

# “O Father of Education, You Come with a Book in Your Hand:” The Ambivalent Status of Reading in a Two-Year Tribal College

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This chapter defines college-level reading from the perspective of two-year community colleges, and claims that college-level reading should be redefined as a spectrum concept that incorporates institutional diversity. Research data from a small TCU (Tribal Community College) illustrate how the decline of reading affects a particularly vulnerable student population disadvantaged by geographical isolation, low socio-economic status, and a cultural heritage of ambivalence about formal education. The last part of the chapter presents teachers' voices from a TCU. Some of these responses to the reading crisis show alarming signs of submission, which are supplemented with more resistant suggestions for intervention. The chapter argues that TCUs and other similar venues of higher education need to start bringing reading back from the cold and adopt reading across the curriculum, by articulating their expectations and by incorporating in their curriculum creative reading assignments of increasing complexity.

The title of this chapter is a line from a 19<sup>th</sup> century poem whose author is not known. The poem has been passed down by generations of educators, and it illustrates the ambivalence of indigenous people towards one of the grand narratives of modernization, education, and towards one of its technologies, the book, which in the mid-1800s was as enigmatic as computers are today. The line, like the rest of the poem, expresses some concern that the book will become a harsh tool and will eradicate other more traditional forms of teaching and learning (See full text in Appendix B). Yet, the poem also expresses some awe about the unprecedented power of books and book learning.

Almost two hundred years later, as I am making an attempt to define the nature and the state of college-level reading from the perspective of a two-year tribal college, my feelings are similar to those of the anonymous 19<sup>th</sup> century Native American. However, the power relations between the technologies of education have significantly changed. My fear today is that the once powerful book is vanishing as my students' eyes are glued to flickering pages of texts and images, which

they seemingly manipulate so skillfully with the rapid movement of their fingers on electronic devices. I am worried that the once modern, but now traditional “print literacy” as I knew it is on the way out, yet I am also hopeful that technology perhaps will bring something in that is just as or even more powerful.

This chapter is a contribution to the definition of college-level reading in a particular and perhaps atypical setting of higher education. Hoping that others in this collection and elsewhere have provided enough evidence of an alarming decline in both the quality and the quantity of reading on a national scale (Davis in this volume; Hollander et al. in this volume; Horning, 2011; Horning, 2007; NCEE, 2013), I wish to supplement the larger scale of these trends with a miniature local variety, which, in some ways, is a microanalysis similar to Martha Townsend’s microanalysis of football players’ reading experiences in this volume.

Survey data from 2010, 2014 and 2015 involving a small number of students (30–50) and 12 full-time instructors from a geographically isolated two-year tribal college (with a student body of approximately 500) are analyzed and interpreted. These data highlight the growing gap between pre-college reading experiences and college expectations, the corrosion of these expectations, and the ambivalence of responses to the situation. In two-year colleges, more specifically, there is a definite shift in the definition of college-level reading with growing stress on what Rosenblatt (2005/1985) called efferent reading (focused on information retrieval). The decline or move away from more complex texts and reading practices started earlier (Holbrook, 1986) and was recently confirmed as almost final and irreversible (NCEE, 2013; Tinberg and Nadeau, 2010). The trend can also be interpreted in terms of transformative learning, or rather, the lack of it, as the concept is elaborated in Gogan’s article in this volume and elsewhere (Gogan, 2013). The data from my surveys as well as the interviews I had with students and instructors show alarming signs that the decline of reading is accepted without resistance along with (perhaps a bit unfounded) optimism that technology will bring about a revival.

This chapter argues that the trends shown in the analyzed student and instructor surveys are not new and are the outcome of a combination of factors, such as the emergence of young adult literature, the pressure towards fast and measurable ways of teaching/learning, or the course book publishers’ cost cutting efforts. Due to the constantly changing targets of texts and reading levels, the definition of college-level reading should incorporate institutional diversity, and institutions of higher education should determine their own specific mixture of what Louise Rosenblatt called the efferent (information oriented) and aesthetic (explorative, interpretation oriented) continuum (Rosenblatt, 2005). In other words, I propose that college-level reading is a spectrum concept rather than a single and static one. Finally, it should be recognized that what we perceive as negative trends or imbalances in our college-age students’ reading experiences can be reversed by intervention. The 2013 executive summary of the National Center on Education and the

Economy, which focuses on two-year colleges and acknowledges that “The bulk of serious technical and vocational education takes place in the U.S. below baccalaureate level” also suggests that incorporating complex texts, and complex reading practices in two-year college curricula are crucial (NCEE, 2013, p. 6). At the end of this paper, classroom practices that help students move along the spectrum of reading skills are suggested, and it is proposed that colleges should continue (or, if not yet, start) exposing students to meaningful reading experiences across the curriculum.

## Shifting Concerns, Moving Targets: The Definition of College-Level Reading

The definition of college-level reading is complicated by several factors. One of them is the diversity of colleges ranging from small, two-year colleges, to large four-year flagship universities. Two-year colleges, in spite of their recent growing enrollment and political attention, once started out as “junior colleges,” under a name that suggested a status between high school and “real college.” As such, community colleges have often found themselves caught between two, occasionally conflicting missions: One was to prepare students for (re)entering the job market (vocational training); the other was to create a pathway to four-year colleges (preparation for transfer). Thus, two-year colleges show a great deal of variety in how they combine these two major elements of their mission, which has an effect on the role and definition of reading, just as the mission of preparing students for scientific research or public school teaching affects the role and definition of reading in other institutions of higher learning.

College instructors generally assume that learning to read takes place at pre-college levels of education, yet it is not clear what they mean by “reading.” Just as Ede and Lunsford (1991) pointed out that “writing” can mean anything from forming letters on a page, typing up a handwritten manuscript or drafting a novel, when “reading at college level” is taken for granted, the complexity of the act of reading is not duly acknowledged. Those who claim that reading instruction does not belong to college level are most likely not fully aware that at advanced levels, reading comprises a broad spectrum of cognitive layers beyond comprehension. This spectrum of cognitive processes involves analysis, interpretation and critical evaluation of print and electronic texts as well as their attached visual or numeral elements that, in our electronic age, increasingly accompany words. At college level, and at the high end of the reading spectrum, students need to become expert or meta-readers, who understand how texts work and can navigate them for meaning (Horning, 2011).

The above definition of college-level reading, however, may be less clearly

articulated in addition to being slowly eroded in two-year colleges. Due to the combined effect of economic and social factors, two-year (community) colleges have been shifting their emphasis away from academic toward vocational training, which has led to a shift along the spectrum of preferred reading practices. Being typical college professors, Howard Tinberg and Jean-Paul Nadeau took it for granted that reading and discussing challenging texts are valued in college, but they found that community college students “do not inhabit well” the texts that are considered staple items in a college anthology (Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010, p. 8). To put it more bluntly, while colleges, in general, emphasize analysis, interpretation, evaluation and critical or rhetorical reading, community colleges tend to be more comprehension centered in their instruction (Carillo, 2015; Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010).

In another approach, the shift evokes Louise Rosenblatt’s much earlier, but still relevant, work on reading as a meaningful transaction between reader and text. Rosenblatt published a series of articles since after World War II, in which she explained the difference between efferent and aesthetic reading (Rosenblatt, 2005). As she stressed, all reading is a combination of these two ends of a spectrum of transactions between reader and text. However, when a student reads a text with the purpose of finding pre-determined answers to questions or as if he or she was reading a TV-guide to find show times, we talk about efferent reading. Aesthetic reading, on the other hand, is the type of reading that creates meanings through a productive transaction between the reader’s and the writer’s personal knowledge and experience represented in the form of text on a page. The outcome of this transaction is not pre-determined and can be unpredictable.

Yet another way of approaching the shift in the definition of reading that is characteristic of two-year colleges is through the role of fiction and non-fiction reading in the curriculum. In many two-year colleges, there has been an increasing emphasis on reading non-fiction, or science texts at the expense of literature. Rosenblatt’s articles show that the pendulum swings between literary texts and other, more utilitarian readings have been going on for decades, without much realization that perhaps seasoned readers need experience in both types of texts, and perhaps it is not so much the texts that determine the reading experience, but the kind of transaction between readers and texts that is fostered (Graff, 2009). In other words, Rosenblatt already in the early 1980s pointed out that literary texts, be that young adult literature or Shakespeare, can also be turned into an efferent reading experience if students are expected to answer multiple-choice questions only. Similarly, if students analyze complex works by formulaic, pre-determined categories, like “setting,” “characters,” “conflict,” instead of being encouraged to create personal meaning, to make inferences about or to question the writer’s intentions, and to interpret the literary conventions followed in the work, there is no deeper (aesthetic) transaction between the text and the reader.

Needless to say, some kind of analysis or systematic separation of elements of

texts (e.g., setting, characters and conflict) is necessary for effective reading, but it should not be exclusive and perfunctory. The secret probably is in finding the balance that allows students to gain experience in multiple ways of interacting with multiple genres of text. This concept is consistent with theories of transformational learning (Gogan in this volume), which emphasize that effective reading is a “receptive, relational, and recursive experience” that ultimately changes the reader’s knowledge, self-perception and worldview (Gogan, in this volume, p. 8). In less theoretical and more practical terms, the National Center on Education and the Economy pointed out that processing, retaining and synthesizing large amounts of information without support, or understanding non-verbal data in graphs, charts and other visuals are essential in preparing students for any vocation (NCEE, 2013, p. 7). And there is plenty of evidence to show that even business experts are aware of the various cognitive and interpersonal advantages of good reading (Hyatt, 2015). Yet, it looks like especially in the less privileged institutions of higher education, the students’ reading experiences tend to be more limited.

Before we would look at the data that show these signs, it would, perhaps be helpful to highlight a few, lesser known facts about a small sub-group of two-year colleges, the TCUs or tribal colleges and universities, where small sets of data used in this chapter were collected.

## Introducing the Tribal College

Within the category of two-year colleges, tribal colleges represent a small (35–38 schools),<sup>1</sup> but culturally and politically significant group. The first TCUs were founded during and after the civil rights era with the purpose of creating a more supportive and culturally more positive learning environment for Native American students, who have been conspicuously underrepresented in the U.S. college educated population. In addition to the typical dual function of vocational training and academic preparation in two-year colleges, tribal colleges also endorse the mission of preserving the Native American cultural tradition and language. TCUs vary in size and location, but they all share a few characteristics: The majority of students come from low-income families and are first generation college students; the schools often struggle for funding from a variety of public and private sources; similarly, their small but dedicated faculty enjoy fewer privileges, lower pay and more extensive teaching and administrative work load compared to other, non-tribal two-year colleges. In the small tribal college where the reading surveys reported in this chapter were conducted, out of the 191 students who between 2008 and 2011 responded to the student profile questions attached to their admission

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1 The actual number of TCUs varies due to suspended or pending accreditation.

tests, 56% reported their annual family income under \$20,000, and 48% said they were unemployed. Eighty-four percent on the admission test survey claimed that neither of their parents has a bachelor's degree, and 65% said neither of their parents has an associate degree (Melis, 2013). Geographical isolation often adds to the disadvantage: According to the admission test student profile survey, 46% of the responding students travel between 10–25 miles, 20% between 25–50 miles, and 8% more than 50 miles daily to get to school. Considering the severe winter weather during most of the school year in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, these students literally have to go extra miles to achieve success in college (Melis, 2013).

Faculty in TCUs are also in a somewhat marginalized position. In accordance with the culturally appropriate egalitarian spirit, faculty in many TCUs are addressed by first names, work under the same contracts as college staff, and are “instructors,” not “professors.” A 2003 report commissioned by the American Indian College Fund concluded that with all adjustments for inflation, “current annual salaries at mainstream, public 2-year colleges are likely to exceed TCU salaries by almost \$10,000” (Voorhees, 2003).<sup>2</sup> Only 11.3% of TCU faculty have earned a Ph.D., compared to 20% in public two-year colleges, 72.6% in public comprehensive four-year colleges and 84.8% in public research universities (U.S. Department of Education data cited in Voorhees, 2003, p. 4). In a small TCU like the one I conducted the reading survey in, several faculty fulfill multiple functions of advising students, administering programs and grants, supervising charter schools, or running some program related project or facility (e.g., fitness center, cultural events, on-campus internet and computer technology, or sustainable farming) in addition to teaching a full load of classes (minimum 15 credits), often with overload or online classes added to supplement income.

Faculty in two-year colleges, in general and compared to four-year college faculty, seldom engage in theoretical discussions or rely on published research in decisions related to their daily work as Tinberg and Nadeau (2010) reckoned. Faculty meetings are rare, and typically are dedicated to the goal of serving the student population more efficiently rather than to the discussion of pedagogical or theoretical matters (Tinberg & Nadeau, 2010). There is rarely, if ever, time to do research on any matter, and research, when it is done, is limited to gaining comparable data (cut-off scores on admission tests; caps on class sizes) from other institutions for administrative purposes.

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2 Although these data are dated, there are no more recent surveys available. The current President of the American Indian College Fund, Cheryl Crazy Bull, confirmed in personal communication that efforts have been made to call attention to this situation after the 2003 study, yet, the author has plenty of anecdotal and personal experience to testify that TCU faculty still work under very harsh circumstances compared to other, non-tribal two-year colleges, and are not even close to enjoying some of the benefits of faculty in four-year colleges (e.g., tenure; release time when taking administrative responsibilities; support for conferences or publication; closeness of research libraries).

This sketchy background was necessary to put the rest of this paper in context by stressing that neither the student nor the teacher survey was created to address some institutional need; its results were not shared beyond personal (but often passionate and involved) discussions with individual faculty members. In addition, because of the small number of participants in the survey and the outlier character of the school, the findings should be viewed as testimonial, illustrative examples with very low level of generalizability.

## Participants in the Surveys

Since the students taking the surveys were all students in a two-year tribal college, it would be assumed that they are Native Americans. However, the definition of Native Americans is not a simple task.<sup>3</sup> To receive federal funding, TCUs are typically required to maintain a 51% Native American enrollment. For reporting purposes, Native Americans are those who possess a valid ID card as members of a federally recognized tribe. Since tribal card ownership entitles the owner to access various health, education and other social services, most students who are eligible own a card. In Michigan, there are 13 federally recognized tribes, but in the tribal college, there are many students who do not have a tribal membership card for a variety of reasons: The student could not document Native American ancestry or failed to meet some of the administrative membership requirements; the student is affiliated with bands or tribes that are not federally recognized, or they are affiliated with bands or tribes residing on Canadian territory on the other side of the St Mary's River.

Native American identity is loosely defined by locals as following the traditional lifestyle, being involved in cultural events (ceremonies, powwows), or, as they often say, "walking the red road." Individuals in the community qualify for these criteria to varying degrees irrespective of whether they own a tribal card or not; some who own a card self-identify as Native American (or, more specifically, Anishinaabe); other card owners don't. In spite of heroic efforts to revive the native language (Anishnaabemowin), very few speak it fluently, and among the younger college students almost none. Decades of forced assimilationist policies and divisive distribution of benefits lead to the situation today that best can be characterized by fragmented indigenous identity with hopes for moderate cultural revival. Under these circumstances, it would be difficult to say that the small set of data presented here is representative of "Native American" tribal college students; more realistically, the data are representative of a small tribal-college with a geographically isolated, low-income, rural student population.

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3 A report on Native Americans published by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 2003 was titled "A quiet crisis," and Native Americans were called the "invisible minority."

## The 2010 Reading Survey

In 2010, the author of this chapter was the honored recipient of the American Indian College Fund's Mellon research grant, which is typically awarded to science oriented projects, or to faculty working on a doctoral degree. The grant made it possible to design and process 4 small surveys and a focus group interview with the help of two part-time work-study students and to write up a 90-page report while I was teaching only one writing class for a semester. One of the four surveys was the *Reading Survey 2010*. Forty-nine students from a small tribal college in Michigan's Upper Peninsula responded to a paper and pencil survey in their college writing class. In spite of the small size of the sample, it represented quite well the total population of the college: almost equal number of both genders; majority of respondents were younger students (82%<sup>4</sup> under 30; 48% 21 or younger); 33(67%) of the respondents were tribal members, 15 (30%) non-tribal; one (2%) did not answer the question). Four aspects of the survey findings will be highlighted here: The responding tribal college students' not school related readings (Table 1); the students' self-reported use of textbook reading strategies (Table 2); the students' self-reported difficulty with various aspects of reading (Figure 1), and their most memorable reading experiences.

**Table 1. Non-school- related Readings of Surveyed Tribal College Students**

Most typical non-school related readings	Percentages of mention (answers n=92; students n=49)
Local newspapers	23%
Entertainment magazines about celebrities, fashion etc	18%
Sports magazines	16%
Fiction	14%
News magazines (Time, Newsweek)	9%
Tribal news or information	8%
Gardening magazines	4%
Non-fiction	2%

*Note. Numbers do not add up to 100 due to rounding.*

Table 1 summarizes 92 responses from 49 responding students, with an average of 1.8 types of reading selected from a list or added under "other, specify." The most popular choice was the local newspaper, which strongly suggests that the

<sup>4</sup> Because of the small size of the sample, percentage data are added for easier interpretation. These percentage data often do not add up to 100, an inevitable rounding error in percentages gained from small base numbers.



reading served efferent, practical purposes of finding a contractor in the classified ads section, or was driven by curiosity for events (births, deaths, weddings) in the community, but this choice can also indicate vigorous interest in local tribal politics typical of the region. The local newspaper also often covers environmental issues, such as the protection of endangered animals, or the hazards of oil pipelines. Next to local news, national entertainment and celebrity news was found as the second most popular reading material. Although high interest in celebrity news usually suggests superficiality, my conversations with students convinced me that reading celebrity news is, in a way, closest to my students' pre-college experience with critical thinking because celebrity news teaches them to separate truth from falsehood and perceived image from reality. This hypothesis, however, needs to be tested because there is also evidence that many students fail to recognize celebrity news as manipulative and fictional discourse.

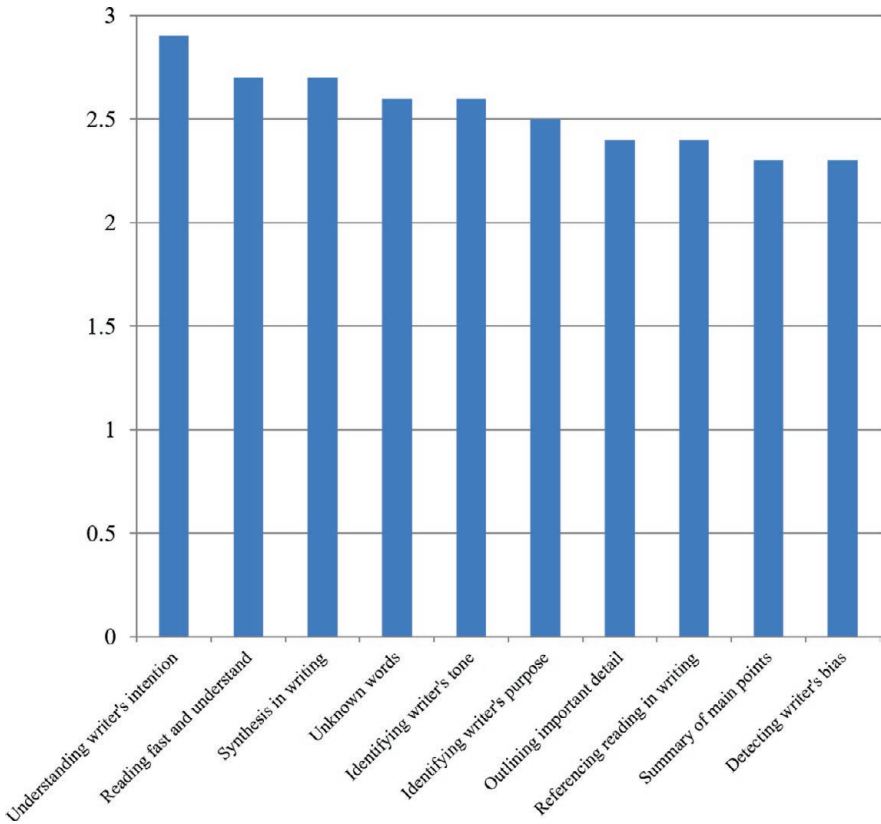
**Table 2. Surveyed Tribal College Students' Use of Textbook Reading Strategies**

<b>Textbook Reading Strategy</b>	<b>Percentage of all Selected Reading Strategies</b>
Previewing chapters and scanning for general idea	17%
Underlining or highlighting important concepts	15%
Making notes on the margin	11%
Making notes in a notebook	10%
Reading the text out loud	10%
Looking up words in dictionary	9%
Guessing word meanings from context	7%
Writing questions on the margin	6%
Discussing the text with other students	6%
Making notes after reading the textbook	5%

*Note.*  $N$  students=49.  $N$  strategies selected=173. Numbers do not include the five students who said they do not read textbooks.

The second set of survey findings is related to the surveyed tribal college students' textbook reading experience. Since it was reasonable to assume that these students' most typical encounter with expository prose is through reading their textbooks, the survey used the textbook reading situation as an example to find out what reading strategies these students commonly use. All students who responded to the survey were enrolled in one of the four English/writing classes offered at the time (two at pre-college level; two first-year college composition). Around 30% of the students had taken pre-college level English classes at the TCU, where reading strategies are covered in detail and practiced regularly. The 49 tribal college student

respondents mentioned 173 strategies from a list of 10, which means they all use an average of 3.6 strategies, while five (3%) of the respondents claimed that they do not read their textbooks.



*Figure 1. Surveyed tribal college students' average difficulty rank list of elements of reading on a scale of 3 (n=49)*

Noticeably, the reading strategies that assume deeper engagement with the text, such as writing questions on the margin, discussing the text with others, or writing after reading were the least frequently mentioned in the sample. We know from experience that these students heavily depend on the expected cash from the end-of-semester resale of their textbooks; therefore, it is no surprise that they typically stay away from “pencil and book” reading strategies. The popularity of highlighting, however, seems to contradict this assumption unless highlights reduce the re-sale value of textbooks less significantly than copious marginal notes. Another problem with highlighting texts is that it often turns into a mechanical habit with little or no mindful selection involved, whereas writing annotations or questions on the margins cannot be done without some engagement with the text.

It is also noteworthy that the surveyed tribal college students do not frequently use dictionaries probably because print dictionaries are not readily available anymore, and textbook reading often takes place away from computers. Textbook reading out loud was a strategy of choice for 10% in the sample. The explanation is that many students with dyslexia or attention deficit (mostly undiagnosed among these students for lack of access, high cost and shame associated with diagnostic labeling) find that reading out loud is the only way they can focus on the text. In the small study area outside my office, I often encounter two or three students, huddled together around the round table and taking turns reading their science, “sosh”(=sociology), or health and fitness course books. This technique may help readers stay on task, but unless discussion ensues, reading textbooks out loud does not involve analysis, interpretation, evaluation or reflection.

One question in the *Reading Survey 2010* asked students to mark on a Likert scale ranging from “very easy” to “very difficult” how difficult the listed elements of reading are for them. Because of the small size of the sample, scores for each element were averaged and a rank list of difficulty was generated. It is worth noting that none of the elements of reading rated below 2. In other words, no element of reading was found easy, not even the lowest in the rank list (see Figure 1). Follow up conversations with students were used to resolve the contradiction that “understanding the writer’s intention” was found most difficult while “detecting the writer’s bias” earned the lowest average difficulty score. The interviewed students explained that bias is easy to see. In fact, they consider everything that is not factual “just an opinion,” therefore, biased, which is a common oversimplification learned somewhere perhaps in high school. Similarly, students explained that understanding the writer’s intention is difficult because no one can tell what another person has in mind. They did not seem to have acquired the idea that readers can make fairly reliable inferences from textual clues. It does not take the supernatural ability to read minds, just the learnable ability to recognize metadiscursive markers, statements of purpose, and other textual clues. With all the limitations of self-reported data considered, these findings suggest a mismatch between the surveyed students’ articulation of “bias,” “understanding the writer’s intention” and that of most college English textbooks. This gap or mismatch would deserve more analysis followed by an adjustment in teaching materials that would acknowledge the need for elaboration, models and practice to support underprepared readers.

Finally, one more outcome of the *2010 Reading Survey* was the responses to the question that asked students to list the three most memorable books in their life. Fifty-seven percent mentioned three or more books, 14% mentioned only two books, 16% mentioned one book, and 7% mentioned no book. These data were not worse than the Pew Research Center’s comparable national data on the decline of book reading between 1978 and 2014 (Weissmann, 2014). The students’ mixed or missing reading experiences are also consistent with national data on the decline

of reading in high school and middle school (Jolliffe & Harl, 2008; “What kids are reading,” 2014). It was more alarming to find out, however, what those memorable readings were and also that 7 (14%) of the readers mentioned books that they hated to read in high school (one student just saying “I hated them all.”). The list of 97 books mentioned by the respondents from the tribal college included some staple high school readings (*The Diary of Anne Frank*, *To Kill a Mocking Bird*, *The Old Man and the Sea*); showed signs of young adult literature (YA) rapidly making its way into high school reading lists; but most of the books students fondly remembered were for much lower age level (e.g., Roald Dahl, Dr. Seuss, the Berenstain Bear books etc.). The mention of these titles and authors suggests that these students had memorable reading experiences in elementary and middle school, which is wonderful, but reading in high school was not equally memorable or pleasant (some students did not remember names or titles and wrote references, such as “Lenny and George,” presumably referring to Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men*). The Renaissance Learning Center’s study on what young people read also recognized the spread of young adult literature while Cunningham and Stanovich (2001) provided evidence that if young people do not read more challenging books and watch television or movies instead, they accumulate a deficiency in their decoding skills, vocabulary development, and, in general, will lack practice in dealing with complex reading materials or life situations. Reschly (2010) reported data that connect limited early reading experiences with accumulated academic disadvantage in later schooling that also correlates with dropout rates. In other words, the surveyed students entered college with a gap between their reading experiences and the expectation of more complex reading (at least of their textbooks) in a two-year tribal college.

## Five Years Later: Is the Downturn Ending?

After an article from the Mellon research grant project was published (Melis, 2013), I designed a small, online survey that 33 students from my College Composition II: Content Area Research class took. The purpose of this small survey was to see if there is any change in students’ reading experiences five years after the *2010 Reading Survey*. The College Composition II class focuses on preparing students for writing college papers, and the typical first assignment is to read a non-fiction article and write a summary-response essay to acquire the basics of correct paraphrasing, citing, and source attribution. Since the students were reading Mitchell Stephens’s “The Death of Reading” article (first published in 1991), it seemed a good idea to conduct the electronic survey and share and discuss the results in class.

This time I was more interested in finding out whether these students perceive a shift in reading habits and skills and if they consider a presumed decline to be a problem. We had a short discussion about reading and other forms of learning.

The term “avid reader” was defined as describing a passionate reader; oral learning or learning from listening to elders was mentioned as valuable source of knowledge comparable to books; and e-reading was defined as the reading of the future, with a virtually unlimited number of books stored on one small device at affordable prices, accessible for everyone. After these discussions, the survey showed that 14 students (44%) consider themselves avid readers while 18 (56%) do not read much, learn by listening, read only for school or only online (See Table 3). Nobody thought that not reading is a good thing even though traditional, oral or hands-on learning were mentioned as equally valuable sources of learning. While students are aware of the oral tradition and value their interaction with elders, they don’t think that these traditional forms can fully replace, instead of just supplementing, modern print or electronic literacy.

**Table 3. Students Self-perception as Readers in a TCU, 2014-2015 (n=33)**

Which description fits you best as a reader?	Number of responses (n=32)	Percent of responses
I consider myself an avid reader	14	44%
I read only for school	4	12%
I don’t even read for school. I learn by listening	2	6%
I read only online	2	6%
I am not much of a reader, but I should be	10	31%
I am not that much of a reader, but it’s ok	0	0%

*Note.* Only 32 responses were recorded for this question. In computer surveys, some responses do not get recorded; respondents may miss the question or forget to submit their answers. Percent data do not add up for 100 due to errors caused by rounding.

Looking at the written answers about one book that affected these tribal college students as readers and that they would like to pass on to their children, again, it was found that the majority of memorable readings come from middle school; many respondents did not remember titles or authors, ten (34%) mentioned a title only, without explaining the effect of reading; those who explained the significance of the book predominantly mentioned emotions, reinforcement of family values, or perfunctory reasons like “It is taught in most high schools and I would appreciate if my children read this book.” Most remarkably, books from such nationally and internationally respected Native American authors as Sherman Alexie, Scott Momaday, Joy Harjo, Leslie Silko, or especially Richard Wagamese, Thomas King and Louise Erdrich, who all are of Anishinaabe/Ojibwe origin, are conspicuously missing from the memorable books list of both the 2010 and the 2015 surveys. This inexplicable absence of these culturally most relevant readings from these tribal college students’ reading experiences is a symptom of a much deeper crisis of

reading that would deserve immediate attention of those who make decisions about high school reading curricula.<sup>5</sup> Three characteristic answers to the question “Name one book that had a memorable effect on your life and that you would like your children to read” are quoted in Figure 2.

*I cannot remember the title of the book, but I remember reading a novel when I was in middle school that greatly affected me. It was about a mother who lost her child in a jet-ski accident. It was so sad. I remember how happy they were before the accident and how depressed the mother was after. It really showed me that life is short and one never knows when their life will end. It taught me to appreciate my loved ones because time is limited. I would really like my child to read this book in middle/high school. For the sheer purpose of teaching my child to value family and loved ones.*

*Knight. It's a book about the Holocaust and it had my attention though out the whole book. I normally don't read books but this book had my full focus and i could not put the book down for anything. [sic]*

*The Silmarillion was probably the one book that had the most effect on me. I read the book my senior year of high school and haven't encountered a reading of such great magnitude yet. I also feel that if children pushed them selves to read more books like the Silmarillion would be an easier read and would be a great read.[sic]*

*Figure 2. Three typical answers of surveyed TCU students to the question, “Name one book that had a memorable effect on your life and that you would like your children to read.”*

After reviewing these responses, one is inclined to raise the questions why students do not read more, and why don't they read texts that would have more memorable and more clearly articulated effect on their thinking. One typical answer usually is that technology (texting), social networking and television or movies crowd out the books, but this small survey did not confirm this common sense assumption, contrary to what many teachers believe<sup>6</sup> (see Appendix A: Teachers' Voices). Ten students (32%) said that their biggest challenge is to find interesting books to read; twelve (37%) blamed time-consuming hobbies for taking up most of their free

5 One explanation is that the two-year tribal college surveyed, in an effort to emphasize vocational training and employable skills, eliminated all literature classes. There is one Native American Literature class, however, that the school started offering, but it would require stronger administrative support to maintain consistent enrollment.

6 The college has Internet access, but we have no information about the students' home access. In general, the students participating in the surveys have cellphones, and some have smart phones, too, which are mostly used for games, music, texting, but not reading. Classrooms are equipped with laptops for all students, and so is the Library and the Learning Center.

time. These hobbies, most probably, are the numerous video games that glue tribal youth to screens instead of books. Not finding interesting books sounds almost absurd in an age when all the world's classics are available free of charge online in the Gutenberg Galaxy; when books for all ages and interests are available at a relatively affordable price on Kindle or through Amazon, not to mention the small, but very responsive public library on campus that serves both students and the community. The library has access to interlibrary loan, ebooks, and other electronic resources and uses its small budget quite effectively to order good quality contemporary fiction and non-fiction. In addition, they also have a very good (although not very well organized) Native American collection. It is true, however, that finding scholarly or academic resources, especially ones that are at an accessible reading level, is very difficult in this location because most of the scholarly or professional electronic data bases that are taken for granted in four-year colleges are forbiddingly expensive and not even cost-effective for a small, geographically isolated tribal school.

*I try to read when I get the time too, I definitely would like to read more. I find it hard to find the time to read. My mother reads about 2 books a week though and loves to read. [sic]*

*My mother reads every night; where my dad, on the other hand, hardly ever reads. I feel as though I am right in the middle, I read often, but not every day. I have the feeling most people my age aren't like this though, less and less students seem to read for enjoyment, they'd rather play video games or watch tv.*

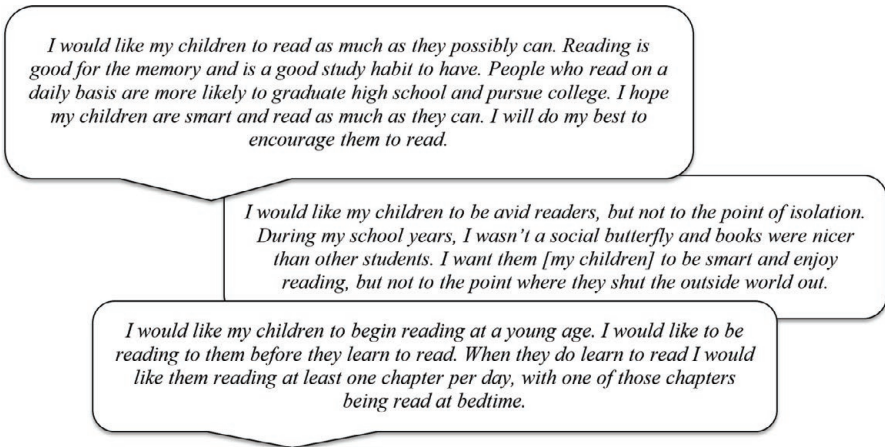
*My reading habits are vastly different than those of my parents' generation. My parents read for fun. This generation feels as if reading is a chore. I can't speak for everyone in this generation though, because some truly enjoy reading [...] I am a more 'hands-on' learner, or if I listen to someone explain a certain subject that will help me more than reading the instructions. I have a very short attention span and if I must read it has to be in completely quiet. I have a very hard time concentrating.*

*Figure 3. Three typical answers from surveyed TCU students to the question "Briefly explain how your reading habits are different (if they are) from those of your parents' generation."*

Suspecting cultural influence or negative motivation coming from the environment, one question asked the respondents to compare their reading habits to those of their parents. Typical responses appear in Figure 3. The respondents, with a few exceptions, admitted that the parents (mothers, in particular, were more frequently mentioned than fathers) read more. Access, motivation, and special learning needs or disabilities came up most frequently as reasons for not reading more or more often. Perusing more among these answers would reveal more boredom, lack of interest or joy in reading, as well as conflict with television, video games (but not so much with computers), awareness of easy electronic access and of the need for change. The "hands-on" learner represents a small, but quite reticent group of tribal

college students who would need help to overcome a fixed mindset of dichotomy between “hands-on” and book learning often reinforced by various rigid theories of learning styles.

In spite of these alarming numbers and voices, students overall appear to be optimistic about the future of reading (mostly presuming that technology is the key), and want their children to be good readers. These students confirm Mitchell Stephens’s observation that “Ironically, but not coincidentally” reading is “fading from our culture at the very moment its importance is . . . established” (Stephens, 1991, para 5). When asked about their overall evaluation of the future of reading, 25 (78%) of the 32 respondents chose the answer “Reading is still alive; it just moved on to Kindle and other electronic devices”; two (6%) selected “Reading books is no longer important. We can learn all we need from the Internet,” not realizing, perhaps, the contradiction since most information on the Internet also requires reading. (This assumption may not be fully accurate as students frequently report using YouTube sources to learn anything from changing a tire to using semi-colons). Optimism about the future was voiced in positive comments in responses to the question “Briefly explain what kind of readers would you like your children to be.” See three typical examples of responses in Figure 4.



*Figure 4. Responses to the question, “Briefly explain what kind of readers would you like your children to be.”*

## Teachers’ Comments on their Students’ Reading in a Two-year Tribal College

The next logical step in this inquiry was to find out how, if at all, the instructors sense the invisible crisis of reading in a small, two-year tribal college. The online



survey I sent out to all full-time instructors (14) yielded 12 (85%) responses from all programs, including science, social science, health and fitness, early childhood education and business. (Unfortunately, no response was entered by the computer studies faculty, who missed the survey). All these programs currently offer certificates, associate degrees or are included in general studies preparing students for transfer. The basic online survey program used for data collections does not allow separating data by segments of responses, but the open ended questions asked all respondents to verbally identify their area of teaching. The first question, “How important are good reading skills in your area of teaching” yielded an almost unanimous response: Ten (90%) instructors believe that good reading skills are very important; one (9%) believes good reading is important (one response was missed or not recorded). On a scale of 5, the average importance rating of reading was 4.91. Similarly, although not so unanimously, teachers agreed or strongly agreed that poor reading skills are one of the main reasons why students struggle with learning in their class, with an average agreement rate of 4 on a 5-point Likert scale.

Then the respondent faculty ranked 12 specific types and skills<sup>7</sup> of reading by importance in their area of teaching. The skills included three more complex skills involved in college-level reading (paraphrasing, interpretation, evaluation) while the rest were related to finding and retaining information from reading. In addition, the survey was intended to gather some data on the responding teachers’ perceived importance of fiction and non-fiction books in their students’ reading experiences. The results confirm the assumption discussed earlier about the more practical, vocational orientation of teaching in two-year colleges. The most important function of reading, according to the surveyed tribal college teachers, is to read and follow instructions precisely. The finding is corroborated by anecdotal evidence: Teachers frequently complain that students do not read instructions well, or do not read instructions at all on assignment sheets, or they read textbooks, but do not retain content well. However, as research in many different forms is becoming indispensable in any area of study, and as it increasingly involves searching the Internet, the importance of evaluating texts for reliability—a complex analytical skill—is also becoming increasingly important. The rank list of importance of types and skills of reading, based on the average rating by 12 full-time teachers, is shown in Table 4.

A more specific list of text types or genres were also rank listed (see Table 5). It is worth noting that paraphrasing and selecting passages for quoting were considered relatively less important in spite of accumulating anecdotal evidence (and

7 The terms “skills” or “types” were not precisely defined for the purpose of using an accessible language. Similarly, when teachers were asked to rank text types or genres, no precise applied linguistic definition of genres was implied. I tried to use terms that are commonly known by all faculty and selected categories by their practical familiarity. I tested these items through conversations with faculty.

actual increase in the number of instances) of plagiarized papers. Although techniques of paraphrasing, quoting and source attribution, strictly speaking, are considered to be the responsibility of English/writing teachers, the task is too complex and time consuming, especially if it is not supported by all faculty giving guidance to students on acceptable ways of incorporating read information in students' writing in each specific content area. However, as such important professional matters are rarely discussed among faculty beyond personal exchanges, this survey demonstrates the relative disadvantage of two-year colleges in terms of lack of professional consensus. In other words, writing across the curriculum is endorsed, but not really implemented, and the faculty is not unified in valuing (or even articulating) some of the more complex reading skills. Typically, responsibility for poor reading or writing skills is placed squarely on the shoulders of the Communication (or English) Department. This attitude often masks lack of understanding that complex literacy skills need a consistent and supportive environment to grow. In addition, tribal college instructors often lack advanced college degrees themselves, and—sometimes even admittedly—lack knowledge of how to support their students' reading and writing skills.

**Table 4. Average Importance Rating of Specific Reading Skills by Faculty in a TCU**

<b>Twelve Reading Skills from Most Important to Least Important (n=12)</b>	<b>Average rating (1=most important)</b>
1. Reading instructions precisely and following them	3.14
2. Reading to get the general or main ideas fast	4.6
3. Evaluating texts for reliability of information	4.8
4. Reading for finding new information	4.88
5. Reading for retaining content	4.89
6. Interpreting reading for multiple possible meanings	5.12
7. Reading to find specific details fast	5.33
8. Reading and paraphrasing content	7.0
9. Reading and memorizing content	7.73
10. Reading books of non-fiction	8.09
11. Reading and marking passages to quote	8.22
12. Reading books of fiction	10.33

It certainly appears to be the case that reading books, and reading fiction, are no longer seen as closely related to learning to be good readers in college, and the fluid spectrum of efferent and aesthetic reading is becoming broken up and separated. The once typical college experience of reading great books is being slowly

eroded, without being replaced by any kind of books. Although the average ratings of types and skills of reading that faculty consider important are not wide spread, no one ranked great fiction or, for that matter, informative books as most important. As a matter of fact, no instructor assigns books to read other than the textbook, with the exception of one history teacher, who requires Voltaire's *Candide* in his world history class.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 5. TCU Teachers' Rank List of Most Important Genres for Students to Read in College**

Genre	Average rating (1=most important); n=12
Short, informative texts (non-fiction)	2.50
Quality news magazines	3.64
Long, informative books (non-fiction)	3.67
Peer reviewed articles (scholarly, professional)	4.20
Anything they like and enjoy (young adult books, fiction)	4.22
Local newspapers	4.70
Great books of classical literature	4.78

Research papers, however, are still required in some of the higher-level content classes, but those research papers are increasingly based on information from short, informative pieces available on the Internet, and quality news magazines are the most reliable sources that teachers can realistically expect students to read and incorporate. In addition to the general reading crisis, two-year colleges tend to have a larger percentage of students who enter college with pre-college level reading and writing skills, making the research paper an increasingly impossible mission, not just because of the writing, but now because of the low level of reading skills. Instructors of science and social studies sometimes require source readings from peer reviewed periodicals; however, it is unlikely that many students are prepared both in terms of background knowledge and the refined reading skills that reading such texts effectively would require.

Viewed from the vantage point of a small, two-year tribal college, college-level reading needs to be (re)defined. As the anonymous author almost two-hundred years ago recognized, education came "with a book in hand" and with an

<sup>8</sup> Retrieving the age old "literary canon" debate is beyond the scope of this paper. It is worth noting, however, that after the critical revision/rejection of the canon, there seems to be a confusion in the high school community about what to read or how to teach good reading. Many of the popular young adult books, in spite of their important role in motivating young readers to read, arguably do not prepare students sufficiently for the complexity of textbooks and other non-fiction materials commonly read in college (Cunningham and Stanovich, 2001; "What kids are reading," 2014).

expectation that it will bring a new, fearful power of learning. The power of education has become part of oppressive colonization and has been abused in many ways, the discussion of which is not pertinent to the topic of this chapter. It would not be surprising if these tribal college students were hostile toward books and reading because “education by the book” has been typically used to eradicate their cultural heritage, but the data presented in this chapter do not show evidence for hostility. Although a few students believe that they do not learn well from books, amazingly, their ancestors were generous and wisely learned to value the book in spite of enduring suffering from the imposing hand holding that book. Most students are surrounded by parents and elders who read ferociously, and who are the most loyal patrons of the community library located on campus. It is safe to conclude that nothing in the survey indicates that, at least in one TCU, students negatively associate reading with colonization.

## (Re)Definition of College-Level Reading: Bringing the Book in from the Cold?

The data selectively collected for this chapter from a small, two-year tribal college were meant to illustrate how the general neglect and misunderstanding of reading in college can affect a particularly vulnerable student population disadvantaged by geographical isolation, low socio-economic status, and a cultural heritage of ambivalence about formal education. There is a need for (re)defining college-level reading to acknowledge the diversity of college experiences and the growing gap between high school reading and college expectation as well as the gap between two-year and four-year colleges. However, as many two-year college students consider transfer to earn a bachelor’s degree and go even further, all of us who teach in two-year colleges should find ways to decrease or at least bridge these gaps by reconsidering the role of reading in our teaching.

One way of addressing the problems is to give in or give up. As an instructor of mathematics said, “I don’t think we can continue to assume that they [our students] are readers and capable of comprehending what they read. I hate to say it, but we need to change our teaching strategies to include less reading” (see Appendix A: Teachers’ voices). This response, so it seems, has been quite typical in our college classrooms, as Anson’s anecdotal introduction to his chapter in this volume also shows. Textbook publishers also read the writing on the wall and design texts for students who don’t read. One textbook of college writing, for example, which just came out with its 6<sup>th</sup> edition, shows a mixed response to the declining reading skills of students. The author began including readings in the 5<sup>th</sup> edition, but made the chapters and the explanations of grammar points shorter, with fewer examples. The added readings are one-and-a-half-page essays, written by “student writers,” mixed

with brief, blog-like texts, or short excerpts from professional staff writers, followed by multiple-choice comprehension and vocabulary tests. The text itself shows signs of simplification. For example, the word “comprehension” is replaced with “understanding the reading.” These kinds of revisions may not be a general trend in all textbooks and they may have been inspired by other factors than the students’ changed reading habits, but seven (58%) instructors in the teacher survey agreed strongly or more or less that textbooks in their field have been simplified over the past few editions; five (41%) responding faculty disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Another way of addressing the decline of reading is to “force” students to read (otherwise they won’t, as one teacher assumes), or as a social studies instructor phrased it, “it behooves the colleges to require some readings of the classics,” and the same instructor was brave enough to suggest books, including some controversial titles. The unpopularity of such measures along with the ineffectiveness of isolated incidents can be mitigated by a joint effort of faculty, for example, by taking turns in choosing one book every semester that every student in a college would read, and every instructor would agree on designing assignments related to the “book of the semester” in a creative way, seeking connections with the book in their disciplinary area. One good example of such efforts is the Common Read programs presented in this volume by Maloy et al. Forcing students to read, however, can easily become counterproductive unless it goes together with meaningful learning activities. Again, it is helpful to bear Louise Rosenblatt’s ideas in mind that it is not so much what students read that matters, but how they read it. Unless the reading is followed by some analysis, evaluation and reflection, it may not create the much needed transformative learning experience (see Gogan in this volume). Therefore, it is necessary to supplement the required reading assignment with a more systematic approach outlined in this volume in Anson’s chapter. This approach not only connects reading to writing, but it also sets up four criteria for making such efforts meaningful: the reading assignment has to be motivating, cognitively complex, creative in its design and resonant with collaborative learning (Anson, in this volume).

There are more productive ways of addressing the emerging crisis of reading than by apathetic submission or by force. Carillo (2015) Anson, Davies and others in this volume provide not only compelling reasons for paying attention to and a general framework for approaching reading, but also examples of activities that all teachers, not only those who teach first-year composition, can apply. The suggested assignments go beyond the routine comprehension questions and require students to summarize and respond to chapters, shorter, but important passages, or related articles in creative ways, for a particular audience or purpose. Four instructors (33%) in my survey admitted that they don’t expect students to learn from the book, and they use gestures, images, Power Point presentations or other ways to communicate the textbook content to students. (Average agreement on a scale of 5 was 2.65). But what if these instructors assigned these tasks to students who would be responsible

for creating the visual-verbal conversions of texts or textbook chapters for the class? These assignments would “force” the students to read the chapter carefully and to understand its content well enough to be able to explain it to others. Collaboration with librarians on taking students to the library and showing them how to find sources there; source evaluation exercises, modeled annotation (teacher shows what to underline, how to write marginal notes, then students can do the same with subsequent readings) and handouts with directed questions can help students acquire higher-level reading processes and develop good reading habits.

In 2008, Gerald Graff in a seminal article bemoaning the deplorable condition of college writing classes suggested that college writing faculty should end their misery, isolation and abuse by pairing up with other faculty and teach writing in collaboration to bring writing “in from the cold.” The core of his proposal was that faculty has to “reach a consensus on what they are looking for in student writing” instead of pointing fingers and placing blame on writing instructors for poor writing in college. Perhaps now it is time to bring the book and reading “in from the cold.” Faculty has to collaborate even more on reading because there is no equivalent of first year composition class teaching “first year reading” to be blamed for students’ inadequate reading habits. (Good examples of such collaboration are presented by Maloy et al. in this volume). As Scholes (2002) pointed out, unlike bad writing, bad reading is not visible, but if we could see how poorly our students read, we would be equally shocked. Now the next step is to accept what many who did research on reading found out; namely, that we have to teach and model the cognitively complex reading processes we expect from our students to perform and also to transfer to various academic and career related reading situations because it won’t automatically happen (Anson and Davies in this volume; Carillo, 2013).

College-level reading has to be (re)defined, book by book, text by text, with faculty reaching a reasonable degree of consensus on what to read, how to evaluate a text for credibility, how to find, analyze and interpret information, and how to apply a broad spectrum of efferent and aesthetic reading essential not only for college-level academic work, but for making sense of an increasingly complex world around us.

## Notes

1. The author would like to thank Mickey Parish, President, and Steve Yanni, Director of Development and Research, at Bay Mills Community College for their approval of and support for this project.
2. Since the data interpreted from 2010 were part of a grant funded research (American Indian College Fund) that was cleared by our institutional research board and the sample of the follow up was considered both too small and low risk, I

was recommended not to go through the usual IRS procedure. Nevertheless, all student and teacher participants in my surveys were informed about the purpose of the survey and the use of their information; they were given the option not to participate and were thanked for their contribution.

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## Appendix A: Teachers' Voices

Excerpts from content area instructors of a two-year tribal college responding to questions on what they expect from their students reading for their classes, and what they consider as strengths and weaknesses in today's students' reading skills:

Science instructor: Students are able to find information on the web, but they lack the skill to know what exactly they found and process it. Processing and retaining what they have is weak. Reading will remain vital in education. Students do not read as in depth or as challenging material as in the past. Hopefully, there will be more access to peer-reviewed articles, so students will need to be able to read these texts.

Social studies instructors: I think reading classic Western literature is vital although I do not think students for the most part read any of it. I think it behooves colleges to require some reading of classics like the Persian letters, Candide, The vicar of Wakefield, or even more touchy books like Justine, Catcher in the rye, and even the Scarlet letter.

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Students will continue to rely on the visual electronic medium and not read anything of great import unless forced to by teachers.



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Unless it is one Social Media or the Internet, I do not think students read anything voluntarily. Sociology students are used to reading in quick bites. They have trouble reading a long research document for analysis. If the research is summarized, especially into a story-like manner, students are captivated by the story and will generally read and understand the summary.

Mathematics: My students need to be able to read the textbook and grasp some of the content. I don't believe many of my students read much of anything. I don't think we can continue to assume that they are readers and capable of comprehending what they read. I hate to say it, but we need to change our teaching strategies to include less reading.

Early Childhood Education: I see today's students as users of technology to solve problems. Students are more engaged in the process of learning if they are given the opportunity to think about information, not just "fill in bubbles." For example, I assess student learning with at least 50% essay response. The essay questions are questions students should be asking themselves as they read the chapters. I want students to develop a metacognitive approach to learning: read, read, reflect, apply. I ask students questions about the reading, followed by how will you apply this to the work you will be doing.

English: I teach English. Today even students who say they are avid readers read books that I am not familiar with. This creates an enormous gulf between me and my students. When I was a student, some books were shared by most people around me. Sometimes we viciously disagreed about the value and meaning of those books, but we were able to have a conversation nonetheless. This is gravely missing today, and it is a struggle to teach anything that involves a text because texts are full of allusions and can be very hard to work through with students without dozens of oral footnotes from the teacher. Technology does not bother me that much: I read on Kindle, too. Another thing that is different today is that my students do not even realize how much easier it is for them to reach those great books that they do not care to read anymore.

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Students do not read. Students have no command of the English language because they have no vocabulary. No vocabulary or articulation is the result of never learning to read.

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I am sorry, but I do not think today's students bring a lot of strengths to college reading tasks. I have seen them misinterpret even Facebook posts. Here is a list of possible reasons for declining reading ability: An insistence on multi-tasking; refusal to turn off/shut out distractions; a deep seated belief that all tasks should be completed within the shortest possible time frame; disinterest in reflection and introspection, stemming from having grown up in a society that occupies itself with massive amounts of external stimuli, leaving no time for quiet examination of ideas. The generation defines itself by online connections rather than values and beliefs. Reading is necessary to form individual values and beliefs. It also tends to be a self-absorbed generation with little interest in the matters beyond their own narrowly defined world. They have little sense of control over their world. A high school curriculum that emphasizes literature over reading for information. A school system that has low expectations for reading to begin with. A rural culture that values social interaction over the introspective activity of reading.

Health and fitness instructor: I see students not reading and learning because it is easier to look up the question online and get an answer, even though they do not understand the answer themselves. All of my classes require extensive reading. There are many formulas, charts, graphs and tons of valuable information including current studies and findings. Students have a hard time with looking at what is a credible material. They tend to look online, and whatever it is that they find must be accurate. But deciding what is actually credible information is hard for them. In the health and fitness industry, there is a lot of false information out there that people read and believe.

## Appendix B: Full Text of the Poem “Sacred Ground”<sup>9</sup>

Sacred Ground  
 O Father Of Education,  
 You Come  
 With A Book In Your Hand.  
 A Monstrous Task;  
 Be Careful,  
 Your Expectations Are Great.  
 The Native People Are  
 Children Of The Earth;  
 Walk Slow and Softly  
 Into These Holy Lands,  
 For The Red Children  
 Are Its Sacred Places.  
 Nurtured With Grace;  
 A Way Of Life,  
 Kept These Human Beings  
 In Spiritual Harmony.  
 The Family Of The Universe:  
 The Fathering Sun.  
 Mother Earth,  
 The Morning Star.  
 And Her Relatives.  
 O Father Of Education,  
 Please Be Careful,  
 For You Have Entered  
 Sacred Ground.

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9 Although I made several attempts, I could not get any information of the author and original context of this poem. I found copies of it hanging in teachers’ offices or on various (English) department notice boards, including one in my own school. With some guesswork, we dated it to the second half of the 1800s, and the inquiry is still on. I found the sentiment in this poem that places reading in a colonial context very important and deserving more inquiry. Overall, my experience is that (modern) education is embraced and supported in the tribal community I work in, but the poem reminded me that books may not always have been welcome around here.