With the fall Common Reading lectures now concluded, I thought you might be interested in what we know thus far from our assessment process. As you know if you have attended a lecture, we hand out a simple, quarter-sheet evaluation to those who attend, and ask that they return it to us when they leave. It is intended to give us a very quick snapshot of who is attending, the reason why they are attending, and how they reacted to the lecture. This fall we have then entered those evaluations into Skylight so that it is easy to see the big picture as well as to tease out some of the details.

The big picture this fall has indeed been BIG: Approximately 2300 students attended the 8 fall lectures, with an average of about 300 students per lecture; of those, 1236 completed an evaluation, or roughly half of all attendees. Most were freshman (72%). To put this information into perspective, this means that slightly less than 10% of our incoming freshman class attended each of the 8 lectures. We also had about 200 students attend the screening of “The Kite Runner” during Week of Welcome, and about 120 students attended the HD 205 event “Life As They Know It” in November. That brings total attendance at fall Common Reading sponsored events to approximately 2600.

As has been true in previous years, almost all (93%) attended the lectures because of a class requirement or for extra credit. The classes that sent the most number of students were our World Civilizations courses, with 53% of attendees reporting they attended because of enrollment either in GenEd 110 or 111. The second largest group (23%) came from Fine Arts 101, with Asia 301 being the third largest at 10%.

The three major questions that we ask those who attend are to rate on a 5-point scale each of the following statements:

1. I found this event interesting
2. I’m inspired to learn more about this topic
3. This event furthered my understanding of some issue of the book (Stones Into Schools)

For question #1, 63% of students responded either agree or strongly agree. If the neutral responses are added in, that figure jumps to 84%.
For question #2, 43% of students responded either agree or strongly agree. If the neutral responses are added in, the figure is 76%
For question #3, 51% of students responded either agree or strongly agree. If the neutral responses are added in, the figure is 76%.

Looking at the individual lectures, those that garnered the strongest positive responses from students were the Veterans Panel (which had the highest ranking across all three questions), the Panel on Islam, and the presentation by Engineers Without Borders. Interestingly, these were the three presentations that included more than one person, and each included at least one student. That may be a format to capitalize on in the future, though the topics themselves may also have been of particular interest.

In summary, we’ve had record turnout to lectures, prompted almost entirely by the use of the events for class projects, assignments, or for extra credit. Once students are at a lecture, they are generally largely positive about the experience and have found it an interesting event that has added to their understanding of some aspect of the book.