive development positionality. Additionally, the approaches students use to respond to a text can influence their interpretations of a text’s broader meaning. Though traditional reader-response theories focus on fictional literature, the field of narrative engagement similarly explores concepts of individual’s responses to both fiction and nonfiction storylines. Because common reading programs tend to use nonfiction texts, narrative engagement is a more suitable lens through which students’ interactions with the text can be studied.

Narrative engagement research suggests that individuals who are more absorbed into a storyline, or transported, are more likely to agree with attitudes implied or presented in the story. Initial studies suggested that the story-consistent beliefs resulted from a reduction in the arguments individuals made against textual attitudes different from their own. The results of recent studies, however, have drawn this original hypothesis into question. Furthermore, the depth of individuals’ transportation may be influenced by the nature of individuals’ prior experiences with the topics. Individuals may have trouble understanding a main character who
believes differently from them, but if they can grow to understand the character, then this empathy tends to soften the strength of their beliefs opposed by main character. To capture all aspects of students’ engagement with common reading programs, including such cognitive and affective reading experiences described by narrative engagement, this study will use Kahu’s (2013) model of engagement as a conceptual framework.
Chapter 3

The purpose of this study was to explore first-year students’ engagement in common reading program events and activities, engagement with the text’s narrative, and students’ affirmation of beliefs espoused in the text’s narrative. As discussed in the prior chapters, common reading programs typically feature curricular and co-curricular experiences, all related to a common book, designed to engage first-year students and support their cognitive and psychosocial development. Yet, studies exploring these popular programs simplified the most foundational component of the program, that is, students’ reading of the text, into a binary variable indicating that they did or did not read. The communication scholarship on the subject of narrative engagement provides a lens through which students’ interaction with the text and reading experiences may be explored. This body of literature suggested that individuals who more deeply engage with the text itself are more likely to espouse story-consistent beliefs and behavioral intentions, and possibly even more likely to act on those behavioral intentions. Furthermore, individuals’ prior experiences with the subject matter of the text may influence their engagement with the text. Thus, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are first-year students engaged with the narrative presented in the common reading program text as well as program-related events, courses, and discussions?
2. To what extent do first-year students report prior experiences with the text’s main themes, and to what extent do first-year students affirm beliefs in alignment with those espoused in the common reading program text’s narrative?

3. How well do the first-year students’ narrative engagement behaviors fit the four-factor model of attentional focus, narrative presence, emotional engagement, and narrative understanding?

4. What are the differences in first-year students’ narrative engagement, program engagement, and story-consistent beliefs among self-reported prior experiences with the CRP text’s main issue?

5. What are the differences in first-year students’ prior experiences with the text’s themes, narrative engagement, program engagement, and story-consistent beliefs among students’ genders and majors?

6. What is the relationship between first-year students’ common reading program experiences (narrative engagement, program engagement, and prior experiences with the themes) and their story-consistent beliefs?

To answer these research questions, an exploratory, nonexperimental, quantitative design was selected by the researcher. This chapter discusses the selection of the research methods used, instruments and procedures for data collection, data analysis strategies, and significance and limitations of the study.

Research Methods

Nonexperimental designs occur when the independent variable is not manipulated by the researcher (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Such studies are common in education, an area in which it may be unethical to manipulate the independent variables. Even so, nonexperimental
research can still provide the researcher with a greater understanding and description of the behaviors in question (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). For instance, nonexperimental, quantitative methods have often and successfully been used to study student engagement in aggregate, using large, multi-institution data sets from surveys, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement (Kuh, 2009). Though nonexperimental research designs cannot show causation, they may portray “the relationships that exist among the variables” (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 366). Such descriptions are often an important part of exploratory educational research, particularly, for those studies conducted “in the early phases of research” when the researcher “is focused on describing the nature of something that was previously unknown” (p. 22). Because the nature of students’ narrative engagement in common reading programs, and its relationship to program engagement and story-consistent beliefs, have not yet been studied, an exploratory, nonexperimental design was appropriate for this study.

Additionally, portions of this study used a “correlational” research design (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 347). Correlational research occurs when the independent and dependent variables are continuous. Research question six is an example of correlational research design; prior experiences, program engagement, and narrative engagement were all continuous variables.

Setting

To select a research site for this study, the researcher identified mid- to large- size institutions that had presented on their common reading program at the 35th Annual Conference on The First-Year Experience in Orlando, Florida (National Resource Center for The First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, 2016). The researcher contacted the presenters or program directors of these institutions to inquire if they would be interested in serving as the site
for this study. Texas State University (TXST) was the first institution of those contacted to respond affirmatively and was therefore the setting for this study.

Texas State University is located in San Marcos, “a growing community of 60,000 people in the Austin Metropolitan Area” (TXST, n.d.-a, “Locations,” para. 1). The university envisions itself as “a public, student-centered, Emerging Research University dedicated to excellence in serving the educational needs of the diverse population of Texas and the world beyond” (TXST, n.d.-b, “Our Mission,” para. 1). The institution was recently identified by the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (CCIHE) as a doctoral institution with “higher research activity,” or a research two (R2) (CCIHE, n.d., “Doctoral Universities, para. 1; TXST, n.d.-c, “World Class Research,” para. 1). The university offers almost 200 degree programs housed in nine different colleges (TXST, n.d.-a). The institution prides itself as being the only Texas university with a U. S. President in its alumni base: Lyndon B. Johnson (TXST, n.d.-d). Currently, the Lyndon Baines Johnson (LBJ) Distinguished Lecture Series continues at the university in his memory and is part of the common reading program (TXST, n.d.-d; TXST, n.d.-e). Additionally, Texas State University “ranks 13th in the nation for total bachelor’s degrees awarded to Hispanic students” (TXST, n.d.-a, “Educational Excellence,” para. 2).

Texas State University’s Common Reading Program has been in existence since 2004 (TXST, n.d.-f). On a website speaking to its incoming first-year students, the Common Reading Program is described as striving to “introduce you to the Common Experience at Texas State; encourage your participation in the intellectual life of the campus; [and] foster a sense of community among students, faculty and staff” (TXST, n.d.-g, para. 3). The Common Experience referred to in the Common Reading Program goals is a “yearlong initiative that cultivates a conversation on a theme” for all students, faculty and staff at the university, not just first-year
students (TXST, n.d.-f, para. 1). Common Experience events portray various perspectives on the theme and related issues and include LBJ Distinguished Lectures and other “scholarly panels” (TXST, n.d.-f, para. 2); theatre, music, and dance performances; poetry textual readings; library, museum, and visual art exhibits; and film screenings (TXST, n.d.-e). Additionally, the Common Experience theme may be incorporated into students’ courses, as well as the University Seminar (TXST, n.d.-f). The university highlights that the Common Experience “has given its participants a sense of how to approach issues they may have thought were beyond themselves” (TXST, n.d.-f, para. 4). In this way, the Common Experience promotes cognitive development by providing students opportunities to practice thinking in a complex manner about Kitchener and King’s (1981) ill-structured problems.

The Common Experience theme for the 2016-2017 academic year was “A Century of Conflict: Dialogues on the U. S. Experience of War since 1917” (TXST, n.d.-h, “Common Experience Theme”). The theme was described by the university as follows: “Conflict and war have always been elements of the human experience, affecting the development of identity, culture, society, and policy—from international and global involvements in armed conflicts to treaties seeking peaceful solutions” (TXST, nd.-h, para. 1). The Common Reading book is chosen each year to align with the chosen Common Experience theme (T. Marquiss, personal communication, July 27, 2016). To this end, the 2016-2017 Common Reading Program book was Karl Marlantes’ *What It Is Like To Go To War* (2011; TXST, n.d.-g). Following its use in another university’s common book program previously, Randall (2016) classified this book as a “memoir” with a “Vietnam War” theme (p. 104). The publisher’s description of Marlantes’ account of his experiences as a Marine lieutenant in the Vietnam War provided insight as to the beliefs and attitudes suggested in the text:
In *What It Is Like to Go to War*, Marlantes takes a deeply personal and candid look at the experience and ordeal of combat, critically examining how we might better prepare our young soldiers for war. War is as old as humankind, but in the past, warriors were prepared for battle by ritual, religion, and literature—which also helped bring them home. In a compelling narrative, Marlantes weaves riveting accounts of his combat experiences with thoughtful analysis, self-examination, and his readings—from Homer to the Mahabharata to Jung. He tells frankly about how he is haunted by the face of a young North Vietnamese soldier he killed at close quarters and how he finally finds a way to make peace with his past. Marlantes discusses the daily contradictions that warriors face in the grind of war, where each battle requires them to take life or spare life, and where they enter a state he likens to the fervor of religious ecstasy. He makes it clear just how poorly prepared our nineteen-year-old warriors—mainly men but increasingly women—are for the psychological and spiritual aspects of the journey. (Grove Atlantic, n.d., para. 2)

**Participants**

As of fall 2015, Texas State University served a student body made up of 37,979 students, 33,480 of whom are undergraduate degree-seeking students (TXST, n.d.-i). Of these students, 58 percent are female, and 42 percent are male (TXST, n.d.-i). Additionally, the institution boasts strong racial and ethnic diversity: 33 percent of students are Hispanic, 10 percent are African-American, and 50 percent are White (TXST, n.d.-i). The population for this study was first-time-in-college students at the selected institution who matriculated during the summer or fall 2016 semester. In fall 2016, the university expected 5,497 first-year students to enroll, an increase from the 5,189 students who enrolled in fall 2015 (TXST Institutional
Research, n.d.). The sample from this population was what Johnson and Christensen (2012) called a convenience sample of students who chose to respond to an invitation to participate in the study.

**Instrumentation**

Because this study formed the basis for TXST’s assessment of their Common Reading Program, the survey instrument used collected data both pertinent for this study and data needed only by the institution. The complete survey instrument for this study combined an existing survey instrument, the Narrative Engagement Scale (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009), with item parcels formulated specifically for the variables of interest in this study. Additionally, the survey instrument collected students’ self-reported demographic data (e.g., gender, major for this study; race/ethnicity and age for institutional assessment purposes). The complete survey is presented in Appendix A. This section describes the Narrative Engagement Scale, the development of items measuring the remaining variables for this study, and the process for obtaining validity and reliability evidence.

**Narrative Engagement Scale.** Transportation and identification have been widely explored using college student samples (Green, 2004; Oliver et al., 2012) and internationally (Cohen et al., 2015; Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010). These studies used popular measures such as those created by Green and Brock (2000) and Cohen (2001) instead of Busselle and Bilandzic’s (2009) Narrative Engagement Scale (NES). Still, these studies provided empirical support for the exploration of narrative engagement constructs as experienced by a diverse, first-year college student population. The measures used in the aforementioned studies, however, conflated the ideas of transportation, identification, and other related constructs (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). Consequently, the NES was developed to explore “a more fundamental set of engagement
sensations that may be confounded with other constructs in other scales” (p. 342). In the final 12 item survey, the authors found four factors explaining the second-order factor of narrative engagement: “narrative understanding,” “attentional focus,” “narrative presence,” and “emotional engagement” (p. 335).

As with the other studies, the NES has been used in studies with undergraduate students (Johnson, 2011; Mangen & Kuiken, 2014); in fact, the instrument was developed using undergraduate student participants (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). Both Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) and Johnson (2011), however, based their studies on students’ responses to television shows or other audio-visual media. Yet, Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) asserted the scale may be “adapted for” written works, including “novels,” as its core constructs originate from readers’ responses to written narratives (p. 343). Furthermore, R. Busselle expressed support for the use of the Narrative Engagement Scale for this study of students’ responses to a common reading program text (personal communication, April 1, 2016).

Testing this instrument’s applicability to written texts, Mangen and Kuiken (2014) used the NES in their study of readers’ responses to a written narrative on different reading media (electronic and paper). Instead of the four factors identified by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009), Mangen and Kuiken (2014) found three factors, two of which mirrored Busselle and Bilandzic’s (2009) factors: “narrative coherence,” similar to narrative understanding, “empathy/sympathy,” as related to emotional engagement (Mangen & Kuiken, 2014, p. 158-159). Their third factor combined Busselle and Bilandzic’s (2009) attentional focus and narrative presence into one factor which Mangen and Kuiken (2014) simply identified as “transportation” (p. 159). Even though these studies suggested different factor structures, both provided validity evidence for narrative engagement, which is the overall construct of interest for this study.
**Story-consistent beliefs.** The items for story-consistent beliefs in this study were developed in alignment with Green’s (2004) measurement techniques for this variable. Specifically, Green (2004) used two to six items to form each of four composite beliefs. Additionally, she analyzed two individual items separately. These items were Likert-type items (DeVellis, 2012) and offered participants a seven-point response scale. After data collection, she reported the Cronbach’s alpha for each of the four composite beliefs. In contrast, Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) averaged participants’ responses to two or three items per each belief or attitude. Yet, in their approach of reducing a few items into one measure, the average reduces the variability in individuals’ responses, which in turn reduces reliability (DeVellis, 2012). In this way, Green’s (2004) measurement for story-consistent beliefs was the more desirable method.

Consequently, the researcher drafted ten original items with a seven-point response scale, to be consistent with the narrative engagement items. All items intentionally featured strong statements to measure the “presence of a favorable attitude,” rather than “the absence of an unfavorable one” (p. 94). These items were reviewed, edited, and then approved by the Director of the Common Reading Program and the Dean of University College at TXST.

**Prior experiences with themes.** The items measuring students’ prior experiences with the text’s themes were adapted directly from Green’s (2004) study. Specifically, Green asked her sample of undergraduate students about the following four topics: “close friends or family” who identified as having a certain sexual orientation, if they personally identified as having a certain sexual orientation, if they belonged to a specific organization type featured in the story, and “how familiar” they are with that organization type (p. 256). She analyzed each of these four questions separately in their relationship to the dependent variables. In the present study,
familiarity with the military was the singular focal point of prior experiences, as opposed
Green’s study (2004) exploring both organizational membership and sexual identity.
Consequently, only three items were used to measure students’ prior experiences; the items still
directly applied Green’s (2004) topics to the themes found in Marlantes’ (2011) text.

**Program engagement.** Institutions offer different events and learning activities in
support of their common reading program (Corbin, 2005; Ferguson et al., 2014; Liljequist &
Stone, 2009; Moser, 2010; Pouchak et al., 2008). Therefore, the institution’s specific
opportunities must inform the development of program engagement items to capture fully
students’ engagement with this particular program. A list of potential events and activities was
generated from instructors’ prior syllabi (TXST, n.d.-j) and the schedule of Common Experience
events (TXST, n.d.-e), both of which were publicly posted. Under the guidance of the Director
of the TXST Common Reading Program, the researcher condensed similar events and activities
into like groups and highlighted individual events of significance to the university. The Director
confirmed the list with the Dean of University College. This list was presented to students as
one item in which they were asked to check all of the learning activities in which they
participated, events they attended, or assignments which they completed or to which they
contributed. Because students may have attended more than one of the event types, students
were asked to indicate the frequency with which they experienced this event type if it exceeded
once.

**Establishing validity and reliability.** Because narrative engagement had not yet been
applied as a conceptual framework for examining common reading programs, the researcher
sought to establish the validity and reliability of measures used in this study. In alignment with
the types of validity described in the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*
(2014), the researcher sought evidence for content validity using two different subject matter expert panels prior to collecting data from the students. The procedures for these panels are discussed in this section. Evidence for internal structure validity and reliability are discussed and examined in the data analysis phase of the study.

First, the researcher collected content validity evidence for the application of narrative engagement concepts (e.g., transportation and identification) to the exploration of students’ engagement with a common reading program text. Specifically, the researcher obtained this evidence through an expert panel review of communication scholars familiar with these constructs. Because the pool of experts was not geographically located in a central position, the experts were invited to participate in an electronic short survey questionnaire (Appendix B). The researcher conducted two rounds of recruitment to obtain the necessary number of participants for the communication scholar expert panel. The experts’ qualifications, informed consent form, and the questionnaire, are presented in Appendices C, D, and E respectively, in alignment with Standard 1.9 (Standards, 2014). The experts’ responses were then coded using what Saldaña (2013) identified as a “structural coding” (p. 84). This coding strategy is appropriate for the first cycle of reviewing qualitative data. In this strategy, the researcher “codes and initially categorizes” the data to “examine comparable segments’ commonalities, differences, and relationships” (p. 84). The results from this analysis not only provided content validity evidence, but also facilitated the researcher’s interpretation of this study’s student survey results.

Simultaneously, the researcher collected content validity evidence for the remaining sections of the planned survey: story-consistent beliefs, prior experiences with the text’s themes, and program engagement. A separate panel was appropriate because the communication scholars were likely not familiar with TXST’s Common Reading Program or the selected text
(Marlantes, 2011). Conversely, those with expertise in TXST’s program were likely unfamiliar with the narrative engagement constructs measured in Busselle and Bilandzic’s scale (2009).

The full item pool for these remaining sections was given to a virtual panel of subject matter experts for review. This second expert panel consisted of a convenience sample (Johnson & Christensen, 2012) of up to ten faculty and undergraduate peer mentors teaching University Seminar (US) at TXST in the fall 2016 semester.

Again, the experts were invited to participate electronically in a short survey (Appendices F and G). Experts were asked about the design of the survey, appropriateness of response categories, and each item’s “clarity” and “conciseness” (DeVellis, 2012, p. 100). As with the communication expert panel, the informed consent document along the instructions and questionnaire are presented in Appendices H and I, in alignment with Standard 1.9 (Standards, 2014). To achieve consensus across this disbursed group of TXST faculty for University Seminar, descriptive statistics were calculated and reported (Standard 1.9, Standards, 2014).

**Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher obtained the support of the Director of the Common Reading Program, Twister Marquiss, housed in University College at Texas State University (TXST), the Institutional Review Board at the University of South Florida, and the TXST Institutional Review Board (Appendices J-L). The Director of the Common Reading Program announced the study in the weekly University Seminar faculty newsletter, and kindly asked the instructors to promote the study to their students (Appendix M). The survey not only served as the data for this dissertation study, but students’ anonymous responses also served as the institutional program assessment instrument. One week after the announcement appeared in the faculty newsletter, the Director sent an e-mail link inviting the students in the aforementioned population
to participate in the study (Appendix N). By clicking on the link, students were taken to an online Informed Consent form (Appendix O). Students who chose to participate and completed the Informed Consent form were allowed to complete the survey online using the anonymous, web-based survey tool, Qualtrics.

The research proposal allowed students two weeks to complete the survey, scheduled to coincide with the timeframe of TXST’s normal end of course assessments. Unfortunately, incidents at the TXST campus resulted in lower response rates than anticipated, for this study as well as for the university’s course evaluations (personal communication, T. Marquiss, January 18, 2017). As a result, participants were recruited in a second interval during the first weeks of the spring 2017 semester. The data collected after the first two intervals included a large portion of missing data on the narrative engagement items. In order to achieve the needed power to perform the planned analyses, the researcher, with the support of the host site, decided to recruit participants during a third time interval, the end of the spring semester. At this point, the researcher added pop-up reminders in the web-based survey tool, appearing when a participant attempted to skip a question. These pop-up reminders simply prompted the participant to complete each question, but did not mandate completion of one question before moving to the next. This final round of data collection yielded a number of complete responses that, when paired with the partial responses collected in the two prior recruitment intervals, provided the necessary sample size to conduct the planned analyses. Though analyses looking for the presence of differences were not conducted, the researcher excluded from the spring recruitment periods any participants who were re-taking the first-year seminar due to a failing grade or academic probation status. In this way, the researcher believes that the only potential difference
in participants among recruitment periods was their time enrolled at TXST. This difference had the potential to influence only the program engagement variable.

The scholarship on survey research methods provided support for the decision to use web-based data collection method for the present study. Web-based survey methods are deemed appropriate for non-experimental designs in which the researcher is seeking information about self-reported behaviors, such as college students’ engagement in common reading programs (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). According to Rea and Parker (2005), this data collection method offers many advantages, including “ease of follow up,” “cost effectiveness,” and “rapid data collection” (p. 11-12). Furthermore, Fowler (2009) noted that self-administered methods, either via web or on paper, are less susceptible to participants’ adjusting their answers to align with what they perceive to be the socially acceptable response. Such instances of self-censorship would negatively influence validity.

In reading research, data are commonly collected after a participant has read a text (Reichl, 2009). Called “off-line method[s],” these data collection methods tend to “provide less direct insight, but they are usually more versatile and complex in their outcome” (p. 57). In contrast, “on-line methods” are those in which data are collected during the participant’s reading experience (p. 57). Studies employing on-line methods are typically exploring specific phenomena, like understanding “word-identification techniques” (p. 57). In alignment with the reading research methods, narrative engagement is typically measured in experimental designs in which the reader consumes the text and immediately responds to a narrative engagement measure, that is, using off-line methods (Green & Brock, 2000; Johnson, 2011). In the present study, data were collected several weeks to months after students read the text, instead of immediately after the reading experience as in communication studies. Yet, Cohen (2001)
asserted that individuals should be able to “recall” their feelings of engagement “at a later time” (p. 255). He believed that an individual would remember “having been deeply absorbed in the text” and thus “able to assess the degree to which he or she empathized with the character” (p. 255). Similarly, story-consistent beliefs have been measured well-after individuals’ original encounter with the narrative as part of a post-test (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). Consequently, the decision to collect data after students have encountered the common reading text, along with the majority of the related events and assignments, is supported by the scholarship.

Data Analysis

The data were entered into SAS software, Version 9.4, for all analyses. Data were cleaned, reverse coded as appropriate, and finally, scanned for missing cases. Because large amounts of missing data were found, the researcher analyzed the missingness for each variable and then developed a multi-pronged strategy to retain as much of the data as possible.

First, the researcher planned to use full-information maximum likelihood in SAS Version 9.4 to examine the factor structure of Busselle and Bilandzic’s (2009) Narrative Engagement Scale. Second, once the factor structure was confirmed, the researcher planned to use item-level multiple imputation procedure ($MI = 5$) for individual narrative engagement items (Stevens, 2009). In order to retain the variability in participants’ scores, the researcher intended to substitute the imputed individual item scores for missing values, rather than substituting the imputed the total narrative engagement score. Next, the researcher decided to use listwise deletion for cases with missing data points contributing to total scores on the following variables: prior experiences, program engagement, and story-consistent beliefs variables. Finally, the participants who indicated “prefer not to respond” would be maintained for gender identity ($n = ...
4) but not intended major \((n = 1)\), based on the numbers of participants would be included in each of those categories.

Once the data were clean and complete, items were grouped into their respective variables to calculate students’ scores on each variable (Table 1). Though the Narrative Engagement Scale was thought to contain either three or four factors (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009; Mangen & Kuiken, 2014), the second-order factor of narrative engagement was the variable of interest in this study. Consequently, students’ responses were totaled to receive their total narrative engagement score, using both the imputed and existing values. This total score for each student was primarily used for analyses of research questions. The story-consistent beliefs items were also totaled in this same way. Similarly, students’ responses to the prior experiences items were totaled; yet, the response choices were weighted in accordance with Table 2 representing the intensity, and therefore potential influence, of the particular prior experience. Students were instructed to “check all that apply,” in the event that they have known more than one person to serve. The researcher based this decision on Green’s (2004) assertion that prior experiences with a text’s theme may differentially impact their narrative experiences.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Survey Item Numbers (#)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Engagement</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Experiences with Theme</td>
<td>12-14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Engagement</td>
<td>15-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative understanding</td>
<td>15-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentional focus</td>
<td>18-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative presence</td>
<td>21-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional engagement</td>
<td>23-26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-consistent Beliefs</td>
<td>27-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Survey items #1-10, and 39-41 are included in the survey instrument for TXST’s institutional assessment needs, but were not analyzed as part of this study.
### Table 2

**Weighting of Students’ Responses to Prior Experiences Items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you have close friends or family who have served/are currently serving in the military?</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, someone who gave their life during their service</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, someone who was injured during their service</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, someone who served during/in a war</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, someone who served in the military, but not in a war</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have you, or do you plan to, serve(d) in the military?</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I have served or am serving currently (reserve or active)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I am currently an ROTC cadet</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, I plan on serving after I graduate from college</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How familiar are you with the military?</th>
<th>Weight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all familiar</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very familiar</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat familiar</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very familiar</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, the program engagement item weighted writing assignments as twice that of other experiences, in accordance with related research findings (Ferguson et al., 2014; Manarin et al., 2015; Neely, 2014). The writing assignments included in the survey were as follows: short reflection paper, persuasive essay, and research paper. The program experience total also accounted for the frequency with which students experienced each event or activity type.
Once students’ scores for each variable were calculated, the researcher then proceeded with analyses for each research question as shown in Table 3. The analyses for research questions one and two provided the researcher with a broad understanding of any general patterns emerging from the data; acquiring such an understanding was critical because the narrative engagement framework had not yet been applied to common reading programs. For the same reasons, the analysis conducted to answer research question three was used to build validity evidence for this study of narrative engagement in a nonexperimental, real-world setting and for interpreting individual subscales in the first research question. Additionally, this analysis contributed to the scholarly discourse about the internal structure of Busselle and Bilandzic’s (2009) Narrative Engagement Scale.

Research questions four and five explored the theoretical relationships among the identified variables, as uncovered during the literature review conducted by the researcher. Specifically, prior experiences with the themes in a text are thought to influence the extent of narrative engagement experienced by the reader (Cohen et al., 2015; Chung & Slater, 2013; Green, 2004); in turn, the extent of narrative engagement is believed to influence the likelihood of readers endorsing story-consistent beliefs (Chung & Slater, 2013; Cohen et al., 2015; Green & Brock, 2000). Many common reading programs, including TXST, are examples of reading for social engagement as described by Manarin et al. (2015) based on the key role of co-curricular activities in the design of the program. As aforementioned, these activities are designed to engage students continually and further with the ideas and issues presented in a common reading program text (Ferguson et al., 2014; Laufgraben, 2006). In this way, program engagement was viewed by the researcher as a continuation of the narrative engagement experience. Therefore, the prior experiences variable acted as a potential predictor variable for the outcome variables of
narrative engagement, program engagement, and story-consistent beliefs. Similarly, academic major and gender emerged during the literature review as relevant factors in the description of reading behaviors among college students (Applegate et al., 2014; Burak, 2004; Burgess & Jones, 2010; Chen, 2007; Jeffries & Atkin, 1996). Consequently, these two variables served as additional potential predictors for all engagement-related outcome variables (i.e., narrative engagement, program engagement, story-consistent beliefs, prior experiences). All three predictors were analyzed separately in their relationships to the outcomes variables based on the complexities of the intersectionalities between gender and prior experiences with the theme of this common reading text (i.e., the military). Exploring how groups of students within these three different predictors vary on the set of outcome variables informs higher education administrators in the design and implementation of their common reading programs.

Research question six also explored the relationships hypothesized in the scholarly literature. Yet, the analysis conducted for this research question distinguished the story-consistent beliefs variable from the program and narrative engagement variables. In research questions four and five, all four of these variables were viewed as a set of outcome variables. In this final analysis, however, story-consistent beliefs were viewed as the sole outcome variable because the relevant scholarly literature positions story-consistent beliefs as a result of narrative engagement and prior experiences (Chung & Slater, 2013; Cohen et al., 2015; Green, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000). As in questions four and five, program engagement was viewed as a continuation of the narrative engagement experience. Consequently, prior experiences, program engagement, and narrative engagement were all viewed as potential predictor variables for the story-consistent beliefs outcome variable.
Table 3

Data Analysis Plan and Variables per Research Question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Data Analysis Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ#1</strong>: To what extent are first-year students engaged with the narrative presented in the common reading program text and program-related events, courses, and discussions?</td>
<td>Narrative engagement; program engagement</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, multivariate normality-when appropriate (e.g., narrative engagement factors).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ#2</strong>: To what extent do first-year students report prior experiences with the text’s main themes, and to what extent do first-year students affirm beliefs in alignment with those espoused in the common reading program text’s narrative?</td>
<td>Prior experiences; story-consistent beliefs</td>
<td>Descriptive statistics including means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ#3</strong>: How well do the first-year students’ self-reported narrative engagement behaviors fit the four-factor model of attentional focus, narrative presence, emotional engagement, and narrative understanding?</td>
<td>Predictor: Attentional focus, narrative presence, emotional engagement, narrative understanding Outcome: Narrative engagement scale items</td>
<td>Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), fit indices (RMSEA, CFI, SRMR, Chi-squared value), Cronbach’s alpha, communalities, loadings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ #4</strong>: What are the differences in first-year students’ narrative engagement, program engagement, and story-consistent beliefs among self-reported prior experiences with the CRP text’s main issue?</td>
<td>Predictor: Students’ prior experiences Outcome: Narrative engagement, program engagement, story-consistent beliefs</td>
<td>MANOVA, post-hoc tests if appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ #5</strong>: What are the differences in first-year students’ program engagement, narrative engagement, prior experiences and story-consistent beliefs among students’ genders and majors?</td>
<td>Predictor: Major; gender Outcome: Narrative engagement, prior experiences, program engagement, story-consistent beliefs</td>
<td>MANOVA, post-hoc tests if appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RQ#6</strong>: What is the relationship between first-year students’ CRP experiences (narrative &amp; program engagement; prior experiences with the themes) and their story-consistent beliefs?</td>
<td>Predictor: Prior experiences, narrative engagement, program engagement Outcome: Story-consistent beliefs</td>
<td>Multiple regression</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students may have encountered common reading program activities in nested settings, like English composition or first-year seminar courses and even residence halls; in fact, Stone et
al. (2004) leveraged these settings for their sampling strategy in which faculty volunteered for their course sections to participate in the study. Yet, the sampling in this study did not occur from these nested settings; instead, students were sampled directly from the population of first-year students. Thus, multi-level modeling techniques were not needed for this project (Stevens, 2009).

The researcher began analysis of the research questions with a confirmatory factor analysis of the narrative engagement items to generate internal structure validity evidence (DeVellis, 2012; Standards, 2014). These analyses answered research question three. For the confirmatory factor analysis alone, students’ responses to individual narrative engagement items were used, rather than their calculated total narrative engagement score. The researcher sought a balance between strong model fit and parsimony of factors, as recommended by DeVellis (2012). To achieve this balance, the researcher reviewed the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and, even though it is heavily influenced by sample size, the Chi-Squared value (Millsap, 2012). The results of this determination were used to check if assumptions were met before interpreting Cronbach’s alpha.

Following factor analysis, reliability evidence was examined for the narrative engagement and story-consistent beliefs measures. For narrative engagement, reconfirming the psychometric properties was an important step because properties are not inherent to the instrument and instead may vary with each data sample (Thompson & Vacha-Haase, 2000). Estimates of internal consistency, including Cronbach’s alpha, are appropriate for reflective measures, like the story-consistent beliefs and narrative engagement (Edwards, 2011). Communalities were reported and examined (DeVellis, 2012). The program engagement and
prior experience items were formative instead of reflective, and weighted, so as not to be “interchangeable” (Edwards, 2011, p. 373). Consequently, measures of internal consistency were inappropriate and therefore were not calculated for these two variables.

Once reliability and validity were established, the researcher calculated descriptive statistics (Table 3) for each variable to answer the first two research questions (Ware, Ferron, & Miller, 2013). With these descriptions completed, the researcher proceeded to prepare the data for the multi-variate analyses of variance (MANOVA) to answer research questions four and five (Stevens, 2009). MANOVA is appropriate for understanding the differences between groups (i.e., categorical variables) on a set of continuous dependent variables (Stevens, 2009). Though students’ intended majors and genders were categorical variables already, there were too many categories represented for optimal statistical analysis. TXST offers over 92 undergraduate majors, over 60 of which were represented by participants in this study. For statistical purposes, the researcher collapsed these majors into a smaller, yet conceptually meaningful, number of groups with adequate numbers of participants in each category. To form these groupings, the researcher began by identifying the TXST majors that directly matched the categories in Applegate et al. (2014). Any remaining majors offered at TXST but not included in the Applegate et al. (2014) study were grouped with like majors and categories. When asked about their gender identity in the demographic information section of the survey, participants were allowed to indicate any and all genders with which they identify. The researcher wanted to give voice to those identities, though representing each identity exactly as reported was not statistically desirable. Consequently, the researcher combined these identities into a group called non-binary, representing participants who identified as one of the following: man and woman, transgender, self-defined, queer, or other.
Students’ prior experiences to this point were considered continuous variables, therefore requiring categorization for the MANOVA in research question four. To categorize these continuous variables and thus be able to explore the group differences, the researcher grouped students’ total prior experience scores into three categories: minor (low scores), average (mid-range scores), and substantial (high scores). The highest possible total prior experiences score was 19 due to the “check all that apply” options on questions 12 and 13. A student with this highest possible score had substantially greater familiarity with the book’s themes than someone with the lowest possible score of zero, representing a student who had no direct experiences with the military. Dividing this range into thirds, the prior experience total scores were categorized as follows: minor, scores of zero to five; average, scores of 6 to 12; substantial, scores of 13 to 19.

Next, the researcher checked for multivariate normality and then homogeneity of variances among groups using Box’s M test (Stevens, 2009). Then, the researcher conducted the identified MANOVA tests and sensitivity analyses. In the event of any significant results, the researcher selected post-hoc univariate tests to determine between which specific groups the differences are occurring (Stevens, 2009). Finally, the researcher conducted a post-hoc power analysis.

For the final research question, the researcher utilized the original, continuous form of the prior experiences variable. This research question was analyzed using multiple regression, which is applied “in predicting a dependent variable from a set of predictors” (Stevens, 2010, p. 230). The researcher first looked for potential outliers using Cook’s D and studentized residual values; similarly, the researcher checked for the presence of multicollinearity using the “variance inflation factor” (p. 235). Then, the researcher conducted the regression analysis (Stevens, 2010).
Significance of the Study

The results of this study may inform the faculty and staff responsible for designing and executing these programs by contributing an understanding of the nature of student engagement with the selected text, as well as the related curricular and co-curricular learning activities. Furthermore, the in-depth understanding of students’ engagement with the text and learning activities may inform state legislators and leaders possessing fiscal or curricular control over university initiatives about the potential educational value of common reading programs. Finally, the study expands the body of knowledge on this particular first-year experience initiative.

Limitations

This study should not be generalized to institutions of a different type, or with common reading program structures, vastly different from that at the site of this study. Similarly, the results should not be generalized to common reading books exploring themes and issues different from the common text featured in this study. Finally, the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study was not intended to show causation.

The main delimitation of this study was its focus on the nature, as opposed to the causes, of students’ engagement with the common reading text and program. The study attempted to account for individuals’ prior experiences and two relevant demographic factors (gender, major), yet these factors did not explain why students chose to participate or interact with the text in certain ways. Furthermore, the saliency of students’ various identities or the intersectionality of those identities was not explored. Finally, this study neither identified counterarguments created in response to the common reading text, nor explored their role in the development of students’ story-consistent beliefs.
Chapter Summary

This study used an exploratory, nonexperimental quantitative design to answer the six research questions. Data were collected through a web-based questionnaire to matriculated first-time-in-college students at Texas State University during the 2016-2017 academic year. The survey instrument combined Busselle and Bilandzic’s (2009) Narrative Engagement Scale, along with measures developed by the researcher and research site for story-consistent beliefs, prior experiences, and program engagement. Demographic information was also collected. Data analysis was conducted in SAS software, Version 9.4, and included descriptive statistics, confirmatory factor analysis, internal consistency, MANOVA, and multiple regression. The results may be used to inform the faculty, student affairs practitioners, legislators, and leaders concerned with the administration of common reading programs. These results, however, should not be generalized to other institution types, common reading program designs, or common book selections featuring themes other than those found in Marlantes (2011).
Chapter 4

The purpose of this study was to explore first-year students’ engagement in common reading program events and activities, engagement with the text’s narrative, and students’ affirmation of beliefs espoused in the text’s narrative. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. To what extent are first-year students engaged with the narrative presented in the common reading program text as well as program-related events, courses, and discussions?

2. To what extent do first-year students report prior experiences with the text’s main themes, and to what extent do first-year students affirm beliefs in alignment with those espoused in the common reading program text’s narrative?

3. How well do the first-year students’ narrative engagement behaviors fit the four-factor model of attentional focus, narrative presence, emotional engagement, and narrative understanding?

4. What are the differences in first-year students’ narrative engagement, program engagement, and story-consistent beliefs among self-reported prior experiences with the CRP text’s main issue?

5. What are the differences in first-year students’ prior experiences with the text’s themes, narrative engagement, program engagement, and story-consistent beliefs among students’ genders and majors?
6. What is the relationship between first-year students’ common reading program experiences (narrative engagement, program engagement, and prior experiences with the themes) and their story-consistent beliefs?

To answer these research questions, an exploratory, nonexperimental, quantitative design was selected by the researcher. This chapter presents validity evidence obtained from two expert panels. The participants in the first-year student survey are described. Treatments for missing data are discussed. Further validity evidence, specifically the Narrative Engagement Scale’s (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009) internal structure, is presented along with a discussion of reliability indicators. Finally, detailed results of the multivariate analyses answering the research questions are discussed.

**Expert Panel Results**

**Communication scholar panel.** A total of six responses were obtained (N = 6).

Following the Informed Consent process, the experts began by rating their professional familiarity with common reading programs as a first-year initiative. On a scale of zero (not at all familiar) to three (very familiar), two participants rated themselves as a two, three as a one, and one as a zero. The mean familiarity with common reading programs was 1.167. The researcher then began data analysis of the open-ended survey questions using structural coding as planned (Saldaña, 2013). This method “both codes and initially categorizes the data corpus to examine comparable segments’ commonalities, differences and relationships,” thus making it applicable to these survey questions (p. 84). The results of this analysis are discussed below, framed in the context of each survey question.

The participants generally reported that the constructs of narrative engagement are applicable to the study of common reading program engagement; however, they emphasized
important cautions in this applicability. One participant disagreed, indicating that the concepts do “not likely” apply. Yet, including this dissenting participant, all experts provided consistent reasoning supporting their answers. Specifically, one participant stated “a coherent narrative structure” or storyline must be present in the chosen text. Similarly, others emphasized that narrative engagement is more challenging with nonfiction narratives, even though communications research suggests transportation is still possible with nonfiction. Combining these ideas supporting the use of narrative engagement constructs to study common reading programs, the dissenting participant concluded that “unless a non-fiction book is a memoir or reportage that has such a structure, there would likely be considerable challenge.”

Four participants foresaw problems with participants’ reporting of their narrative engagement experiences. Two primary reasons were given for their concerns. First, one participant expressed concern that “their [students’] recollection would be confounded with their degree of engagement in the discussions, activities, etc.” Secondly, the duration of time between the measurement of narrative engagement and the “original experience of reading the text” was much longer than what is typical of communication studies that occur in experimental, laboratory settings. The concern here was that the “subtleties” of engagement may be lost during this time, resulting in extra measurement error. Yet, another participant proffered alternative perspectives on this same issue. Specifically, this participant suggested that the extended duration between reading the text and reporting their experiences “may reduce the strength of the correlation, maybe. On the other hand, the more they were transported, the more they should recall the text.” Another participant similarly suggested that though the duration between reading and reporting may be too long for this study, the typical, lab-based communication studies may require participants to report their experiences when they are still “a bit too close to
the experience and may not have had time to reflect or ruminate on the story.” In this way, the participant suggested a compromise between immediate data collection and a lengthy delay. Yet, this participant also concluded that “the scales are sensitive enough to distinguish gross differences between those who found the story engaging and those who did not.” Finally, this participant pointed out that the “scale is a bit more diagnostic with respect to failures in engagement. That is, it will tell you if readers found the story boring, hard to understand, or simply did not find it compelling.” Thus, the researcher concluded narrative engagement measures should be able to provide descriptive insight into participants’ experiences with the common reading program text, in alignment with the study’s purpose.

Overall, the participants were “more confident” about students’ ability to report their story-consistent beliefs. Three participants identified no problems at all, while two identified the problem being the identification of relevant story-consistent beliefs. The researcher’s second expert panel of faculty and peer mentors affiliated with the TXST Common Reading Program was designed a priori to address this issue. The final participant simply provided a caveat critical to the interpretation of the study results: “it will not be possible to ascertain the impact of the book on beliefs without a pretest or experimental design.” This response did not diminish any results of the current study so long as the interpretation aligned with its descriptive purpose. Similarly, in additional comments, the participant elaborated to suggest:

…measurement of response to the book on arrival to campus, how much it made them think about things they hadn’t thought about before, confirmed existing beliefs, stimulated counterarguing, as well as transportation measures (and identification if relevant) before discussions, etc., and a longitudinal design to assess how these responses determine responses to the discussions and seminars, as well as how the seminars might
influence subsequent responses regarding the book and the issues raised in the book, and regarding their own approach to thinking about controversial issues.

Though the communication scholar expert panelists provided noteworthy cautions, the results indicated that narrative engagement constructs may be applied to this study of common reading program engagement for descriptive, not explanatory, purposes.

**TXST expert panel.** The Texas State faculty and peer mentors survey yielded additional content validity evidence ($N = 7$). This panel was asked about the narrative engagement items only in the contexts of their expertise: TXST Common Reading Program, TXST first-year students, and the selected text by Marlantes (2011). Four of the seven respondents answered the question inquiring if they perceived the items from the Narrative Engagement Scale (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009) to be “worded appropriately for students at the end of their first semester.” All four who answered this question agreed that the questions were appropriate, adding that some items seemed redundant but the questions “get to the point.” The comment about item redundancy was appropriate and not concerning to the researcher, given the purpose and design of this reflective measurement (Edwards, 2011). One participant elaborated that “By this point in the year, I feel that they [the first-year students] have been exposed to a higher level of grammar and vocabulary that is sufficient to respond to these items.” Similarly, the participants mostly believed that the narrative engagement items were appropriate for students whose first language is not English. One participant, however, believed four specific items (17, 21, 22, and 23) may be troublesome to speakers of other languages due to the wording about the “story world” versus the “real world.” Noting this concern, the researcher planned further examination of these specific items during confirmatory factor analysis to determine their inclusion in the measurement model. Other comments and suggestions for improvement of the survey as a
whole were directed at wording of the items to be used solely for TXST assessment purposes
(items 1-10). Overall, one participant summarized that the survey “did a good job of covering
the entire Common Experience Reading program on all aspects, both inside and outside the
classroom.”

The survey additionally asked about the individual items measuring program
engagement, prior experiences with the text’s theme, and story-consistent beliefs. Participants
were asked to rate the clarity of the item, appropriateness of response categories, conciseness of
the item, and conciseness of response categories for each item on a scale of 0 (least) to 3 (most).
Participants were also given the opportunity to provide corrective suggestions and comments for
each item. Total item scores were calculated by summing these four areas, creating a possible
high score of 12. From these total item scores, the mean and standard deviation was calculated
for all participants (Table 4).

Table 4

*Item Total Scores from TXST Expert Panel (N = 7)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Topic</th>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Engagement</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7.67</td>
<td>4.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Experiences</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9.43</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>5.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-consistent beliefs</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.43</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28</td>
<td>10.43</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10.71</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10.00</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9.86</td>
<td>5.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32</td>
<td>9.86</td>
<td>5.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33</td>
<td>10.86</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34</td>
<td>10.14</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10.14</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>10.29</td>
<td>1.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The program engagement item mean was the lowest. The participants’ comments indicated the question was “too long.” Unfortunately, this question design met the needs for the TXST program assessment, and no alternatives were available. Similarly, the item means were low for prior experiences questions. Yet, these items were modeled exactly in alignment with Green’s (2004) study about the influence of prior experiences on narrative engagement. Consequently, the researcher chose to keep these items as originally written to maintain consistency with the communication literature base.

Focusing specifically on the story-consistent beliefs items, the means ranged from 9.86 to 10.86 ($SD = 5.66; SD = 2.83$, respectively). Again, the researcher planned further examination of the two items with the lowest mean score during reliability estimations to determine their inclusion in the study. Finally, one suggestion for survey improvement addressed the notion that multiple ideas were contained in one item for several story-consistent beliefs items. Yet, no participants commented that the beliefs did not align with those presented by Karl Marlantes in the selected text, *What It Is Like To Go To War*, or that any main beliefs were excluded from these ten items. Consequently, the results from this expert panel supported the measurement content of the story-consistent beliefs items. These results thereby negated the concern about identification of relevant story-consistent beliefs expressed by the communication expert panel. Taken together, the results from this panel provided validity evidence for the first-year student survey questions.

**First-year Student Survey**

**Participants.** A total of 325 first-year students at TXST responded to a portion of the distributed survey. The sample summary provided below, along with following analyses, represents the total sample of participants across the three data collection intervals. Of 243
responses, the vast majority of participants, 95.06%, identified themselves as full-time students, enrolled in 12 or more semester hours \( (n = 231) \); remaining students identified as part-time, enrolled in less than 12 semester hours \( (n = 12) \). Participants’ self-reported ages and racial/ethnic identities are reported in Tables 5 and 6, respectively. Further demographic data, including gender identities (Table 7) and intended majors (Table 8), were collected from participants. These tables represent participants’ direct responses; responses were later grouped into like categories for analysis of research question five. Most participants reported being age 18, and the most popular majors are nursing, exercise and sport science, and interdisciplinary studies. Participants’ gender, and racial and ethnic identities align with the composition of the TXST student body.

Table 5

*Summary of Participant Ages \( (n = 241) \)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>56.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>38.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6

**Summary of Participant Racial/Ethnic Identities (n = 241)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino/a, Native American or American Indian, and White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, and White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander and Black or African American</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander and White</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander, Black or African American, and White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander and Hispanic or Latino/a</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino/a, Native American or American Indian and White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino/a, Native American or American Indian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino/a, Native American or American Indian and Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino/a and White</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino/a</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>25.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American or American Indian and White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>46.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to respond</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>241</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7

**Summary of Participant Gender Identities (n = 243)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Man and woman</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man and queer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>21.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman and transgender</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman and queer</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman and self-defined</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>72.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgendered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-defined</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native American or American Indian and White</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>243</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

*Summary of Participant Intended Majors (n = 243)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to respond</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture Animal Sciences</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ag Business management</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthropology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Studio</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Athletic Training</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biochemistry</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Laboratory Sciences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Design</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Disorders</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Information Systems</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Science</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Justice-Law Enforcement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic Media &amp; Mass</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication Engineering Technology</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exercise &amp; Sport Science</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family &amp; Child Development</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion Merchandising</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finance</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography-Resources &amp; Environmental Studies</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare Administration</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary Science</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary Studies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interior Design</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International Studies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Missing data. Based on the researcher’s aforementioned informal observations during data collection, the researcher examined the amount of missing data for the 325 participants. Program engagement was measured by one item, asking participants to indicate the frequency with which they engaged in each curricular or co-curricular learning experience. Two hundred fifty-eight (258) participants, or 79.38%, answered this one item. For the next item parcels, participants tended to answer all items in the parcel or none of the items. Specifically, prior experiences with the text’s theme were measured by three items. Two hundred sixty-two (262) participants answered at least one of these three items. Of these 262 participants, 100% answered questions 12 and 13. The final item contributing to the prior experiences score, question 14, had a 99.62% response rate. Two hundred forty-one (241) participants answered all three items about prior experiences. For the story-consistent beliefs scale, 234 participants responded to at least one item on this scale. 225 participants responded to all 10 items. These participants
responded to an average of 97.86% of all ten items. Individual item response rates are displayed in Table 9. The patterns of response to the narrative engagement items were distinct from the story-consistent beliefs and prior experiences variables. Whereas the majority of participants who completed at least one item in both the story-consistent beliefs and prior experiences parcels also completed all remaining items in that parcel, the majority of participants who completed at least one item of the narrative engagement scale did not necessarily complete the remaining items in the parcel.

Table 9

*Missing Data for Story-Consistent Beliefs Survey Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Total Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percentage of All Participants ($n = 325$)</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants Who Answered At Least One Item on Scale ($n = 234$)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SC27</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>71.69</td>
<td>99.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC28</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>70.46</td>
<td>97.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC29</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>70.77</td>
<td>98.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC30</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>70.77</td>
<td>98.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC31</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>71.08</td>
<td>98.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC32</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>70.46</td>
<td>97.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC33</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>70.15</td>
<td>97.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC34</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>69.84</td>
<td>97.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC35</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>69.54</td>
<td>96.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC36</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>69.85</td>
<td>97.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Missing responses for narrative engagement were distributed among the items and with greater frequency (Table 10).
Table 10

*Missing Data for Narrative Engagement Survey Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Total Number of Responses</th>
<th>Percentage of All Participants (n = 325)</th>
<th>Percentage of Participants Who Answered At Least One Item on Scale (n = 250)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NES15</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>36.31</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES16</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>32.92</td>
<td>42.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES17</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>40.92</td>
<td>53.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES18</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>32.62</td>
<td>42.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES19</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>30.77</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES20</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>48.62</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES21</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>34.77</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES22</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>38.77</td>
<td>50.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES23</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>38.46</td>
<td>50.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>NES24</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>45.23</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES25</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>57.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES26</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>62.77</td>
<td>81.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on these differences in missingness among the variables of interest, the researcher developed a multi-pronged strategy to retain as much of the data as possible. First, the researcher used full-information maximum likelihood in SAS Version 9.4 to examine the factor structure of Busselle and Bilandzic’s (2009) Narrative Engagement Scale for research question three (Figure 1). Second, once the factor structure was confirmed, the researcher used item-level multiple imputation procedure \( MI = 5 \) for individual narrative engagement items (Stevens, 2009; Appendix P). In order to retain the variability in participants’ scores, the researcher substituted the imputed individual item scores for missing values, rather than substituting the imputed total narrative engagement score. Once these substitutions were completed, participants’ total narrative engagement scores were calculated, using both the existing and
imputed individual item scores. These totals were used for analysis of all research questions, except for the aforementioned confirmatory factor analysis. Next, the researcher used listwise deletion for cases with missing data points contributing to total scores on the following variables: prior experiences, program engagement, and story-consistent beliefs variables. Finally, the participants who indicated “prefer not to respond” were maintained for gender identity, but not intended major, based on the numbers of participants who were included in each of those categories and had completed all other items to achieve total variable scores where relevant.

**Internal Structure Validity**

The researcher conducted confirmatory factor analysis to establish internal structure validity (DeVellis, 2012; *Standards*, 2014) of the Narrative Engagement Scale (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). As previously described, the researcher used full-information maximum likelihood, with 40 complete observations and 208 incomplete observations. Item means and standard deviations are reported in Appendix Q. The model along with the loadings and communalities are reported in Figure 1. Loadings range from .53 to .99, thus meeting what Stevens (2009) suggested as a minimum of .4. Communalities range from .28 to .99. The items of concern (17, 21, 22, and 23) for participants whose first language is not English from the TXST expert panel similarly had acceptable loadings, ranging from .59 to .79, and communalities ranging from .35 to .63. As seen in Figure 1, these items were not the most concerning. Overall model fit indices indicated the model was reasonably acceptable (*SRMR = .095, RMSEA = .049, CFI = .95*), even though the Chi-squared test of fit was statistically significant \(\chi^2(50 = 80.16, p < .0001)\). Given the similarity of these indices to those originally reported during instrument development by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009), the researcher
decided to continue analysis using the four (orthogonal) factor model explained by one higher order factor.
Figure 1. Narrative Engagement Scale, illustrating twelve items explained by four orthogonal factors and one higher order factor \( \chi^2(50 = 80.16, \ p < .0001, \ SRMR = .095, \ RMSEA = .049, \ CFI = .95) \).
Reliability

Cronbach’s alpha was calculated for each of the Narrative Engagement Scale (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009) subscales and the scale as a whole, following the multiple imputation procedure. As seen in Table 11, the alphas range from .63, called “undesirable” by DeVellis (2012, p. 109), to .8, with the full-scale Cronbach’s alpha equaling .76, “respectable” (p. 109).

Table 11

Summary of Narrative Engagement Scale and Subscales (n = 325)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subscale &amp; Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Understanding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES15- At points, I had a hard time making sense of what was going on in the book. (-)</td>
<td>4.32</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES16- My understanding of the characters is unclear. (-)</td>
<td>4.94</td>
<td>.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES17- I had a hard time recognizing the thread of the story. (-)</td>
<td>4.96</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha for narrative understanding</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentional Focus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES18-I found my mind wandering while I was reading the book. (-)</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES19- While I was reading the book, my body was in the room, but my mind was inside the world created by the story. (-)</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES20- I had a hard time keeping my mind on the book. (-)</td>
<td>3.58</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha for attentional focus</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Presence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES21- While I was reading the book, my body was in the room, but my mind was inside the world created by the story.</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES22- The book created a new world, and then that new world suddenly disappeared when I finished reading the book.</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES23- At times while I was reading, the story world was closer to me than the real world.</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha for narrative presence</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES24- The story affected me emotionally.</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES25- While I was reading, when Karl Marlantes succeeded, I felt happy, and when they suffered in some way, I felt sad.</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NES26- I felt sorry for some of the characters in the book.</td>
<td>5.01</td>
<td>1.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cronbach’s alpha for emotional engagement</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall scale score</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Cronbach’s alpha</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(-) indicates reverse coded
Cronbach’s alpha was also evaluated for the story-consistent beliefs items for the 225 participants who responded to all 10 items (Table 12). The full-scale alpha was .896. The two items of concern, based on their low item score means from the TXST panel, were items SC31 and SC32. Yet, if either of the two lowest items were removed from the story-consistent beliefs scale, the Cronbach’s alpha would decrease [α (SC31) = .889 and α (SC32) = .885]. The only way to increase Cronbach’s alpha would have been to remove SC30 (α = .8975), but the mean item score given by the TXST panel was well within the range of item means (M = 10.00, SD = 5.66). The high standard deviation for this item, however, suggested disagreement among faculty, as evidenced that two of the seven participants suggested alternate wording. Because the increase in Cronbach’s alpha from excluding this item was extremely negligible and the TXST panel diverged in their opinions, the researcher decided to include this item on the story-consistent beliefs scale. The resulting Cronbach’s alpha for the ten-item scale (α = .896) fell within the range DeVellis (2012) calls “very good” (p. 109).

Table 12
Summary of Story-Consistent Beliefs Scale (n = 225)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SC27- As a society, we should talk about war, the experiences our service personnel have in war, and the consequences of those experiences and war itself.</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC28- Our military training programs should prepare our service personnel spiritually, as well as physically, for the experiences they may face.</td>
<td>5.97</td>
<td>1.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC29- We need to provide better care for our service personnel at the conclusion of their service.</td>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC30- When a war is fought to stand for what's right or protect ourselves or others, a warrior must choose a side on which to stand.</td>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC31- If war becomes necessary, a country's leaders and its citizens should enter into the conflict solemnly, without arrogance, and recognize the resulting sorrow and suffering at the war's end.</td>
<td>5.32</td>
<td>1.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC32- The best things I can do to support service persons are to be there with them, and help them access services they may need.</td>
<td>5.66</td>
<td>1.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC33- The conclusion of a war or conflict should not be celebrated like a sports victory but instead as a solemn event.</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC34- War is both physically and psychologically difficult on those fighting it.</td>
<td>6.40</td>
<td>1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC35- A country's leaders considering war should really try to understand what they are asking of their military and then decide if it's truly necessary.</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC36- When our country deploys its military, we are all participants.</td>
<td>5.48</td>
<td>1.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall scale score</td>
<td>5.72</td>
<td>1.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Cronbach’s alpha</td>
<td>0.896</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Research Questions

Summary statistics. As planned, the researcher then proceeded to answer the remaining research questions. The summary statistics for calculated variables are reported in Table 13; this table answers research questions 1 and 2. Participants reacted more strongly to the narrative understanding ($M = 14.22$) and attentional focus ($M = 10.53$) subscales than the emotional engagement ($M = 13.88$) narrative presence ($M = 10.95$) and subscales of the Narrative Engagement Scale (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). The narrative understanding and attentional focus factors must be interpreted separately from the emotional engagement and narrative presence factors because these items were reverse coded. Consequently, high scores on narrative understanding items like “I had a hard time understanding” indicated strong disagreement, and thus, ease of understanding or more accurately, “lack of difficulty in comprehending” (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009, p. 341). The narrative understanding subscale mean ($M = 14.22$) thus suggested some lack of problems in understanding, albeit, not a complete absence of problems. In this way, students understood the text and encountered only minimal challenges. Similarly, a high score on attentional focus items indicated strong disagreement with items like “I found my mind wandering,” and thus, the absence of distractions. Theoretically, Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) designed items in a reversed fashion because individuals only become aware when distractions are present. Thus, the relatively low mean score on attentional focus factor ($M = 10.53$) indicated that students were aware of distractions while reading the text. The emotional engagement ($M = 13.88$) and narrative presence ($M = 10.95$) means were closer to the ‘neutral’ response on the seven-point scale. Collectively, these results suggested students were moderately engaged with the narrative, as indicated by the mean total narrative engagement score ($M = 48.89$).
The program engagement variable mean included weightings from Chapter 3 emphasizing writing experiences (short reflection paper, persuasive essay, and research paper), and thus cannot be interpreted purely as the number of interactions each participant had with the common reading program. The standard deviation ($SD = 7.05$), however, was higher than the mean ($M = 6.61$), indicating extremely high variability in participants’ experiences with the common reading program. Additionally, the kurtosis value was extremely high ($kurtosis = 20.80$), indicating a leptokurtic distribution. Next, the mean ($M = 3.89$) of the prior experiences variable fell within the score range that the researcher designated a priori as “minor.” Finally, because the story-consistent beliefs variable was composed of ten items each with a seven-point response scale, the mean ($M = 57.19$, $SD = 9.73$) was between “somewhat agreed” or “agreed,” varying almost one scale point per item. None of these variables exhibited a perfectly normal distribution, yet the skewness and kurtosis values (except program engagement) were relatively small. Combined with the large sample size, these data approximated a normal distribution.

Table 13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary Statistics for Calculated Variables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Engagement ($n = 325$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--Narrative Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--Attentional Focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--Narrative Presence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--Emotional Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Engagement ($n = 258$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Experiences ($n = 241$)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-Consistent Beliefs ($n = 225$)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparative analyses. The next analyses for this study involved group comparisons of participants’ self-reported characteristics (prior experiences with the text’s themes, intended major, and gender identity) on a set of outcome variables (program engagement, story-consistent beliefs, and narrative engagement). In the event of statistically significant multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) results according to Wilks’ Lambda values, the researcher planned univariate follow-up tests and Tukey analyses. For any follow-up tests, the alpha level was adjusted to .0167 for research question four, and to .0125 for research question five, from .05, using the Bonferroni adjustment.

The first analysis grouped participants’ prior experiences with the theme into a priori categories: minor, average, and substantial. As indicated in Table 14, no students fell into the substantial category, resulting in a two-group analysis of the three variables (story-consistent beliefs, program engagement, and narrative engagement).

Table 14

Frequency Table for Prior Experiences (n = 202)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prior Experiences Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Minor (total scores = 0-5)</td>
<td>168</td>
<td>83.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average (total scores = 6-12)</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Substantial (total scores &gt; 13)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Multivariate normality analysis for this research question suggested violations of the normality assumption \([B_{1,p}=5.50, \chi^2=189.423(10, n=202) p=.0000; B_{2,p}=24.71, z_{upper}=12.60, z_{lower}=12.18, p=1}\) and only one statistically, but not practically, significant outlier \((D^2=23.81, p<.00001)\). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, skewness, kurtosis) for each of the three outcome variables (story-consistent beliefs, program engagement, and narrative}
engagement) are provided by prior experiences group in Table 15. Correlations among the outcome variables are listed in Table 16, ranging from 0.07 to 0.12. Similarly, the Box’s M test suggested violation of homogeneity \[\chi^2(6, N=202) = 28.03, p < .0001\]; however, a robustness argument can be made. An omnibus MANOVA test (Table 17) found statistically significant differences between the prior experiences groups on the set of narrative and program engagement dependent variables, with a small effect size \[\text{Wilks’ } \lambda = .95; F(3, 198) = 3.36, p = .0200, f^2 = .05\]. For this research question, sensitivity analysis was not provided because the data yielded only two groups.

The follow-up tests did not identify the source of any statistically significant differences at the adjusted alpha level due to a loss of power. The narrative engagement follow-up test \[F(1, 200) = 5.42, p = .0209, \text{ Table 18}\] suggested that participants in the “average” prior experiences group \(M = 52.05, SD = 10.20\) indicated higher, though not significantly, levels of narrative engagement than the “minor” prior experiences group \(M = 48.54, SD = 7.53\). Similarly, the program engagement follow-up test \[F(1, 200) = 4.07, p = .0449, \text{ Table 18}\] suggested that participants in the “average” prior experiences group reported more, again non-significant, program engagement \(M = 4.76, SD = 3.57\) than the “minor” prior experiences group \(M = 7.05, SD = 6.39\). Finally, the follow-up univariate for story-consistent beliefs did not show a significant difference \[F(1, 200) = 0.06, p = .8117, \text{ Table 18}\] between the “minor” and “average” groups, respectively \(M = 56.99, SD = 9.32; M = 57.344, SD = 12.77\). Consequently, the researcher concluded that group differences existed between the minor and average prior experiences groups, yet greater power is needed to discern conclusively the specific source(s) of the variation.
Table 15

**Summary Statistics for Differences among Prior Experiences (n = 202)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Narrative engagement</th>
<th>Program Engagement</th>
<th>Story-consistent beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Prior Experiences with Theme</strong></td>
<td><strong>Minor Prior Experiences (n = 168)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Average Prior Experiences (n = 34)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Skewness</td>
<td>Kurtosis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative engagement</td>
<td>48.54</td>
<td>7.53</td>
<td>.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Engagement</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td>6.39</td>
<td>1.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-consistent beliefs</td>
<td>56.99</td>
<td>9.32</td>
<td>-.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16

**Correlations among Outcome Variables for Prior Experiences (n = 202)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative Engagement</th>
<th>Program Engagement</th>
<th>Story-consistent Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Engagement</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Engagement</td>
<td>.07 (.35)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-Consistent Beliefs</td>
<td>.12 (.08)</td>
<td>.08 (.28)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17

**Multivariate Test of Significance for Differences among Prior Experiences**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wilks’ Lambda</th>
<th>F-Value</th>
<th>Probability</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
<th>Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.9516</td>
<td>3.36</td>
<td>.02*</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(3, 198)

*Note.* This omnibus test is significant at the .05 level.
Table 18

*Univariate Follow-Up Tests for Differences among Prior Experiences* \((n = 202, df= 1, 201)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>349.77</td>
<td>349.77</td>
<td>5.42</td>
<td>0.0209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>12906.86</td>
<td>64.53</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13256.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>147.37</td>
<td>147.37</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.0449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>7235.74</td>
<td>36.18</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7383.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-consistent beliefs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>5.65</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.8117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>19877.38</td>
<td>99.39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19883.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* None significant at the .0167 level.

The next research question explored group differences between gender identities and intended majors on narrative engagement, program engagement, and story-consistent beliefs. TXST offers over 92 undergraduate majors, over 60 of which were represented by participants in this study. For statistical purposes, the researcher collapsed these majors into a smaller, yet conceptually meaningful, number of groups with adequate numbers of participants in each category. To form these groupings, the researcher began by identifying the TXST majors that directly matched the categories in Applegate et al. (2014). Any remaining majors offered at TXST but not included in the Applegate et al. (2014) study were grouped with like majors and
categories. This process resulted in seven distinct, meaningful groups, as reported in Tables 19 and 20.

Table 19

*Frequency Table for Major Groups (n = 201)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Group</th>
<th>Included Majors</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>Accounting, Economics, Fashion Merchandising, Finance, Management, Marketing</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>Athletic Training, Clinical Lab Sciences, Exercise &amp; Sport Science, Healthcare Administration, Nursing, Nutrition &amp; Foods, Radiation Therapy, Respiratory Care</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>22.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts &amp; Humanities</td>
<td>Art (Studio), Dance, English, French, History, Music, Music Studies, Philosophy, Theater</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interdisciplinary</td>
<td>Interdisciplinary Science, Interdisciplinary Studies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math, Science,</td>
<td>Agriculture, Agriculture Animal Sciences, Agriculture Business Management; Computer Information Systems, Computer Science, Construction Science; Electrical, Industrial Engineering; Interior Design; Sound Recording Technology; Biochemistry, Biology, Geography, Geography Resources &amp; Environmental Studies, Mathematics, Microbiology, Physics, Wildlife Biology</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>24.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering &amp;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Multivariate normality analysis for these major groups again suggested violations of the normality assumption \[B_1,p = 7.17 \chi^2(20, n = 201) = 245.19, p = .0000; B_2,p = 36.24, z_{upper} = 12.52, z_{lower} = 11.88, p = 1\) and only one statistically, but not practically, significant outlier \(D^2=31.32, p<.0001\). Correlations among the dependent variables are listed in Table 21, ranging from -0.11 to 0.12. Similarly, the Box’s M test suggested violation of homogeneity \(\chi^2(50, n = 201) = 77.55, p = .0075\). An omnibus MANOVA test (Table 22) found no statistically significant differences between the major groups on the set of narrative and program engagement dependent variables, \([\text{Wilks’ } \lambda = .94; F(20, 637.74) = 0.64, p = .8828, f^2 = .02\]. Because other researchers may have selected a different test statistic, sensitivity analysis was conducted and resulted in the same conclusion \([\text{Pillai’s Trace } = .07, F(20, 780) = .65, p = .8828; \text{Hotelling-Lawley Trace} = .07, F(20, 415.02) = 0.64, p = .8835; \text{Roy’s Greatest Root} = .04 F(5, 195) = 1.40, p = .2268\]. Power analysis (.53) suggested the test may have identified any existing differences,
yet further research with stronger power would be beneficial. Because the omnibus test was not significant, no follow-up univariate tests were conducted. Consequently, the researcher concluded that these data did not suggest the presence of group differences among major groups for common reading program engagement, narrative engagement, and story-consistent beliefs.

Table 21

Correlations among Outcome Variables for Major Groups (n = 202)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative Engagement</th>
<th>Program Engagement</th>
<th>Story-Consistent Beliefs</th>
<th>Prior Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program</td>
<td>.04 (.54)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-Consistent</td>
<td>.12 (.08)</td>
<td>.08 (.28)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Experiences</td>
<td>.12 (.09)</td>
<td>-.11 (.13)</td>
<td>.02 (.83)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22

Multivariate Test of Significance for Differences among Major Groups (n = 201)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wilks’ Lambda</th>
<th>F-Value</th>
<th>Probability</th>
<th>Effect Size ($f^2$)</th>
<th>Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.94</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>.8828</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(20, 637.74)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final comparative analysis focused on group differences between gender identities on the aforementioned set of outcome variables. When asked about their gender identity in the demographic information section of the survey, nine students chose to share the complexity of their identity (Table 6). One of these participants had missing data points on a variable of interest and thus was dropped from analysis for this question, resulting in a total of eight
participants. The researcher wanted to give voice to those identities, though representing each identity exactly as reported was not statistically desirable. Consequently, the researcher combined these identities into a group called non-binary, representing participants who identified as one of the following: man and woman, transgender, self-defined, queer, or other. The resulting summary statistics for this analysis are presented in Table 23.

Multivariate normality analysis for this research question suggested violations of the normality assumption \[B_1,p = 6.71, \chi^2(20, N = 202) = 230.48, p = .0000; B_2,p = 36.08, z_{\text{upper}} = 12.39, z_{\text{lower}} = 11.75, p = 1\] and only one statistically significant outlier \[D^2 = 27.95, p < .00001\]. This outlier was also practically significant, yet within the range of plausible scores. Therefore, the researcher included this outlier in the analysis. Correlations among the outcome variables are listed in Table 24, ranging from -0.10 to 0.14. Similarly, the Box’s M test suggested violation of homogeneity \[\chi^2(30, N = 202) = 83.23, p < .0001\]. An omnibus MANOVA test (Table 25) found statistically significant differences between the gender groups on the set of narrative and program engagement outcome variables with a small effect size, \[\text{Wilks’ } \lambda = 0.89; F(12, 516.21) = 1.94, p = .0274, f^2 = .05\]. Sensitivity analysis revealed similar results [Pillai’s Trace = .11, \(F(12, 591) = 1.93, p = .0287\); Hotelling-Lawley Trace = .12, \(F(12, 336.96) = 1.96, p = .0273\); Roy’s Greatest Root = .0868, \(F(4, 197) = 4.28, p = .0024\)]. Power was sufficient (.92).

The follow-up univariate test for narrative engagement revealed a significant difference only for story-consistent beliefs among gender groups at the adjusted alpha level \[F(3, 198) = 4.44, p = .0048, \text{Table 26}\]. Though a loss of power resulted in no statistically significant gender group pairings on the Tukey post-hoc tests of Honestly Significant Difference, group means and standard deviations provided insight. Participants who identified as women \((M = 58.37, SD = 8.55)\) or non-binary \((M = 56.75, SD = 7.27)\) had stronger story-consistent beliefs than
participants who identified as men ($M = 53.89, SD = 12.30$) or those who preferred not to answer ($M = 45.25, SD = 19.52$). None of the other univariate follow-up tests suggested any significant differences (program engagement: [$F(3, 198) = 1.22, p = .3044$; narrative engagement [$F(3, 198) = 1.19, p = .3155$], prior experiences [$F(3, 198) = .71, p = .5462$]).

Table 23

**Summary Statistics for Differences among Gender Groups (n = 202)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Narrative Engagement</th>
<th>Program Engagement</th>
<th>Story-Consistent Beliefs</th>
<th>Prior Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-binary</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 8)</td>
<td>45.96</td>
<td>7.52</td>
<td>-0.16</td>
<td>-1.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 140)</td>
<td>48.86</td>
<td>8.23</td>
<td>-0.3</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 44)</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>8.01</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to respond</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n = 4)</td>
<td>46.89</td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>-0.72</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24

**Correlations among Outcome Variables for Differences among Gender Groups (n = 202)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative Engagement</th>
<th>Program Engagement</th>
<th>Story-Consistent Beliefs</th>
<th>Prior Experiences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Engagement</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Engagement</td>
<td>.06 (.40)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-Consistent Beliefs</td>
<td>.14 (.05)</td>
<td>.07 (.35)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Experiences</td>
<td>.11 (.11)</td>
<td>-.10 (.14)</td>
<td>.03 (.64)</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 25

*Multivariate Test of Significance for Differences among Gender Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wilks’ Lambda</th>
<th>F-Value</th>
<th>Probability</th>
<th>Effect Size</th>
<th>Power</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>.89</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>.0274</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12, 516.21)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 26

*Univariate Follow-up Tests for Differences among Gender Groups (n = 202, df = 3, 198)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>234.39</td>
<td>78.13</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>0.3155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>13022.24</td>
<td>65.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>13256.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Engagement</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>133.76</td>
<td>44.59</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.3044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>7249.35</td>
<td>36.61</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>7383.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Story-consistent beliefs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>1252.32</td>
<td>417.44</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>.0048*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>18630.71</td>
<td>94.09</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>19883.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Prior Experiences</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between groups</td>
<td>12.10</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.5462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within groups</td>
<td>1122.28</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>1134.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *Only story-consistent beliefs significant at the .0125 level.*

**Regression analysis.** The final research question explored a theoretically based regression model: story-consistent beliefs may be explained by participants’ prior experiences
with the theme, common reading program engagement, and narrative engagement experiences. An initial test of the model indicated a practically and statistically significant outlier (Cook’s $D = 0.25$; Story-consistent beliefs total =10; $\hat{y} = 56.74$; studentized residual = -4.81). Once this outlier was removed, the model was re-run (Table 27). This model explained only a very small portion of the variance ($R^2 = .03$), and the model itself was not statistically significant [$F(3, 197) = 1.73, p = 0.1615$]. The adjusted $R^2$ value, .01, is only slightly smaller than $R^2$, due to the small number of predictors ($k = 3$) and large sample size ($n = 201$). Though the model was not significant, thereby prohibiting the conclusion of an effect’s presence, the effect size was very small ($f^2 = 0.03$). Tested at $\alpha = .05$, none of the regressor variables in the following equation significantly predicted participants’ story-consistent beliefs:

$$\hat{y} \text{ (story-consistent beliefs)} = 48.318 + 0.0775 \text{(Program Engagement)} + 0.1528 \text{(Narrative Engagement Total)} + 0.2491 \text{(Prior Experiences)}.$$  

A post-hoc power analysis was selected and found to be 0.46.

Because the communication scholar expert panel suggested that students’ ongoing engagement with the text through program events and learning experiences could confound the model, the researcher used the ‘test’ statement in the SAS regression procedure to see if the prediction model was relevant for only the narrative engagement related constructs, that is, narrative engagement and prior experiences but not common reading program engagement. Results from this test indicated that this grouping of variables also did not explain participants’ story-consistent beliefs [$F(2, 197) = 2.35, p = .0982$].
Table 27

*Regression Summary Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Partial R²</th>
<th>$\beta$</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p-value</th>
<th>VIF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intercept (Story-Consistent Beliefs)</td>
<td></td>
<td>48.32</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>11.67</td>
<td>&lt;.0001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Engagement</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.4810</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Engagement</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>.0633</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Experiences</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.25</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.3838</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Notes.* $R^2 = .03$ ($p = .1615$). Model not significant at the .05 level.

Analysis of regression assumptions indicated no violations. First, the residuals were analyzed for normality ($SD = 9.27$). This assumption was not violated based on the relatively small values for the skewness (-0.96) and kurtosis (0.92). The scatter plots did not suggest any discernible pattern, indicating the homoscedasticity assumption also was not violated. Finally, the assumption of multi-linearity was not violated because the correlation matrix showed very low correlations (see Table 28, excludes aforementioned outlier) between the three variables; similarly, the variance inflation factors were also low (Table 27).

Table 28

*Correlation Table for Regression Analysis (n = 201)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Narrative Engagement</th>
<th>Prior Experiences</th>
<th>Program Engagement</th>
<th>Story-Consistent Beliefs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative Engagement</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Experiences</td>
<td>0.11 (0.11)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Engagement</td>
<td>0.04 (0.54)</td>
<td>-0.09 (0.18)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story-Consistent Beliefs</td>
<td>0.14 (0.05)</td>
<td>0.07 (0.31)</td>
<td>0.05 (0.48)</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the results of all analyses conducted to answer the research questions for this study. Validity evidence from the two expert panels supported use of the narrative engagement constructs, with minor caveats, and the items developed to measure participants’ story-consistent beliefs. Confirmatory factor analysis indicated the data fit the orthogonal four-factor model explained by one higher order factor found by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009). Reliability measures were described. Treatments for missing data were described. Results of research question analyses included summary statistics, multivariate analyses of variance, and regression for the purpose of describing participants’ engagement with the common reading text and program.
Chapter Five

This chapter presents the conclusions for this research study. A summary of the study is presented. Then, the results are summarized and discussed for each research question. The limitations of the study are reviewed. The chapter concludes with comments on directions for future research and practice in common reading programs.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore first-year students’ engagement in common reading program events and activities, engagement with the text’s narrative, and students’ affirmation of attitudes espoused in the text’s narrative. As discussed in prior chapters, common reading programs are popular first-year initiatives in colleges and universities designed to develop a sense of community among first-year students, introduce students to academic discourse, strengthen learning strategies, and explore global issues presented in the text (Boff et al., 2007; Daughtery & Hayes, 2012; Ferguson, 2006; Ferguson et al., 2014; Goldfine et al., 2011; Randall, 2016; Soria, 2015; Thorne et al., 2014). A committee often selects the book for a year; usually, the text is a work of nonfiction exploring societal issues that faculty of all disciplines can incorporate meaningfully into their courses and discussions (Laufgraben, 2006; Liljequist & Stone, 2009; Randall, 2016). First-year seminar courses specifically use the book as a point of common ground for discussion (Ferguson, 2006). Additionally, common reading programs feature events such as scholarly lectures or panels exploring issues in the text, films and debates, an author visit, essay or creative contests, museum and art exhibits, and even service projects related to the text’s issues (Corbin, 2005; Gracie, 1997; Laufgraben, 2006;
Liljequist & Stone, 2009). Recently, these programs have come under fire for promoting a liberal agenda of faculty who allegedly seek to indoctrinate first-year students into their “progressive” way of thinking (Randall, 2016, p. 7; Thorne, et al., 2014). Furthermore, institutions who selected a controversial text have been at risk for losing state-level funding based on these choices (Roldan, 2014).

Despite these accusations about the programs and the actions taken towards institutions, little is actually known about the nature of students’ engagement with these popular programs (Soria, 2015). Studies suggest that the programs have the ability to support students’ transition to college (Daughtery & Hayes, 2012) and develop students’ multicultural appreciation (Soria, 2015). Researchers exploring the development of community as a result of common reading programs have come to differing conclusions (Ferguson et al., 2014; Goldfine et al., 2011). Though these studies all contribute to a solid foundational knowledge base, the data collected in most common reading studies are largely from programmatic assessments. In this way, these studies explore the achievement of learning outcomes in relation to a simplistic and binary categorization of students’ involvement with the text itself: “Did you read the book? Yes or no” (Daughtery & Hayes, 2012; Ferguson et al., 2014; Soria, 2015; Stone et al., 2004). Reading, however, is a complex process (Schiefele et al., 2012); moreover, students’ responses to the book are equally complex.

Reader response theories have traditionally provided insight to these responses to a text (Sadoski & Paivio, 2007); however, these theories, and the instruments developed to measure such responses, are more suited for fictional works (e.g., Miall & Kuiken, 1995). Because most common reading programs select works of non-fiction (Randall, 2016), a related field of study in the communication discipline known as narrative engagement was selected to explore students’
engagement with a common reading text. Narrative engagement constructs may be applied to understanding readers’ or viewers’ responses to nonfiction stories as well as fiction (Green & Brock, 2000). This body of knowledge suggests that individuals who are more deeply transported into a text, and identify with the characters therein, are more likely to espouse beliefs consistent with those presented in the storyline (Green & Brock, 2000). Furthermore, familiarity with the narrative’s themes is thought to influence the nature of individuals’ narrative engagement experiences (Green, 2004). Specifically, the researcher sought to explore the following research questions:

1. To what extent are first-year students engaged with the narrative presented in the common reading program text, as well as program-related events, courses, and discussions?
2. To what extent do first-year students report prior experiences with the text’s main themes, and to what extent do first-year students affirm beliefs in alignment with those espoused in the common reading program text’s narrative?
3. How well do the first-year students’ narrative engagement behaviors fit the four-factor model of attentional focus, narrative presence, emotional engagement, and narrative understanding?
4. What are the differences in first-year students’ narrative engagement, program engagement and story-consistent beliefs among self-reported prior experiences with the CRP text’s main issue?
5. What are the differences in first-year students’ prior experiences with the text’s themes, narrative engagement, program engagement, story-consistent attitudes among students’ genders and majors?
6. What is the relationship between first-year students’ narrative experiences (narrative engagement, story-consistent beliefs, and prior experiences with the themes) and their program engagement?

To address these questions, the researcher used an exploratory, nonexperimental quantitative design. Data were collected at Texas State University during the 2016-2017 academic year. TXST’s Common Reading Program engages first-year students with a non-fiction book, directly tied to the university’s Common Experience theme each year. The Common Reading Program (CRP) seeks to foster a sense of community among students, faculty and staff, and to encourage students to participate in the intellectual life of the campus. The book this year was *What It Is Like To Go To War* by Karl Marlantes (2011). Prior to surveying first-year students at TXST, the researcher collected validity evidence for the design of this study from two different expert panels. Then, first-year students were surveyed using a web-based tool. Three hundred twenty-five (325) students responded to the survey.

Students were asked to respond to questions about their prior experiences with the text’s theme (war and its impacts on soldiers), and the frequency and nature of their engagement with CRP learning activities and events. Additionally, the survey featured a twelve-item scale developed by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) that measures engagement with the narrative itself on four distinct subscales: narrative understanding, attentional focus, emotional engagement, and narrative presence. Finally, students were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the attitudes toward war presented by the author in the text, as well as their demographic information.

From the survey questions, the researcher totaled a score for each participant for the following variables: narrative engagement, program engagement, story-consistent beliefs, and
prior experiences with the themes. Because a large amount of students’ responses to narrative engagement items were missing, the researcher used item-level multiple imputations to complete the data; narrative engagement total scores were calculated using both existing responses along with imputed results where needed. The researcher then conducted the analysis of the relationships among these variables, as guided by the literature review that suggested differences may exist among genders, majors, and prior experiences. Detailed results were presented in Chapter 4; a summary and discussion of these findings is presented here.

Summary and Discussion of the Findings

Expert panels for validity. The first expert panel consisted of communication scholars specializing in narrative engagement research. The purpose of this panel was to provide content validity and explore their professional opinions on the application of narrative engagement constructs to the study of common reading programs. These professionals generally agreed that though the constructs are applicable, some challenges may arise. Specifically, the nature of the nonfiction texts was of concern to the panelists; they stressed the nonfiction would have to feature a strong narrative, that is a “coherent” storyline perhaps in the form of a “memoir” as opposed to a reporting of facts. This finding aligned with the Mangen and Kuiken (2014) study that found transportation into a nonfiction narrative was possible, but more challenging than with fictional stories. The text used by TXST was, in fact, a memoir (Randall, 2016), yet it was not presented in chronological format. Flashbacks to the writer’s experiences as a Marine lieutenant in the Vietnam War were non-sequentially interwoven with philosophical, historical, spiritual and cultural discussions on war. This pattern may have detracted from the coherency in the storyline. Because some narratives are more effective in their ability to change beliefs as a result
of transportation (Slater et al., 2006), the researcher concluded that the particular structure of this memoir potentially may have influenced the results of this study.

Next, the panelists expressed concern about the potential for narrative engagement experiences to be confounded with programmatic experiences, and ultimately, diminished in clarity over time. The latter concern resulted from the contrast in the typical design of communication studies (i.e., immediate measurement of engagement in laboratory settings) and the months between the engagement experience and measurement used in this study. Additionally, the panelists urged caution in the interpretation of results: without an experimental, pre- and post-test design, the narrative engagement framework could not prove that students’ story-consistent beliefs were a direct result of reading the common book. The descriptive purpose of this study reduced the relevance of this concern. Finally, one participant suggested ideas for the design of future research studies including reconsideration of the timing of data collection (upon arrival to campus, before engaging with the program and in in-class discussions), exploring the role of counterarguing, the interaction with seminars on beliefs (longitudinally), and “their own approach to thinking about controversial issues.”

The second expert panel consisted of faculty and peer mentors affiliated with TXST’s first-year seminar and the TXST Common Reading Program. The purpose of this panel was to achieve a consensus about the relevant story-consistent beliefs posited in the Marlantes (2011) text. Also, this panel was needed to ensure the survey’s language was appropriate for first-year students, many of whom may not speak English as their first language. The panel noted some items of concern for speakers of other languages. Yet, confirmatory factor analysis later suggested these items were not as problematic as the panelist anticipated. Additionally, the panel suggested that the survey “did a good job of covering the entire” program and experience, “both
inside and outside the classroom.” They suggested improvement of wording on assessment-only items and the prior experiences items. Because the prior experiences items were directly modeled after those used by Green (2004) in her study of prior experiences, the researcher elected to disregard those suggestions. Finally, the panel suggested that the program engagement item that asked students to report the frequency with which they engaged in each program activity was too long. Since the program requested certain large-scale, main events to be included specifically, the researcher did not act upon this particular recommendation from the expert panel.

Collectively, the results from these two panels suggested that the constructs of narrative engagement as presented and worded in the survey are appropriate for exploring first-year students’ engagement with common reading programs based on narrative-driven nonfiction books. However, the two panels suggested contradictory guidance as to the timing of data collection. The communication scholars urged surveying students immediately upon arriving on campus, whereas the TXST faculty and peer mentors believed one semester provided students’ exposure to the level of vocabulary needed to respond accurately to the Narrative Engagement Scale items (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). More studies utilizing narrative engagement constructs for common reading programs, along with cognitive interviewing (DeVellis, 2012) on the Narrative Engagement Scale items, could build a consensus between these two groups.

**Research question 1.** This question asked: To what extent are first-year students engaged with the narrative presented in the common reading program text, as well as program-related events, courses, and discussions? On the 12-item Narrative Engagement Scale questions, students were asked to respond on a Likert-type seven-point scale. For each three-item subscale, the total possible score ranged between three and 21; for the total scale score, the possible range
was between 12 and 84. Overall, first-year students reported moderate engagement with the Marlantes (2011) narrative ($M = 48.49, SD = 7.04$).

Specifically, participants reacted more strongly to the narrative understanding ($M = 14.22, SD = 2.44$) and attentional focus ($M = 10.53, SD = 2.99$) subscales than the emotional engagement ($M = 13.88, SD = 2.70$) and narrative presence ($M = 10.95, SD = 2.31$) subscales of the Narrative Engagement Scale (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). The narrative understanding and attentional focus factors must be interpreted separately from the emotional engagement and narrative presence factors because these items were reverse coded. Consequently, high scores on narrative understanding items like “I had a hard time understanding” indicated strong disagreement, and thus, ease of understanding or more accurately, “lack of difficulty in comprehending” (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009, p. 341). The narrative understanding subscale mean ($M = 14.22$) thus suggested some lack of problems in understanding, albeit, not a complete absence of problems. In this way, students understood the text and encountered only minimal challenges. Similarly, a high score on attentional focus items indicated strong disagreement with items like “I found my mind wandering,” and thus, the absence of distractions. Theoretically, Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) designed items in a reversed fashion because individuals only become aware when distractions are present. Thus, the relatively low mean score on attentional focus factor ($M = 10.53$) indicated that students were aware of distractions while reading the text. The emotional engagement ($M = 13.88$) and narrative presence ($M = 10.95$) means were closer to the ‘neutral’ response on the seven-point scale. Collectively, these results suggested students were moderately engaged with the narrative, as indicated by the mean total narrative engagement score ($M = 48.89$).
The moderate nature of students’ narrative engagement with the common reading text may be reflective of the loss of “subtleties” of the experience over the months between reading and responding to the survey, as expressed by the expert panel. Conversely, one communication scholar also expressed confidence that the scale was more so designed to detect “failures in engagement;” the scholar elaborated that “it [the scale] will tell you if readers found the story boring, hard to understand, or simply did not find it [the narrative] compelling.” In this way, students’ moderate engagement with the text may be representative of a programmatic success. Also, the scale was able to detect the greater presence of distractions and the more pronounced lack of comprehension challenges than emotional engagement. Yet, the survey questions examined for this study excluded the experience of community, a key programmatic learning outcome, as well as the portion of the text that students reported reading. Furthermore, students’ participation in the survey was voluntary, and therefore, may exclude first-years at TXST who had less positive experiences with the text. As such, a programmatic success, or failure, may not be concluded with certainty from this study.

Additionally, the moderate engagement with the text could have resulted from several properties of the text. First, Burgess and Jones (2010) noted that the nonfiction genre was not preferred by college students for their leisure reading; moreover, though Randall (2016) discouraged the practice, nonfiction texts are the most popular selections for common readings programs. Second, some texts have been found to be more narratively engaging and persuasive than others (Green & Brock, 2000; Slater et al., 2006). The frequent, yet not chronological, flashbacks found in Marlantes’ (2011) text were interwoven with his researched discussion of the issues. Therefore, the storyline in this text may not have been “coherent” enough as the communication scholars believed was beneficial for this study. Thus, both of these issues—time
between measurement and reading, and a nonfiction narrative characterized by flashbacks and frequent philosophical discussions—plausibly precluded a stronger response to the common reading narrative.

Despite students’ moderate engagement with the narrative, the data suggested that students largely understood the text. This finding aligned with the Manarin et al. (2015) results suggesting college students can read and comprehend nonfiction works. True comprehension of the text is a necessary predicate to the more complex goals of reading for social engagement (Manarin et al., 2015), such as connecting the text to the outside world. Because the designs of common reading programs exemplify reading for social engagement, the results suggested that students applied this foundational skill to the Marlantes (2011) text. Consequently, students were likely sufficiently prepared for the curricular exercises faculty could employ to help students achieve the higher-level goals of reading for social engagement.

The program engagement students reported was less clear. The mean engagement level \( (M = 6.61) \) was less than the standard deviation \( (SD = 7.05) \). These results suggested very strong variability, and therefore, must be interpreted with extra caution. The strength of the variability and the leptokurtic distribution may have resulted from the weighting of the writing assignments; furthermore, the mode of the data collected was zero. Yet, this data point also surprised the researcher because in-class experiences would not have been optional for students, even though many events and lectures were optional. These in-class experiences were obtained from prior syllabi of first-year seminar courses at TXST in which most students enroll and included reading quizzes, facilitated discussions or activities, creative projects, and group presentations. Even though the TXST expert panel suggested this question was too long, most students answered the question \( (n = 258) \). Further analysis is needed to understand the nature of this variable and to
consider other possible measurement strategies for students’ engagement with common reading program activities.

**Research question 2.** The second research question asked: To what extent do first-year students report prior experiences with the text’s main themes, and to what extent do first-year students affirm beliefs in alignment with those espoused in the common reading program text’s narrative? First-year students reported “minor” familiarity, prior experiences with the text’s themes of military service, and relationships to those who served, were injured, or died in the service of their country ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 2.40$). Responses were weighted according to the potential impact of that experience. Using a three-item parcel, the possible total ranged from zero to 13. In fact, when grouped for analyses in other research questions, the majority of students fell into the “minor” ($n = 168$) or “average” ($n = 34$) categories but none into “substantial.” Because the vast majority of students reported an age of 18, they could not have personally served in the military themselves prior to enrolling at TXST; in this way, such minimal experiences with the text’s theme were expected. Even students who reported participation in ROTC during their first semester of college would not yet have served on a military base. In this way, these prior experiences with the text’s theme were thus vicarious experiences. The more distant emotional connection to vicarious experiences may have resulted in qualitatively different reflective learning than those who had experienced a topic personally. Consequently, this result contrasted with Green’s (2004) study that incorporated a theme with which participants may have had direct, instead of vicarious, personal experience, and thus introduced greater variability in the variable: a man coming out to his fraternity brothers as gay.

In general, students espoused beliefs in alignment with those presented in the common reading text ($M = 57.19$, $SD = 9.73$). Items included beliefs positioned by the author as
appropriate, such as “Our military training programs should prepare our service personnel spiritually, as well as physically, for the experiences they may face” and “As a society, we should talk about war, the experiences our service personnel have in war, and the consequences of those experiences and war itself.” Students were asked to respond to ten items on a seven-point scale ($\alpha = .90$). Thus, the mean ($M = 57.19$) equated to a response between “somewhat agree” and “agree.” The purpose of this study was descriptive; thus, the story-consistent beliefs may not be interpreted as a result of students’ engagement with the narrative, the common reading program, or their prior experiences with the text.

**Research question 3.** This third question asked the following: How well do the first-year students’ narrative engagement behaviors fit the four-factor model of attentional focus, narrative presence, emotional engagement, and narrative understanding? The purpose of this research question was to contribute to the narrative engagement literature base by a study conducted in a real-world, nonexperimental design. The four-factor model explored in this question was developed by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009), suggesting that these four orthogonal factors were explained by the higher order factor of narrative engagement. The first of these four factors, “attentional focus,” described viewers’ lack of “distractions” from the program (p. 341). The next factor is related to transportation, or “narrative presence,” and explains the extent to which a viewer enters “the story world” created by the narrative (p. 331). Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) called the third factor “emotional engagement,” explaining both viewers’ sympathy and empathy toward characters. This factor aligns with Cohen’s (2001) dimension about experiencing feelings, but does not address the cognitive factor of Cohen’s perspective-taking. This cognitive component is explained by Busselle and Bilandzic’s (2009) final factor, “narrative
understanding,” which checks comprehension of the storyline, viewers’ perceptions of how realistic the storyline is, and perspective-taking.

These data fit the model at a reasonably acceptable level, \((SRMR = .095, \text{RMSEA} = .049, CFI = .95)\), even though the Chi-squared test of fit was statistically significant \([\chi^2 (50) = 80.16, p < .0001]\). This test was conducted with 40 complete and 208 incomplete observations. Loadings ranged from .53 to .99, thus meeting what Stevens (2009) suggested as a minimum of .4. Communalities ranged from .28 to .99. Cronbach’s alpha for subscales ranged from .63 to .80, and the overall scale alpha was “respectable” at .76 (DeVellis, 2012, p. 109). Because the data fit the model appropriately, the model provided evidence of internal structural validity (Standards, 2014), and therefore, supported total narrative engagement scores as a variable for analysis in other research questions. Additionally, these results suggested the instrument may be suitable for use in nonexperimental conditions, so long as the psychometric properties are reexamined with each use (Thompson & Vacha-Haase, 2000).

Finally, these results aligned with what Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) found during their instrument development process. Their study continued exploration of narrative engagement by examining how subscales related with theorized outcome constructs, including enjoyment and story-consistent beliefs. They found that emotional engagement was more likely to be correlated with story-consistent beliefs than narrative understanding. Though the relationships between the subscales and the students’ story-consistent beliefs could be explored in a similar fashion to provide further validity evidence, such analysis was outside the scope of this project.

**Research question 4.** This question explored the following: What are the differences in first-year students’ narrative engagement, program engagement and story-consistent beliefs among self-reported prior experiences with the CRP text’s main issue? This research question
was selected to explore whether the hypothesized relationships among the narrative engagement constructs existed in the nonexperimental context of a common reading program based on a nonfiction text. In the extant literature, prior experiences with the themes in a text are thought to influence the extent of narrative engagement experienced by the reader (Cohen et al., 2015; Chung & Slater, 2013; Green, 2004). Additionally, readers who are more engaged with the narrative are thought to be more likely to espouse story-consistent beliefs (Chung & Slater, 2013; Cohen et al. 2015; Green & Brock, 2000). Because the curricular and co-curricular experiences composing the program engagement variable continually engaged students with the themes and issues presented in the text (Ferguson et al., 2014; Laufgraben, 2006), program engagement was viewed as an extension of the narrative engagement experience for analysis in the final three research questions.

Data analyzed for this research question suggested that there were differences in the amount of narrative engagement and program engagement between groups of students with differing levels of prior experiences with the common reading text’s theme. An omnibus MANOVA test found statistically significant differences between the prior experiences groups on the set of narrative and program engagement outcome variables, with a small effect size [Wilks’ λ = .95; $F(3, 198)= 3.36, p = .0200, f^2= .0509$]. The follow-up tests were not able to identify the source of any statistically significant differences at the adjusted alpha level due to a loss of power, yet these tests were able to provide some insight. The narrative engagement follow-up test [$F(1, 200) = 5.42, p = .0209$] suggested that participants in the “average” prior experiences group ($M = 52.05, SD = 10.20$) indicated higher, though not significantly, levels of narrative engagement than the “minor” prior experiences group ($M = 48.54, SD = 7.53$).

Similarly, the program engagement follow-up test [$F(1, 200) = 4.07, p = .0449$] suggested that
participants in the “average” prior experiences group reported more, again non-significant, program engagement \((M = 4.76, SD = 3.57)\) than the “minor” prior experiences group \((M = 7.05, SD = 6.39)\). Finally, the follow-up univariate test for story-consistent beliefs did not show a significant difference \([F(1, 200) = 0.06, p = .8117]\) between the “minor” and “average” groups, respectively \((M = 56.99, SD = 9.32; M = 57.34, SD = 12.77)\).

Though the design of this study precluded suggesting that these prior experiences caused the increased extent of narrative and, possibly, program engagement, the finding that there was a relationship is still meaningful. First, the relationships between individuals’ prior and narrative experiences have been found in other studies to be complex, with differing impacts on narrative engagement and the affirmation of story-consistent beliefs. These complexities are particularly present in individuals’ identification with the characters in a narrative. While Green (2004) found that prior experiences increased the extent of participants’ narrative engagement, the Dal Cin et al. (2004) results did not replicate her findings. Slater et al. (2006) found contradictory results between two different narratives. Further complicating the relationship between prior experiences and narrative engagement, both Chung and Slater (2013) and Cohen et al. (2015) found that prior experiences, especially strength of attitudes, potentially impeded individuals’ narrative engagement. In the Chung and Slater (2013) study, perspective-taking specifically was diminished in individuals who reported less favorable attitudes toward the featured, yet stigmatized, character in a narrative.

The communication discipline will continue to disentangle the nature of individuals’ prior experiences and pre-existing attitudes and their effects on narrative engagement. However, the mere presence of some relationship among these constructs in the context of a common reading program is important. First-time-in-college students matriculate with vastly different
backgrounds from one another; these differences are one of the main reasons for the existence of common reading programs, that is, to provide students a common experience through which they can connect (Ferguson, 2006; Ferguson et al., 2014; Laufgraben, 2006). In other words, the common reading program is in many ways designed to bridge the gaps among first-year students’ prior experiences. Yet, these data suggested that those prior experiences impacted how students engaged with the common book, and possibly the program events and related curricular assignments. In this way, students’ prior experiences have the potential to impact the achievement of community development outcomes for a program. Though this first-year student survey inquired about students’ experiences of communities as a result of the TXST Common Reading Program, analysis of these data was outside scope of this study; therefore, the actual impact of prior experiences on community experiences is unknown.

**Research question 5.** This research question explored two factors, gender and intended major, that emerged in the literature review as potentially influential to college student reading behaviors: What are the differences in first-year students’ prior experiences with the text’s themes, narrative engagement, program engagement, story-consistent attitudes among students’ genders and majors? As with the prior research question, program engagement was viewed as a continuation of the narrative engagement experience.

To conduct this analysis, the researcher grouped the participants’ self-reported gender identities and majors into meaningful groups for two separate MANOVAs. For the first MANOVA, the major groups were patterned after Applegate et al. (2014); remaining TXST majors not included in the Applegate study were then grouped with like categories. This process yielded six groups: business; health sciences; arts and humanities; interdisciplinary; math, science, engineering, and agricultural engineering; and social sciences. An omnibus MANOVA
test found no statistically significant differences among the major groups on the set of narrative and program engagement outcome variables, [Wilks’ λ = .94; F(20, 637.74) = 0.64, p = .8828, $f^2 = .02$].

Narrative engagement has not been previously studied explicitly as a function of students’ intended major, yet existing studies provided some guidance to the interpretation of this finding. First, Applegate et al. (2014), Jeffries and Atkin (1996), and Chen (2007) all found differences among majors in the frequency and amount with which students read. The Applegate et al. (2014) study extended their exploration, categorizing students into groups by the amount they read, both voluntarily and for class assignments: “unwilling,” “unenthusiastic,” “enthusiastic,” and “avid” (p. 192-6). Those readers classified as either enthusiastic or avid were more likely to report identification with characters, one component of overall narrative engagement. Furthermore, these readers in the Applegate study were also more likely to report using transaction beliefs, which have been found to elicit emotional engagement, influence students’ interpretation of a text, and support connection of the text to external concepts and experiences (Mason, Scirica, & Salvi, 2006; Schraw & Bruning, 1996). These consequences of using transaction beliefs are all critical components of reading for social engagement (Manarin et al., 2015). In this way, enthusiastic readers using transaction beliefs could plausibly experience more narrative engagement. Because Applegate et al. (2014) found differences in the number of enthusiastic or avid readers among majors, the researcher expected to find differences in narrative engagement among majors for this study.

Similarly, the researcher expected to find a difference in program engagement among majors, based on the Ferguson et al. (2014) findings that students in majors where the faculty had adopted the common reading text were more likely to have read the selected text. The lack of
difference between majors may have resulted from an equitable campus-wide implementation of the common reading program at TXST. Alternatively, the leptokurtic program engagement variable with a mode of zero could have influenced this result. Though the lack of differences among majors on the set of narrative and program outcome variables was unexpected, conducting similar analyses using the first survey question instead could have provided better insight. Specifically, this survey question, included for TXST assessment purposes, asked about the percentage of text read by students, but was outside the planned analyses for the present study. Based on the aforementioned literature about the frequency and amount with which students read according to major, analysis of this question as an outcome variable among differences in majors may have produced different results.

The analysis of differences among gender identities on the set of outcome variables provided interesting results. To give voice to students who reported complex gender identities, the researcher created a grouping for statistical purposes. The researcher named this grouping non-binary, representing students identifying as transgender, self-defined, queer, other, or man and woman. Consequently, the gender groupings included four categories: non-binary, women, men, and those who preferred not to respond. An omnibus MANOVA test found statistically significant differences among the gender groups on the set of narrative and program engagement outcome variables with a small effect size, \[\text{Wilks’ } \lambda = .89; F(12, 516.21) = 1.94, p = .0274, f^2 = .05\].

The follow-up univariate test for narrative engagement revealed a significant difference only for story-consistent beliefs among gender groups at the adjusted alpha level \[F(3, 198) = 4.44, p = .0048\). Though a loss of power resulted in no statistically significant gender group pairings on the Tukey post-hoc tests of Honestly Significant Difference, group means and
standard deviations provided insight. Participants who identified as women \((M = 58.37, SD = 8.55)\) or non-binary \((M = 56.75, SD = 7.27)\) had stronger story-consistent beliefs than participants who identified as men \((M = 53.89, SD = 12.30)\) or those who preferred not to answer \((M = 45.25, SD = 19.52)\). None of the other univariate follow-up tests suggested any significant differences (program engagement: \(F(3, 198) = 1.22, p = .3044\); narrative engagement \(F(3, 198) = 1.19, p = .3155\), prior experiences \(F(3, 198) = .71, p = .5462\)).

The researcher expected to identify gender differences on the program engagement variable based on the presence of differences found in one common reading study (Goldfine et al., 2011) and one study of a book-club type program for sophomore students (Gauder et al., 2007). Using the aforementioned connection between enjoyment as an outcome of narrative engagement (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009), the very gendered patterns found in college students’ pleasure reading behaviors (Burak, 2004; Burgess & Jones, 2010) led the researcher also to expect a difference of narrative engagement according to gender. Though the data did not support this expectation, Burak (2004) found no gender differences in students’ intentions during an academic semester; thus, the results of this study plausibly are reflective of the mix of students who read the text during the summer and those who read during the semester.

The differences among gender groupings on the story-consistent beliefs outcomes, however, are meaningful. The researcher identified two plausible explanations for this result; both center the intersection of gender issues within the military. In narrative engagement literature, prior experiences and attitudes about the themes are thought to influence not only narrative engagement experiences, but also story-consistent beliefs (Green, 2004; Green & Brock, 2000; Slater et al., 2006). Though the relationship between prior experiences and story-consistent beliefs was not found in this study, the items measuring prior experiences focused
solely on students’ experiences and familiarity with the military to maintain consistency with Green’s (2004) study. No measure was taken to determine students’ pre-existing attitudes about the need for war, soldier preparation and care, or the military. In this way, gender identities as analyzed in this research question may have served as a proxy for the attitudinal component of the prior experiences relationship with story-consistent beliefs. However, narrative engagement literature suggests that these changes in story-consistent beliefs occur by means of increased transportation and identification, that is, intense narrative engagement. Consequently, if the gender differences found here resulted from a sort of prior experience position, the narrative engagement outcome variable likely should also have revealed gender differences. Because the researcher found no gender differences in narrative engagement, gender was likely not operating as an extension of prior experiences in this case.

Likely, the data simply reflected a gendered response to the beliefs Marlantes (2011) espoused in the text, which were also gendered. Furthermore, the ways in which gender identities intersect with the military, and military issues, are ever-present issues. For instance, only recently have women been permitted in 100 percent of combat roles (Chappell, 2015), but at least one recent study has suggested all-male Marine units outperformed units including women (Peralta, 2015). Moreover, the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy requiring service members to conceal complexities of their gender and sexual identities was not repealed until 2011 under President Obama’s leadership (Bumiller, 2011). Within the context of these complexities, masculine norms, such as “risk taking,” “violence,” a “desire to win,” “emotional control,” “self-reliance,” and ultimately, avoidance of seeking help for mental health (Wong, Wang, Miller, & Ho, 2016) permeated Marlantes’ (2011) depiction of his own Vietnam War experiences. Such norms also informed his expressions of masculinity in battle, like “the warrior’s place in
society,” and returning warriors’ need to be healed and cared for by women (Samet, 2011, para. 6). Yet, his analytical discussion of the political, cultural, historical, and spiritual aspects of war led him to conclusions contrastingly sharply with those masculinity-tinged recollections; it was these conclusions that he implored readers to adopt as their own beliefs (Samet, 2011). He urged a cautious, solemn, and intentional approach to decisions to enter war, stressing the need to discuss and support the psychological and spiritual toll of war on its soldiers (Samet, 2011). These ideals were represented in the items developed by the researcher to measure story-consistent beliefs. As previously discussed, these items were validated by the TXST Common Reading Program Director, the TXST expert panel, and in alignment with Samet’s (2011) review of Marlantes’ memoir. In this way, it is not surprising that women and those individuals with a non-binary identity reported stronger agreement with the story-consistent beliefs items that challenge norms of masculinity in war.

**Research question 6.** This research question explored the possibility of describing story-consistent beliefs as a function of students’ narrative engagement, program engagement, and prior experiences with the themes: What is the relationship between first-year students’ narrative experiences (narrative engagement, story-consistent beliefs, and prior experiences with the themes) and their program engagement? The analysis conducted for this research question distinguished the story-consistent beliefs variable from the program and narrative engagement variables, in that story-consistent beliefs were viewed as the sole outcome variable. The researcher selected this model based on the relevant scholarly literature that positions story-consistent beliefs as a result of narrative engagement (Chung & Slater, 2013; Cohen et al., 2015; Green & Brock, 2000). As with prior analyses, program engagement was viewed as a
continuation of narrative engagement. Both program engagement and prior experiences, as a predictor of narrative engagement, remained predictor variables.

This model explained only a very small portion of the variance ($R^2 = .03$), and the model itself was not statistically significant [$F(3, 197) = 1.73, p = 0.1615$]. The adjusted $R^2$ value, .01, is only slightly smaller than $R^2$, due to the small number of predictors ($k = 3$) and large sample size ($n = 201$). Though the model was not significant, prohibiting the conclusion of an effect’s presence, the effect size was very small ($f^2 = 0.03$). Tested at $\alpha = .05$, none of the regressor variables in the following equation significantly predicted participants’ story-consistent beliefs:

$$\hat{y} \text{ (story-consistent beliefs)} = 48.318 + 0.0775 \text{ (Program Engagement)} + 0.1528 \text{ (Narrative Engagement Total)} + 0.2491 \text{ (Prior Experiences)}.$$ 

Results from this test indicate that this grouping of variables also did not explain participants’ story-consistent beliefs [$F(2, 197) = 2.35, p = .0982$].

Though this study was not designed to show causation of story-consistent beliefs, these results indicated that story-consistent beliefs could not even be described as function of the predictor variables. That is, there was no relationship between what students believed and the experiences they had with the common reading book and learning activities. The Narrative Engagement Scale itself has previously correlated strongly with story-consistent beliefs (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009). This same relationship between variables has also been found both in narratives seeking to reduce prejudice against a particular group (Chung & Slater, 2013), and those endorsing a specific position on a public issue (Cohen et al., 2015; Slater et al., 2006). Consequently, the result of this analysis was unexpected.

This result may have occurred for many reasons. First, Busselle and Bilandzic (2009) found that the emotional engagement subscale was more predictive of story-consistent beliefs
than the narrative understanding subscale. In the present study, students reported a near-neutral response of emotional engagement and stronger narrative understanding; based on these responses, the lack of relationship among the variables could have been expected. Another plausible explanation is that different narratives have varying abilities to induce a change toward the story’s beliefs (Green & Brock, 2000; Slater et al., 2006). As aforementioned, the communication scholar expert panel emphasized the need for the narrative to be “coherent”; the philosophical, non-chronological nature of Marlantes’ (2011) memoir may have mitigated the strength of students’ narrative engagement and, therefore, the expression of story-consistent beliefs.

Counterarguing, or cognitively finding fault with the positions implied as desirable by the story (Green & Brock, 2000), may have also contributed to the lack of a relationship between students’ narrative and program engagement and their story-consistent beliefs. In the communication literature, counterarguing with the story is theoretically reduced or even “eliminated” entirely as a result of intense narrative engagement (Slater et al., 2006, p. 236). Recent studies have called this perspective on the role of counterarguments into question (Johnson, 2011; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010). In the context of a common reading program, such suspension of counterarguing would be undesirable because “critical scrutiny of a message is incompatible with the suspension of disbelief associated with processing a narrative if engagement occurs” (Slater et al., 2006, p. 236). This “critical scrutiny” is akin to critical thinking, a foundational goal and process of higher education (Lucas, 2006).

Yet, the curricular and co-curricular elements of the common reading program were designed to provide students with practice reflecting on consequences of possible solutions, as well as learning to explore and reconcile contradictory perspectives (Kitchener & King, 1990).
These practice opportunities should have fostered development and “cognitive complexity” (Keeling, 2004, p. 21); in narrative engagement terms, these practice opportunities would have essentially re-introduced any counterarguments that students may have suspended during their reading experience due to transportation and identification. Because cognitive complexity and cognitive development theories refer to “changes in the way people think but not what they think” (Evans et al., 1998, p. 11), changes in story-consistent beliefs should not be expected if the program-related developmental tasks functioned as designed. Though this explanation for the lack of a relationship between story-consistent beliefs and narrative and program engagement would be most desirable from a student development perspective, the presence of and roles played by counterarguments were outside the scope of this study.

Discussion

In sum, the results of this study suggested the following: first-year students were moderately engaged with but understood the common reading program text; students had very few prior experiences with the text’s themes, but asserted some agreement with the text’s story-consistent beliefs; students who did have prior experiences with the theme were more engaged with the narrative and possibly the program than those with fewer prior experiences; and women and students identifying as non-binary were more likely to agree with the story-consistent beliefs, but there were no differences in engagement and beliefs among majors. Finally, students’ story-consistent beliefs cannot be described as a function of their engagement with the narrative, common reading program activities and prior experiences. This study thus described a common reading program based on a book that students understood, but that did not elicit a strong emotional response. In this way, students engaged intellectually with the text’s themes, but this engagement with the narrative and program activities was not related to their beliefs.
about war- and military-related topics. More research is needed to understand the mechanisms by which and nuances of how students engage with common reading program narratives. However, these initial results suggest Randall’s (2016) accusations that common reading programs are a tool for indoctrinating first-year students into a liberal agenda are presently unwarranted. Similarly, actions taken against institutions, such as loss of state-level funding described by Roldan (2014), based on their selection of controversial books are also questionable.

**Limitations**

This study should not be generalized to institutions of a different type, or with common reading program structures, vastly different from that at the site of this study. Similarly, the results should not be generalized to common reading books exploring themes and issues different from the common text featured in this study. Finally, the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study was not intended to show causation.

The main delimitation of this study was its focus on the nature, as opposed to the causes, of students’ engagement with the common reading text and program. The study attempted to account for individuals’ prior experiences and two relevant demographic factors (gender, major), yet these factors did not explain why students chose to participate or interact with the text in certain ways. Furthermore, the saliency of students’ various identities or the intersectionality of those identities was not explored. Finally, this study neither identified counterarguments created in response to the common reading text, nor explored their role in the development of students’ story-consistent beliefs.
Directions for Future Research

The results of this study prompt the suggestions for future research studies. The design of future research studies on the topic of narrative engagement in common reading programs should employ a pre- and post-test design for the measurement of story-consistent beliefs. Additionally, these pre-post tests of story-consistent beliefs should be examined for differences in gender identities and other dimensions of identity that may intersect with the text’s themes, as issues of war and the military are not the only topics likely to be complexly gendered. Furthermore, future research designs should consider measuring narrative engagement at a period closer to students’ reading experiences. When combined, these suggestions would result in a phased study: students are first pre-tested on story-consistent beliefs likely during orientation, before the common book is assigned; narrative engagement is then measured upon matriculation, perhaps during the first week of classes; post-test story-consistent beliefs and program engagement are measured at the end of the first semester or first-year. Alternatively, program engagement could be measured real-time in a time-diary style (Mokhtari et al., 2009), so that students accurately remember the number of in-class assignments and discussions in which they participated. One disadvantage to a study designed in this fashion is the concern of the TXST CRP expert panel that first-year students may be uncomfortable with the vocabulary and syntax on certain Narrative Engagement Scale (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009) items without at least one college semester completed. Therefore, future studies should also include cognitive interviews (DeVellis, 2012) or other continued measurement work to determine the appropriateness of using this instrument with new first-year students.

Regardless of the phasing used for future studies, some adjustments to data collection and analysis should be made. First, pop-up reminders urging students to complete all questions
should be set at the initiation of the study. Additionally, feedback from the faculty expert panel should be sought earlier in the process to allow ample time for faculty responses, discussion among program administrators if appropriate, and subsequent survey adjustments. Specific and explicit opportunities to suggest where, if at all, the items failed to identify story-consistent beliefs should be provided. During analysis, researchers should not weight the writing assignments on the program engagement variable.

Qualitative designs should also be considered for studies inquiring into how students engage with common reading texts. Such studies will allow researchers to give voice to the complexities of students’ experiences with common reading programs. Specifically, qualitative designs could explore the ways in which students’ psycho-social identities, including issues of identity saliency and intersectionality, influenced or related to their programmatic experiences. Students’ motivation for engaging with the common reading text and the program itself may also be illuminated through qualitative methods. Furthermore, qualitative methods may be the best way to explore the presence and nature of students’ counterarguments with the text. Scholars should also inquire into how students think about controversial issues, including those presented in a common reading text, and how their thought processes evolve over the course of the common reading program experience.

The results of this study also suggested new topics for quantitative studies inquiring into the nature of students’ engagement in common reading programs and with the common texts. The students’ agreement with story-consistent beliefs should be examined for common reading texts featuring other subjects and themes; similarly, students’ narrative engagement with other nonfiction works, especially those with more “coherent” narratives, should be considered. Next, researchers should continue to explore how students’ prior experiences with and attitudes about
text themes relate to their engagement in the common reading program, the portion of text read, and their experience of community. These explorations should center participants’ identities, including the intersectionality of identities, and explore connections between students’ racial and ethnic identities on the set of outcome variables.

Additional research questions may be formed by the extant literature on narrative engagement. First, future studies can explore the presence of the theorized correlations between the emotional engagement and narrative understanding subscales of Buselle and Bilandzic’s (2009) Narrative Engagement Scale with story-consistent beliefs in a non-experimental context, such as the present study. Furthermore, researchers should explore the presence of any differences in the portion of text read by students among major and gender groups. As instructors’ reading influenced the students’ passion for reading (Applegate et al., 2014), the relationship between faculty narrative engagement for the common book as related to that of their students could be explored.

Finally, the present study, with the aforementioned modifications, should be replicated in other institutional and common reading program types. Similarly, the study should be replicated with a program using a text that explores differences in identity and cultural issues, as opposed to the present study’s text that explored a global issue. The purpose of this study would be to explore a text’s ability to reduce prejudice (Chung & Slater, 2013) as a story-consistent belief in a non-experimental context.

**Implications for Practitioners**

Common reading program administrators should be aware of students’ prior experiences with the text’s themes; their multiple identities may impact the nature of their engagement with the common book itself and related program activities. Though text selection is already a
challenging task for most common reading committees, and no text will be equally meaningful to every new student, committees should at least consider these complex intersections in the context of the incoming class’s characteristics. Furthermore, programs may alert their student affairs professionals, academic advisors, and faculty to the possibility of such varied responses to the text according to individual experiences and identities. Faculty development sessions or resources exploring how to engage individual students with the narrative, particularly students who are reluctant to engage, may be beneficial.

Program administrators may also consider implementing a more nuanced approach to assessment of the reading experience than the binary categorizations currently in use. Over time, a richer understanding of students’ emotional engagement, attentional focus, narrative understanding, and narrative presence (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009) may provide insight into the types of common book texts that elicit the strongest engagement from students. As with future research studies, however, these assessments should be timed strategically and phased. Furthermore, program administrators seeking to enhance their assessment should seek to rely on cross-campus partnerships to leverage existing data sources, particularly those that are qualitative or reflective in nature. Such data sources, like essays written about the common book in English courses, may describe the presence of any counter arguments, as well as how students interacted with the text and thought about the issues raised therein.

Chapter Summary

Common reading programs are popular first-year initiatives designed to introduce students to scholarly discourse about complex issues, build community, enhance multicultural appreciation, and strengthen students’ reading and learning strategies. This study explored the first-year students’ engagement in common reading program events and activities, engagement
with the text’s narrative, and students’ affirmation of attitudes espoused in the text’s narrative.

Prior studies of common reading programs simplified students’ reading of the common reading text into two categories (yes, no). This study then used the narrative engagement framework from the communication discipline to describe the nature of students’ involvement with the text itself. A total of 325 first-year students enrolled at Texas State University responded to a web-based survey of about their experiences with the 2016-2017 Common Reading Program book, Karl Marlantes’ *What It Is Like To Go To War* (2011).

The results indicated that students were moderately engaged with the narrative itself, and large variability existed among students’ engagement with the common reading program. In contrast, there was little variability in students’ prior experiences with the military and war; in fact, most students had only minor prior experiences. Students generally agreed with the beliefs about war espoused by the text. An orthogonal four-factor model, originally developed by Busselle and Bilandzic (2009), fit the data in this study and were explained by the higher order factor of narrative engagement. The multivariate analyses conducted for this study indicated the presence of differences between students’ prior experiences with the themes on the program engagement and narrative engagement variables, but not in the affirmation of story-consistent beliefs. No differences existed among students’ intended majors on narrative engagement, program engagement, or story-consistent beliefs. The analyses identified differences among gender identities on story-consistent beliefs, but not program engagement or narrative engagement. This result likely reflected the complex relationship between gender identities and the book’s theme of war and the military. Finally, multiple regression found no relationship between students’ affirmation of story-consistent beliefs and their program and narrative experiences. These results suggest that practitioners should be sensitive to the complexities of
how students’ prior experiences and attitudes may influence their engagement with the selected text and the program. Because students’ story-consistent beliefs could not be described as a function of their narrative and program engagement, this study provided no support for Randall’s (2016) assertion that common reading programs blindly indoctrinate students into a certain political agenda.
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Appendix A: First-Year Student Survey

Program Engagement

For questions #1-4, “read” means to read with careful attention to detail, and perhaps making notes, identifying key passages, and thinking about the main ideas, characters, or issues.

1. What percentage best represents the amount of the Common Reading book that you read, using the above definition?
   
   A) Less than a quarter of the book  
   B) More than a quarter, but less than half of the book  
   C) More than half, but less than three-quarters of the book  
   D) More than three-quarters of the book to all of it!

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements, based on your response to question 1.

2. When I first received my Common Reading book, I intentionally decided the percentage of the book I would read, using the above definition.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

3. I skimmed, scanned or speed-read the portions of the book I did not fully “read,” using the above definition.

   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

4. What percentage best represents the portion of the common reading program book that you listened to using Audible (or a similar app)?

   A) Less than a quarter of the book  
   B) More than a quarter, but less than half of the book  
   C) More than half, but less than three-quarters of the book  
   D) More than three-quarters of the book to all of it!

Next, consider “discussions” about the common reading program to mean formal or informal conversations, of any length or duration, in which the common reading program book was a topic.
5. (Screening) I voluntarily had discussions with my friends outside of class or study groups about the Common Reading book.
   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

If you answered strongly disagree or disagree to question #5, please skip to question #9.

If you answered agree or strongly agree to question #5, please respond to questions #6-8, using the same definition of discussion.

6. The topic of my Common Reading-related discussions with my friends was most often related to its main ideas (e.g., complexities of war), the characters, and/or what and how the book made me think and feel.
   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

7. The topic of my common reading program-related discussions with my friends was usually about the process of reading it or the requirement to read it, rather than the ideas in the book.
   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

8. My conversations with friends about the book and its ideas helped me feel connected to other first-year students and the university community.
   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

9. (screening) I voluntarily had discussions with a faculty member, teaching assistant (TA), or other university staff member about the book’s main ideas (e.g., complexities of war), the characters, and/or what and how the book made me think and feel.
   Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

If you answered strongly disagree or disagree to question #9, please skip to question #11.

If you answered agree or strongly agree to question #9, please respond to this question, using the same definition of discussion.

10. My conversations university faculty and staff about the book and its ideas helped me feel connected to the university community.
    Strongly Disagree  Disagree  Agree  Strongly Agree

11. Please check all the items representing something you did (participated in, attended, created or accessed in some way) relating to the book, or the Common Experience, including the two events you attended as required for your University Seminar class:
    ● Twitter or other social media
    ● Short reflection paper
    ● Persuasive essay
Prior Experiences with the Theme (adapted from Green, 2004)

12. Do you have close friends or family who have served/are currently serving in the military? Please check all that apply.
   - Yes, someone who served during/in a war
   - Yes, someone who served in the military, but not in a war
   - Yes, someone who gave their life during their service
   - Yes, someone who was injured during their service
   - No

13. Have you, or do you plan to, serve(d) in the military? Please check all that apply.
   - Yes, I have served or am serving currently (reserve or active)
   - Yes, I am currently an ROTC cadet
   - Yes, I plan on serving after I graduate from college
   - No

14. How familiar are you with the military?
   - Not at all familiar
   - Not very familiar
   - Somewhat familiar
   - Very familiar

Narrative Engagement Items (adapted directly from Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009)

Narrative Understanding

15. At points, I had a hard time making sense of what was going on in the book.
16. My understanding of the characters is unclear.
17. I had a hard time recognizing the thread of the story.

**Attentional Focus**

18. I found my mind wandering while I was reading the book.
19. While I was reading the book, I found myself thinking about other things.
20. I had a hard time keeping my mind on the book.

**Narrative Presence**

21. While I was reading the book, my body was in the room, but my mind was inside the world created by the story.
22. The book created a new world, and then that world suddenly disappeared when I finished reading the book.
23. At times while I was reading, the story world was closer to me than the real world.

**Emotional Engagement**

24. The story affected me emotionally.
25. While I was reading, when Karl Marlantes succeeded, I felt happy, and when they suffered in some way, I felt sad.
26. I felt sorry for some of the characters in the book.

**Story-Consistent Attitudes Items**

27. As a society, we should talk about war, the experiences our service personnel have in war, and the consequences of those experiences and war itself.
28. Our military training programs should prepare our service personnel spiritually, as well as physically, for the experiences they may face.
29. We need to provide better care for our service personnel at the conclusion of their service, counseling.
30. When a war is fought to stand for what’s right or protect ourselves or others, a warrior must choose a side on which to stand.
31. If war becomes necessary, a country’s leaders and its citizens should enter into the conflict solemnly, without arrogance, and recognize the resulting sorrow and suffering at the war’s end.
32. The best things I can do to support service persons are to be there with them, and help them access services they may need.
33. The conclusion of a war or conflict should not be celebrated like a sports victory but instead as a solemn event.
34. War is both physically and psychologically difficult on those fighting it.
35. A country’s leaders considering war should really try to understand what they are asking of their military and then decide if it is truly necessary.
36. “When our country deploys its military, we are all participants.”

**Demographics**

37. I identify as: (check all that apply)
   - Man
   - Woman
   - Transgender
   - Queer
   - Self-defined
   - Prefer not to answer

38. My intended major is:  
   (dropdown menu of majors available at TXST)

39. My age is:  
   (dropdown menu of ages)

40. Please specify your race/ethnicity: (please check all that apply)  
   - A) Asian or Pacific Islander
   - B) Black or African American
   - C) Hispanic or Latino
   - D) Native American or American Indian
   - E) White
   - F) Other
   - G) Prefer not to respond

41. I am enrolled:  
   - A) Part-time (fewer than 12 credit hours)
   - B) Full-time (12 or more credit hours)
Appendix B: Communication Scholar Expert Panel Recruitment E-mail

Kali Morgan <kali5@mail.usf.edu>                           Thu, Nov 17, 2016 at 2:10 PM

To: [Blurred email address]

Dear [Blurred name],

My name is Kali Morgan and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida (USF). I am writing to invite you to contribute to my research by serving on a virtual expert panel about the constructs of narrative engagement (e.g., Green and Brock’s transportation, 2000, and Cohen’s identification, 2001).

For my dissertation, I am studying how first-year college students become engaged with the now popular “common reading programs,” designed to create common experiences and introduce first-years into collegiate level academic expectations.

Current research on these programs focuses on the outcomes, after simply asking students if they read the book selected or not. Yet, as you know, response to a narrative is a complex process and has not been a component of common reading program research. As you may expect, I plan to survey first-year students about their experiences (USF eIRB #20249).

Because these concepts have not yet been applied to the study of common reading programs, I am seeking your expertise in these constructs to generate content validity for my study. If you choose to participate, the survey consists of only five questions. Your responses will only be used to inform my interpretation of results from an undergraduate student survey about their common reading program experiences.

If you are interested in helping me with my study, please click on this link below that will direct you to the Informed Consent form: https://goo.gl/forms/iWH29ApnYpfE07363

Thank you very much for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Kali Morgan, Doctoral Candidate

University of South Florida

Kali5@mail.usf.edu
### Appendix C: Expert Panel of Communication Scholars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expert’s Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Expertise</th>
<th>Website</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Melanie Green, Ph. D., Associate Professor of Communication</td>
<td>Department of Communication, State University of New York at Buffalo; Buffalo, NY</td>
<td>“Media effects,…the persuasive power of narratives, technology”</td>
<td><a href="http://www.buffalo.edu/cas/communication/faculty/green.html">http://www.buffalo.edu/cas/communication/faculty/green.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily Moyer-Gusé, Ph. D., Associate Professor of Communication</td>
<td>School of Communication, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH</td>
<td>“Media effects, narrative processing and narrative influence”</td>
<td><a href="https://comm.osu.edu/people/moyer-guse.1">https://comm.osu.edu/people/moyer-guse.1</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rick Busselle, Ph. D., Associate Professor and Chair of Department of Media Production and Studies</td>
<td>Department of Media Production &amp; Studies, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH</td>
<td>“Engagement with narratives,” “how mediated stories influence our perceptions and understandings of social issues”</td>
<td><a href="https://www.bgsu.edu/arts-and-sciences/media-and-communication/faculty-and-staff/rick-busselle.html">https://www.bgsu.edu/arts-and-sciences/media-and-communication/faculty-and-staff/rick-busselle.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila Murphy, Ph. D., Full Professor of Communication</td>
<td>Annenberg School for Communication &amp; Journalism, University of Southern California</td>
<td>“the role of narrative or storytelling in shaping the public’s knowledge, attitudes, and practices”</td>
<td><a href="http://annenberg.usc.edu/faculty/communication/sheila-murphy">http://annenberg.usc.edu/faculty/communication/sheila-murphy</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Slater, Ph. D., Professor of Communication</td>
<td>School of Communication,</td>
<td>“Health communication,”</td>
<td><a href="https://comm.osu.edu/people/slater.59">https://comm.osu.edu/people/slater.59</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Affiliation</td>
<td>Research Interests</td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mary Beth Oliver, Ph. D.</td>
<td>Distinguished Professor, Co-Director of Media Effects Research Laboratory</td>
<td>Ohio State University, Columbus, OH</td>
<td>“Emotional and cognitive effects of media; media portrayals; media violence; reality television; stereotyping”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donald Kuiken, Ph. D.</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Department of Psychology, University of Alberta</td>
<td>“Self-perceptual an aesthetic aftereffects of impactful dreams and memorable literary reading”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anne Mangen, Ph. D.</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>Faculty of Humanities, National Research Center for Reading Education and Reading Research, University of Stavanger (Norway)</td>
<td>“Measuring the effect of technical and material affordances of the interface on, e.g., reading comprehension or narrative engagement”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurit Tal-Or, Ph. D.</td>
<td>Senior Lecturer</td>
<td>Department of Communications, The Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Haifa (Tel Aviv, Israel)</td>
<td>“Psychology of the media, interpersonal communication”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena Bilandzic, Ph. D.</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>Department of Media, Knowledge, &amp; Communication, Augsburg University (Germany)</td>
<td>“Narrative experience and persuasion”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Informed Consent Form for Communication Scholar Expert Panel

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Pro # 00028249

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study. We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called: First-Year Student Engagement in Common Reading Programs.

The person who is in charge of this research study is Kali Morgan. This person is called the Principal Investigator.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which students engage with the Common Reading Program, events, learning activities, the storyline in the Common Reading Program book itself, and students’ attitudes about the topics in the Common Reading Program text.

This study will use the theories of narrative engagement (transportation, identification, etc.) from the communication discipline to study students’ engagement with the Common Reading Program text.

Why are you being asked to take part?

We are asking you to take part in this research study because of your expertise in study of individuals’ engagement with narratives. Prior knowledge of postsecondary Common Reading Programs is not necessary; brief descriptions of these programs will be provided as appropriate.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey form survey online providing your perspectives on the application of the narrative engagement framework to the study of Common Reading Programs. The link to this online survey will be provided to you at the end of this consent form. Though your responses will not be anonymous, they will only be used in the interpretation of the results from an undergraduate student survey about their experiences with a Common Reading Program. Please try to answer all survey questions, but if any questions make you uncomfortable or you would simply prefer to skip the question, please do not answer that question.
Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal
You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer; you are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

Benefits and Risks
We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

This research is considered to be minimal risk.

Compensation
We will not pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Privacy and Confidentiality
We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online.

Certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are: Principal Investigator, research team, the advising professor, program/survey administrator at Texas State University (the site of the planned student survey).

Examples of others who may see the data:
The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB), and government offices such as, The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

- It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person’s everyday use of the Internet. If you complete and submit an anonymous survey and later request your data be withdrawn, this may or may not be possible as the researcher may be unable to extract anonymous data from the database.

Contact Information
If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu. If you have questions regarding the research, please contact the Principal Investigator at (407) 832-6589 or kali5@mail.usf.edu.
We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are. You can print a copy of this consent form for your records.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by proceeding with this survey that I am agreeing to take part in research and I am 18 years of age or older.

https://goo.gl/forms/fWH25ApnYpfE07S63
Appendix E: Questionnaire for Communication Scholar Expert Panel

Please respond to the following questions.

Common reading programs are university curricular and co-curricular initiatives for first-time-in-college students based on the reading of a book in common prior to students’ matriculation. These programs are designed to build community among first-year students, academically support their transition to college, and promote their cognitive development by exploring a complex societal issue(s) presented in the selected texts. For example, review Texas State University’s program here: http://www.txstate.edu/bobcatbook/

1. On a scale of 0 (least) to 3 (most), please indicate your familiarity with and knowledge of these programs.

   0-Not at all familiar   1- Not very familiar   2- Somewhat familiar   3-Very familiar

The books are typically nonfiction novels exploring human rights, diversity, and/or global challenges (climate change, war, etc.).

2. In your professional opinion, are the ideas of transportation and identification, as described in your field’s literature base, applicable to studying students’ engagement with the texts used in common reading programs? Why or why not?

Most students will read the text over the summer. Throughout the fall semester, they may complete their reading of the text and also participate in in-class learning activities, discussions, and attend co-curricular events (guest lectures, debates, etc.), all related to the book and its themes.

Near the end of the fall semester, they will complete the survey reporting their engagement with the text. This study’s design and purpose are purely exploratory, not intended to suggest causation. This design does differ from the experimental designs used in communication studies.

3. Do you foresee any problems with students’ recollection of their transportation and identification into the text? If so, what? If not, why?

Similarly, students will be reporting their prior experiences with the text and answering questions that will indicate any story-consistent beliefs they may have.

4. Do you foresee any problems with students’ abilities to react to the story-consistent beliefs questions? If so, what? If not, why?

5. What further comments or recommendations do you have for this study?

Thank you for your time!
Appendix F: Recruitment E-mail for TXST Expert Panel (Faculty)

University Seminar Feedback Invitation: Common Reading Program Engagement
1 message

Marquiss, Twister <twister@txstate.edu>  
To: "Marquiss, Twister" <twister@txstate.edu>  
Cc: Kali Morgan <kali5@mail.usf.edu>  

This message is intended for select University Seminar faculty members. You may also receive an invitation from the Office of Institutional Research. If you choose to participate, please do so only once.

Dear US 1100 Faculty Member:

Below and attached you will find an invitation to participate in feedback associated with the research survey that Texas State University first-year students will receive shortly. The student survey and your feedback are part of dissertation research by a doctoral candidate, Kali Morgan, at the University of South Florida, focused on engagement with the Common Reading Program here at Texas State, as well as this year’s book: What It Is Like to Go to War by Kari Mariantes.

Please read the invitation below, where you will find the link to the feedback form. This feedback is not a requirement; the choice about whether to participate is entirely up to you.

Thanks in advance for your time! Feel free to contact me if you have questions.

Best wishes,

Twister Marquiss, M.F.A.  
Common Reading Program Director  
Texas State University  

twister@txstate.edu | UAC Suite 149 | 512.245.3579

----- Original Message ----- 

Hello!

Thank you for all that you do for Texas State’s University Seminar and Common Reading Program!

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida (USF) and will be conducting my dissertation research on students’ engagement with common reading programs (USF eIRB #28249; Texas State IRB #2017268).

Twister Marquiss, Director of the Texas State Common Reading Program, has graciously agreed to collaborate with me to study Texas State’s program.

We are planning to invite our first-year students to participate in a survey that will help us learn how they are engaging with the Common Reading Program and this year’s book itself.

We are seeking your feedback on the wording and content of this survey, especially from those of you who are fluent in Spanish. We want to ensure that the survey questions are likely to be perceived as clear and concise by all our first-year students.

Please note that your feedback is in no way a requirement of your position with University Seminar or the Common Reading Program.
If you so choose to participate, your feedback can be provided all online. To do so, click on this link https://goo.gl/forms/XrvkuUgL0F3KPZfEY2 to complete an_Informed Consent form. Completing this form will direct you to the online survey form, which may take up to 30-45 minutes for you to review. Your responses will only be used to inform the interpretation of results from the first-year student survey about their Common Reading Program experiences.

Thank you again for all you do for the program! If you have any questions, please contact me at kali5@mail.usf.edu or 407-632-6569.

Sincerely,

Kali Morgan, Ph. D. Candidate

University of South Florida
Peer Mentor Feedback Invitation: Common Reading Program Engagement
1 message

Marquiss, Twister <twister@txstate.edu>  
To: "Black, Victoria A" <vg13@txstate.edu>  
Cc: Kali Morgan <kali5@mail.usf.edu>  

Dear Peer Mentors:

Below and attached you will find an invitation to participate in feedback associated with the research survey that Texas State University first-year students will receive shortly. The student survey and your feedback are part of dissertation research by a doctoral candidate, Kali Morgan, at the University of South Florida that is focused on engagement with the Common Reading Program here at Texas State, as well as this year's book: What It Is Like to Go to War by Karl Marlantes.

Please read the invitation below, where you will find the link to the feedback form. This feedback is not a requirement of your position as a Peer Mentor; the choice about whether to participate is entirely up to you.

Thanks in advance for your time! Feel free to contact me if you have questions.

Best wishes,

Twister Marquiss, M.F.A.  
Common Reading Program Director  
Texas State University

twister@txstate.edu | UAC Suite 149 | 512.245.3579  
----- Original Message -----  

Hello!

Thank you for all that you do for Texas State’s University Seminar and Common Reading Program!

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida (USF) and will be conducting my dissertation research on students’ engagement with common reading programs (USF IRB #28249; Texas State IRB #2017268).

Twister Marquiss, Director of the Texas State Common Reading Program, has graciously agreed to collaborate with me to study Texas State’s program.

We are planning to invite our first-year students to participate in a survey that will help us learn how they are engaging with the Common Reading Program and this year’s book itself.

We are seeking your feedback on the wording and content of this survey, especially from those of you who are fluent in Spanish. We want to ensure that the survey questions are likely to be perceived as clear and concise by all our first-year students.

Please note that your feedback is in no way a requirement of your position with University Seminar or the Common Reading Program.

If you so choose to participate, your feedback can be provided all online. To do so, click on this link https://goo.gl/forms/XvkkuUgoF3KPZEY2 to complete an Informed Consent form. Completing this form will direct you to the online survey form, which may take up to 30-45 minutes for you to review. Your responses will only be used to inform the interpretation of results from the first-year student survey about their Common Reading Program experiences.

Thank you again for all you do for the program! If you have any questions, please contact me at kalli5@mail.usf.edu or 407-832-6559.

Sincerely,

Kali Morgan, Ph. D, Candidate

University of South Florida
Appendix H: Informed Consent Form for TXST Expert Panel (Faculty & Peer Mentors)

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Pro # 00028249

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) and Texas State University (TXST) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study. We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called: First-Year Student Engagement in Common Reading Programs.

The person who is in charge of this research study is Kali Morgan. This person is called the Principal Investigator.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which students engage with the Common Reading Program, events, learning activities, the storyline in the book itself, and students’ attitudes about the topics in the Common Reading Program text. We plan to invite all first-year students at Texas State to complete a survey about their Common Reading Program experiences and attitudes. Because Texas State University serves many individuals whose first language may be Spanish, we want to ensure that our survey questions will translate well for all students.

We are asking you to take part in this research study because of your areas of expertise: you are both affiliated with the Texas State University Common Reading Program as a faculty member or undergraduate peer leader and you speak the Spanish language.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to complete a survey online providing your feedback on the content and wording of the survey that first-year Texas State University students will be sent about their Common Reading Program experiences and attitudes. The link to this online survey will be provided to you at the end of this consent form. Individual survey forms will be aggregated for analysis. Though your responses will not be anonymous, they will only be used in the interpretation of the results from the Common Reading Program survey completed by Texas State University first-year students. Please try to answer all survey questions, but if any questions make you uncomfortable or you would simply prefer to skip the question, please do not answer that question.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.
You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer; you are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study.

If you are considered a Texas State University faculty member, your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

If you are considered an undergraduate peer leader, your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status, course grade, recommendations, or access to future courses or training opportunities.

**Benefits and Risks**

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.

This research is considered to be minimal risk.

**Compensation**

We will not pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online.

Certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are: the Principal Investigator, research team, the advising professor, and the Common Reading Program administrator at Texas State University.

Examples of others who may see the data:
The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB), and government offices such as, The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

- It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person’s everyday use of the Internet. If you complete and submit an anonymous survey and later request your data be withdrawn, this may or may not be possible as the researcher may be unable to extract anonymous data from the database.

**Contact Information**
If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu. If you have questions regarding the research, please contact the Principal Investigator at (407) 832-6589 or kali5@mail.usf.edu.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are. You can print a copy of this consent form for your records.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by proceeding with this survey that I am agreeing to take part in research and I am 18 years of age or older.

https://goo.gl/forms/XrkvkuUgoF3KPZEY2
Appendix I: TXST Expert Panel Questionnaire

Please refer to your copy of the CRP Engagement Study First-Year Student Survey (these survey questions are also provided within this document for your convenience). We are seeking your feedback on the wording and content of the following survey questions #1-14 and #27-36. A separate section of this survey will address questions #15-26.

On a scale of 0 (least) to 3 (most), please rate each item as written on each of the indicated categories. Use the blank space in between each item to explain your rating, provide supplementary commentary, or your suggested revisions to improve the item.

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<tr>
<th>Item Number</th>
<th>Clarity of Item Stem</th>
<th>Appropriateness of Response Categories</th>
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As you can see on your copy of the First-Year Student Survey, questions #15-26 ask students about their experience reading. These are questions from a published instrument that has been used with undergraduate students, primarily juniors and seniors, in the past. The questions are included here for your reference; students are asked to indicate the extent to which they agree with the statements on a 7-point scale, "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree":

15. At points, I had a hard time making sense of what was going on in the book.
16. My understanding of the characters is unclear.
17. I had a hard time recognizing the thread of the story.
18. I found my mind wandering while I was reading the book.
19. While I was reading the book, I found myself thinking about other things.
20. I had a hard time keeping my mind on the book.
21. While I was reading the book, my body was in the room, but my mind was inside the world created by the story.
22. The book created a new world, and then that world suddenly disappeared when I finished reading the book.
23. At times while I was reading, the story world was closer to me than the real world.
24. The story affected me emotionally.
25. While I was reading, when Karl Marlantes succeeded, I felt happy, and when they suffered in some way, I felt sad.
26. I felt sorry for some of the characters in the book.

Do you feel that these items are worded appropriately for students at the end of their first semester at the university? Why or why not?

As you know, Texas State University has many students who may speak Spanish as their first language. Do you feel that these items are phrased appropriately for students whose first language may not be English? That is, do you perceive any of these phrases may be “lost in translation?” If so, which ones? Why?

Next, please provide your feedback on the overall design of the survey, including the areas of strength and weakness. For weak areas, please provide your recommendations on alternatives that would improve the survey.

Finally, please share any additional comments or ideas you have for improving this survey.

Thank you very much for your time and effort!
Appendix J: Letter of Support from TXST Common Reading Program Director

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
The rising STAR of Texas

October 14, 2016

To Whom It May Concern:

This letter serves as support for the proposed research by University of South Florida doctoral student Kali Morgan. The research will include both a small pilot study and a significant research survey of Texas State University first-year undergraduate students; the purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which students engage with the Common Reading Program, events, learning activities, the storyline in the book itself, and students’ attitudes about the topics in the Common Reading Program text.

I have reviewed the research and find it appropriate for the population of first-year students at Texas State University. I approve these research activities to take place on site at Texas State, and there are appropriate resources available to conduct the research. I will serve as the contact individual who will represent Texas State in matters related to the conduct of human subjects research. There are adequate provisions to handle unanticipated problems and/or adverse events, and should any support be needed, I will seek support from Texas State University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) in the Office of Research Integrity and Compliance (ORIC).

Sincerely,

Christopher "Twister" Marquiss
Common Reading Program Director
Texas State University
Senior Lecturer in University College
Faculty in Department of English and Honors College
512.245.3579 | twister@txstate.edu

COMMON READING PROGRAM
601 University Drive | University College | UAC Suite 149 | San Marcos, Texas 78666-4684
phone: 512.245.3579 | fax: 512.245.8785 | TXSTATE.EDU/BOBCATBOOK

This letter is an electronic communication from Texas State University.

MEMBER THE TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY SYSTEM®
Appendix K: USF IRB Approval Letter

November 4, 2016

Kali Morgan
Undergraduate Studies
Tampa, FL 33612

RE: Exempt Certification
IRB #: Pro00028249
Title: First-Year Student Engagement in Common Reading Programs

Dear Ms. Morgan:

On 11/4/2016, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that your research meets criteria for exemption from the federal regulations as outlined by 45CFR46.101(b):

(2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless:
   (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

As the principal investigator for this study, it is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted as outlined in your application and consistent with the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report and with USF HRPP policies and procedures.

Please note, as per USF HRPP Policy, once the Exempt determination is made, the application is closed in ARC. Any proposed or anticipated changes to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB review must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant an amendment or new application.

Given the determination of exemption, this application is being closed in ARC. This does not limit your ability to conduct your research project.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.
Sincerely,

Kristen Salomon, Ph.D., Vice Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board
Appendix L: TXST IRB Approval Letter

Kail Morgan <kail5@mail.usf.edu>

Fwd: Confirmation of Approval: IRB Application 2017268
1 message

Wed, Nov 23, 2016 at 5:39 PM
Marquiss, Twister <twister@txstate.edu>
To: Kail Morgan <kail5@mail.usf.edu>
Cc: "Cortez, Laura J" <laurajcortez@txstate.edu>

Kail and Laura:

Happy Thanksgiving! Fantastic news: the project is approved! See below.

Laura: What’s next? I assume we can get rolling on Monday morning, but I’m not sure what the procedures are — online or elsewhere — now that it’s been approved.

Best of everything,
Twister

Twister Marquiss, M.F.A.
Common Reading Program Director
Texas State University

twister@txstate.edu | UAC Suite 149 | 512.245.3579

Begin forwarded message:

From: AVPR IRB <avpr-irb@txstate.edu>
Subject: Confirmation of Approval: IRB Application 2017268. DO NOT REPLY to this message.
Date: November 23, 2016 at 11:20:12 AM CST
To: <cm31@txstate.edu>

This email message is generated by the IRB online application program. Do not reply.
The reviewers have determined that your IRB Application Number 2017268 is exempt from IRB review. The project is approved.

==================================

Institutional Review Board
Office of Research Compliance
Texas State University-San Marcos
(ph) 512/245-2334 / (fax) 512/245-3847 / avpr-irb@txstate.edu / JCK 489
601 University Drive, San Marcos, TX 78666

Texas State University is a member of the Texas State University System.

NOTE: This email, including attachments, may include confidential and/or proprietary information and may be used only by the person or entity to which it is addressed. If the reader of this email is not the intended recipient or his or her agent, the reader is hereby notified that any dissemination, distribution or copying of this email is prohibited. If you have received this email in error, please notify the sender by replying to this message and deleting this email immediately. Unless otherwise indicated, all information included within this document and any documents attached should be considered working papers of this office, subject to the laws of the State of Texas.
Appendix M: First-Year Student Survey Announcement E-mail to US 1000 Faculty

FW: Weekly Email
1 message

Cortez, Laura J <lauracortez@txstate.edu>                                   Tue, Nov 29, 2016 at 11:21 AM
To: Kail Morgan <kail5@mail.usf.edu>
Cc: "Merquis, Twister" <twister@txstate.edu>

Good news! Looks like something was sent out about your survey just as I was writing to you. So yes, complete your survey and we can start moving forward.

From: University Seminar
Sent: Tuesday, November 29, 2016 10:09 AM
Subject: Weekly Email

US 1100 Announcements
Information related to Teaching US 1100

End-of-course evaluations: Please remind your students that course evaluations and SPIs are now available on ePortfolio. A good way to encourage your students to complete their evaluation is to allow them to bring an electronic device to class and set aside approximately 10-15 minutes for them to complete the evaluation.

Make-Up Boat Tours: Friday, December 9, 2016, at 3:00, 3:10 and 3:20. If your students miss your boat tour, you may allow them to sign up for a make-up tour at http://signup.txstate.edu/sessions/2870-for-us-1100-students-only-fall-2016-make-up-boat-tour. We will make a list of those completing a make-up tour available on the US 1100 faculty TRACS site so you may verify your students’ attendance.

Survey of First-Year Students regarding Common Reading Engagement: All first-year students at Texas State will receive an email link to a survey about their engagement with the Common Reading Program. The Common Reading Program is collaborating with a doctoral student researcher from the University of South Florida to explore the ways in which first-year students engage with a common reading program. Please encourage your students to complete the survey. Direct questions about the survey to Twister Marquiss (twister@txstate.edu).
Appendix N: Recruitment E-mail for First-Year Student Survey

Research Participation Invitation: Common Reading Program Engagement

1 message
Thu, Dec 8, 2016 at 5:24 PM

To: Kali Morgan <kali5@mail.usf.edu>

First-Year Students at Texas State:

Below you will find an invitation to participate in a research survey about the Common Reading Program here at Texas State University (USF IRB #26249; Texas State IRB #2017288). The online form is part of dissertation research by a doctoral candidate at the University of South Florida; the research focuses on engagement with our Common Experience and Common Reading Program, specifically concerning this year's book: *What It Is Like to Go to War* by Karl Marlantes.

Please read the invitation below, where you will find the link to the research survey. Participation is voluntary, but please consider participating when you have time.

Best wishes,

Twister Marquiss, M.F.A.
Common Reading Program Director
Texas State University

twister@texasstate.edu | UAC Suite 149 | 512.245.3579

----- Original Message -----

Hello!

I hope you have had a fantastic fall semester at Texas State and that you had the opportunity to read the Bobcat Book and participate in a few Common Experience events.

I am a doctoral student at the University of South Florida (USF) and I have partnered with Texas State’s Common Reading Program to hear about all your experiences with the book, in-class, and the events! To do so, I designed a research study (USF IRB #26249; Texas State IRB #2017288); as a student at a research institution, you may be invited to participate in studies like these occasionally.

If you choose to participate, you can participate entirely online. To do so, click on this link [https://usf.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8w6nOyZYTeCRJ2t](https://usf.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8w6nOyZYTeCRJ2t) to complete an Informed Consent form; this form describes the study and your rights so you can decide if you want to participate. If you complete this form, you will then be directed to the survey about your Common Reading Program experiences.

Remember, this research study is all about us learning from you so we can continue to improve future first-year students! Your responses will be anonymous, so please consider participating!

If you have any questions, please contact me at kali5@mail.usf.edu or 407-832-6580.

Sincerely,

Kali Morgan, Ph. D. Candidate
University of South Florida
Appendix O: Recruitment E-mail for First-Year Student Survey

Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in this Research Study

Pro # 00028249

Researchers at the University of South Florida (USF) and Texas State University (TXST) study many topics. To do this, we need the help of people who agree to take part in a research study. This form tells you about this research study. We are asking you to take part in a research study that is called: First-Year Student Engagement in Common Reading Programs.

The person who is in charge of this research study is Kali Morgan. This person is called the Principal Investigator.

Purpose of the Study

We are asking you to take part in this research study because you are a first-year student at Texas State University. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways in which students engage with the Common Reading Program, events, learning activities, the storyline in the book itself, and students’ attitudes about the topics in the Common Reading Program text.

Study Procedures

If you take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an anonymous survey online about your Common Reading Program experiences and attitudes. The link to this online survey will be provided to you at the end of this consent form. Individual survey forms will be aggregated for analysis and publication. Please try to answer all survey questions, but if any questions make you uncomfortable or you would simply prefer to skip the question, please do not answer that question.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal

You have the alternative to choose not to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer; you are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your student status, course grade, recommendations, or access to future courses or training opportunities.

Benefits and Risks

We are unsure if you will receive any benefits by taking part in this research study.
This research is considered to be minimal risk.

**Compensation**

We will not pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

**Privacy and Confidentiality**

We must keep your study records as confidential as possible. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. Certain people may need to see your study records. By law, anyone who looks at your records must keep them completely confidential. The only people who will be allowed to see these records are: Principal Investigator, research team, the advising professor, and the survey administrator at Texas State University.

Examples of others who may see the data:
The University of South Florida Institutional Review Board (IRB), and government offices such as, The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

- It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses. Confidentiality will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. No guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the Internet. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person’s everyday use of the Internet. If you complete and submit an anonymous survey and later request your data be withdrawn, this may or may not be possible as the researcher may be unable to extract anonymous data from the database.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at RSCH-IRB@usf.edu. If you have questions regarding the research, please contact the Principal Investigator at (407) 832-6589 or kali5@mail.usf.edu.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not let anyone know your name. We will not publish anything else that would let people know who you are. You can print a copy of this consent form for your records.

I freely give my consent to take part in this study. I understand that by proceeding with this survey that I am agreeing to take part in research and I am 18 years of age or older.

[https://usf.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8w6nOyZTeCRJ2t](https://usf.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_8w6nOyZTeCRJ2t)
Appendix P: Item-Level Multiple Imputation Results

Multiple Imputation Results (MI = 5)

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<th>Variable</th>
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<td>NES16</td>
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<td>NES17</td>
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<td>NES18</td>
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<td>NES19</td>
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<td>NES24</td>
<td>3.80</td>
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<td>NES25</td>
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<tr>
<td>NES26</td>
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### Appendix Q: Summary of Narrative Engagement Scale and Subscales for Factor Analysis

**(Prior to Multiple Imputation Procedure)**

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<tr>
<th>Subscale &amp; Item</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative Understanding ($n = 57$)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>NES15- At points, I had a hard time making sense of what was going on in the book. (-)</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>2.09</td>
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<td>NES16- My understanding of the characters is unclear. (-)</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>1.66</td>
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<tr>
<td>NES17- I had a hard time recognizing the thread of the story. (-)</td>
<td>5.40</td>
<td>1.70</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cronbach's alpha for narrative understanding</td>
<td>0.83</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Attentional Focus ($n = 54$)</strong></td>
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<td>NES18- I found my mind wandering while I was reading the book. (-)</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>2.06</td>
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<tr>
<td>NES19- While I was reading the book, my body was in the room, but my mind was inside the world created by the story. (-)</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>2.22</td>
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<tr>
<td>NES20- I had a hard time keeping my mind on the book. (-)</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>2.18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cronbach's alpha for attentional focus</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Narrative Presence ($n = 76$)</strong></td>
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<td>NES21- While I was reading the book, my body was in the room, but my mind was inside the world created by the story.</td>
<td>3.68</td>
<td>1.73</td>
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<td>NES22- The book created a new world, and then that new world suddenly disappeared when I finished reading the book.</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>1.66</td>
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<td>NES23- At times while I was reading, the story world was closer to me than the real world.</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>1.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cronbach's alpha for narrative presence</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Engagement ($n = 100$)</strong></td>
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<td>NES24- The story affected me emotionally.</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.81</td>
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<td>NES25- While I was reading, when Karl Marlantes succeeded, I felt happy, and when they suffered in some way, I felt sad.</td>
<td>4.57</td>
<td>1.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>NES26- I felt sorry for some of the characters in the book.</td>
<td>5.26</td>
<td>1.33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cronbach's alpha for emotional engagement</td>
<td>0.75</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Cronbach's alpha ($n = 40$)</strong></td>
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<td>0.88</td>
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(-) indicates reverse coded