

A NARRATIVE SUMMARY OF THE 2014 BOOK SELECTION PROCESS

The Process of Selection

The College Reads! [committee](#) solicited book recommendations from the entire campus community between August and October. When the committee convened on October 1, there were 127 submissions (105 unique titles). Fifty-one percent of the book recommendations came from students, 27% from faculty, 15% from staff, 6% from administrators and 2 % from others. [The College Reads! website](#) tracked the list, posting books that had been removed and added to the list as the committee worked.

As a reminder, the criteria for book selection include:

- Intellectually stimulating – a book that stretch students' minds, causes students to think about topics or issues they might not have encountered before, or a book that engages familiar themes in a new way.
- Readable—a book that is enjoyable, engaging, and of a manageable length (typically <350 pages). It can be fiction or non-fiction.
- A living author—one of the highlights of The College Reads! is a public lecture by the book's author and an opportunity for students who have read the book to meet with the author in small groups.
- Provocative—a book that will provoke discussion across campus; one that will provide a way for multiple departments and campus constituencies to develop engaging co-curricular activities throughout the academic year.
- Relevant—a book with a topic or theme that will resonate with the campus; a book in which students can locate themselves, their lives, and their futures

The committee met weekly (every Tuesday from 2-3p) from October 1-December 3. A final meeting on December 9 was held to vote on the final selection. At the first meeting, committee members reviewed the list and removed books that did not meet the published criteria and those that were judged a poor fit for the program (e.g. *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *Game of Thrones*, *Tuesdays with Morrie*). Each member of the committee was asked to review the remaining 55 books on the list by reading reviews and come to the next meeting prepared to “work the list.” In addition, several books were assigned for reading (e.g. *All Things Shining*, *Outcasts United*, *A Long Way Gone*, *Looking for Longleaf*). At the next meeting, we worked from members' research and reduced the list by another 22 books. More books were assigned for reading (e.g. *Handmaid's Tale*, *Oryx and Crake*, *Soil and Soul*, *The Garden of Beasts*, *Looking Like the Enemy*, *Present Shock*, *Reverence*, *The Dinner*, *What Money Can't Buy*, *Thank you for your Service*). At the next several meetings, titles were again reviewed, some dismissed, others assigned. As books were read, committee members recommended that it either stay on the list and be read by another person or be removed from the list. Books were also added to the list if reading one book, suggested another title or a review of a book suggested another title. By November 5, 110 books had been reviewed and dismissed. By mid-November, the committee had developed a “long” short list of books (e.g. *A Long Way Gone*, *Conundrum*, *Delusions of Gender*, *Gentleman of the Road*, *Looking Like the Enemy*, *One Amazing Thing*, *Outcasts United*, *The Good Soldiers*, *The Book of Jonas*, *The Spirit Catches you and You fall Down*, *The Year Without Pants*, *Upheaval in Charleston*, *What Makes you Tic*, *What Money Can't Buy*, *Wild, Wool*) and we moved to the stage of multiple readers for each remaining book and student readers for books.

Each week, committee members reported out and either recommended striking the book or passing it to another reader. Consensus developed around *The Good Soldiers*, *Outcasts United*, and *The Book of Jonas*. We ordered more copies of each and distributed them to faculty, students, and staff outside the committee. Every committee member who wanted one had a copy of each of the three final books.

The Decision

We hoped that we could make a decision by Thanksgiving, but the sheer number of books under consideration meant that we missed that mark. We set December 3 as the decision meeting. Three books remained on the list and were widely read over Thanksgiving. At the December 3 meeting, *The Book of Jonas* was eliminated fairly quickly. Individuals spoke on behalf of each remaining book or the pros and cons of both books. Input collected from outside the committee was shared. Information about the quality of both authors, author availability, and price was shared. YouTube clips of both authors at speaking engagements or in interviews had been previously viewed. Information from other sources (FYE Conference, Student Affairs connections) was shared about both authors. As the decision point neared, time ran short in the meeting. We took a non-binding straw vote (*The Good Soldier* over *Outcasts*).

A final 30-minute meeting was called for December 9 in order to make a decision before the break. Information about the possibility of bringing Luma Mufleh instead of or in addition to the author of *Outcasts United* was provided. Information from three universities that have previously selected *The Good Soldiers* (American University, Framingham State University, and Century College) and provided in advance of the meeting. During the discussion, one committee member argued strongly for *Outcasts United* on “diversity” grounds and she asked that the committee be provided input solicited from an administrator outside the committee and his email was read in full. After the period of discussion, a final vote was taken with a majority of the committee in favor of *The Good Soldiers*.