

## The Common Text Program at UMass Lowell

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### Overview

Inaugurated by the English Department in Fall 2005 and now part of the First Year Writing Program, Common Text introduces UML's freshmen to a shared reading experience in each semester of College Writing. In first-semester College Writing classes, students read a nonfiction text in common and attend programs designed to emphasize the interdisciplinary nature of the writing classroom. In College Writing II, students read a non-fiction or dramatic text in common, typically attending a production of that play and related events taking place in downtown Lowell and on campus. Through their common experience of analyzing the common text and attending the programs sponsored by various departments and disciplines, students will continue to develop a sense of the exciting intellectual and cultural scope of their experience at UML; enhance their sense of belonging to a vibrant learning community across the disciplines; and tie the general-educational goals of critical thinking and communication skills to students' understanding of their roles as members of the broader community.

### Goals

- To emphasize and improve skills in writing, oral communication, critical analysis, and collaboration
- To explore a theme or issue using an interdisciplinary approach which engages a variety of academic contexts and cultural perspectives
- To invigorate the teaching on our campus and promote vital interactions between faculty colleagues and between students and faculty
- To help integrate campus life with the city of Lowell
- To create a sense of shared cultural experience among first-year students at UML and insure that every first year student has a common academic experience as a class
- To improve campus life by promoting student engagement, curiosity, and excitement

### Sample Practices

- Seek collaboration from colleagues in other departments and offices on campus
- Provide a paid, intensive training workshop for College Writing faculty teaching the text
- Facilitate student cooperation and collaboration across sections of College Writing
- Research and gather instructional support materials
- Outreach to Lowell High School to support students' college readiness and curricular alignment
- Encourage students to connect with texts outside the classroom by cultivating active learning
- Offer a wide variety of events on campus, such as:
  - Fall and Spring film-and-discussion series
  - Panel conversations with faculty in various disciplines, such as "Fighting Back at Work"
  - Afternoons with Lynn Nottage, author of *Intimate Apparel*, Howard Mansfield, author of *The Bones of the Earth*, and Bob Clyman, author of *Secret Order*
  - Discussion of Narrative Art and Creativity Workshop with writer and artist Lynda Barry
  - On-campus talkbacks with actors from the MRT and OBP productions of CT plays
  - Residence Hall film screenings and pizza nights
  - Freshman essay contests

### The Future of Common Text

We will continue to assess its impact on students' writing and thinking, and their campus experience as a whole, with particular attention to freshman retention. We will align our work with new initiatives aimed at first year students. We will give students tools to understand critical global issues. We will emphasize problem-centered learning into our faculty workshop materials, and encourage English faculty to pursue those strategies. We will continue our efforts to build a robust and diverse roster of collaborating faculty.