

# Assessing Book Club-in-a-Bag: What We Learned from Piloting a Campus-Wide Book Club Initiative

## Purpose & Goals

In the Spring of 2021, deep in the midst of an ongoing pandemic and increased racially motivated violence, our academic library launched a campus-wide Book Club-in-a-Bag program. Modeled after public library programs, this pilot reading initiative was designed to promote a forum for safe and open discussions on issues of inclusivity, equity, and diversity through leisure reading.

In an effort to support institutional goals for inclusive community-building and equity-minded practices, University Libraries introduced a campus-wide book club initiative. The Book Club-in-a-Bag program encourages discussion and engagement among smaller groups of students, faculty, and staff. The goal of the program is to promote communication and respect among our campus community through the shared experience of reading. We aim to do this by

- Providing space and opportunity for the campus community to engage with each other
- Encouraging self-reflection and analysis of our personal and shared impact on perpetuating social inequities, systemic racism, and oppression
- Highlighting voices of those from marginalized communities or identities
- Promoting reading as an accessible and engaging activity

## Assessment Design & Methodology

Our purpose for assessing the Book Club-in-a-Bag pilot was to understand the following:

- If the titles offered were engaging/interesting/appropriate
- If the number of book titles and the number of copies of each title is sufficient for participating groups
- If the check-out period is sufficient
- The quality and value of the supplemental materials provided. Specifically
  - Did they adequately serve to start/maintain a discussion about the book?
  - Did they contribute to thoughtful discussions about potentially difficult topics or issues explored in the book?
- The overall satisfaction of the participants
  - Was the experience enjoyable? Beneficial?
  - Would they participate in the program again?
  - What would they want done differently?
  - What titles would they recommend as new purchases?

We designed a post-participation survey instrument of 11 questions which could be completed digitally through an online survey system. We encouraged all participants to contribute to the assessment. We chose this assessment method because of its convenience and its effectiveness. Data has been easy to gather and quick to analyze. Qualtrics, the survey system our campus uses, allows the program coordinators to be notified when a submission has been made, which saves time and allows for continual assessment, even after the pilot concluded. The survey can also be quickly edited to include new book titles or additional assessment questions as the book club evolves.



**90% of respondents were “highly satisfied” with the program**

## Key Findings

Through our assessment, we identified a few key findings that will help guide us in future decision-making. Overwhelmingly, people who participated in the Book Club-in-a-Bag program enjoyed their experience. A few of our other takeaways are

- Having everything in one bag was helpful—particularly the discussion questions
- 100% of respondents would check out another book
- 90% of respondents were “highly satisfied” with the program
- Fiction and YA were the most popular genres
- Horror and sci-fi were the least popular genres
- More faculty and staff participated than students

## Implications

By developing a successful and sustainable assessment method, we can continue to ensure that we are working toward our overall objectives and grow our book club programming in the future. We will continue to work to identify book titles that not only resonate with our campus community but provide an opportunity for groups to engage in meaningful and critical conversations. We hope to give other academic library practitioners some insight by sharing our experiences and processes openly.

**100% of respondents indicated they would check out another book**

## References

- Harder, A., Howard, V., & Rehberg Sedo, D.N. (2015). Creating cohesive community through shared reading: A case study of One Book Nova Scotia. *Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research*, 10(1), 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v10i1.3098>
- Jacobsen Kiciman, J., Bull, A. C., & Whitney, K. (2019). *Book clubs in academic libraries: A case study and toolkit*. UW Pressbooks. <https://uw.pressbooks.pub/bookclubs/>

## Book Clubs in Practice

One theme we saw in reviewing the literature was the concept of the book club as a tool for community building and engagement. In their study of a public book club initiative in Nova Scotia, Alyssa Harder and colleagues (2015) found that connecting with others in the community was a major motivator for people to participate in their book club. And the librarians at the University of Washington Tacoma, responsible for the Book Clubs in Academic Libraries toolkit (2019) found that a campus-wide book club had multiple benefits, one being the building of community through decreased isolation and peer discussion.

## Current Status & Next Steps

Our pilot completed in Spring 2022, and based on the assessment results, we have decided to continue to purchase more titles. The results also led to some additional questions we need to address.

- What do we do when we want to deaccession/deselect the books?  
For example, the horror selection has not been checked out, so should we deaccession nine copies and move one copy to the circulating collection?
- How do we find titles that align with the interests of our campus community while also selecting authors that represent culturally diverse or minoritized identities?
- How do we better publicize the program and offerings, particularly to our student population? We created a new handout to share during New Student Days, and there was great interest from attendees. Are there other ways we should promote the program?

Check out more about  
Book Club-in-a-Bag

