

Parents' Guide to the University of Central Florida Common Read Program

2017 selection: *High Price: A Neuroscientist's Journey of Self-Discovery That Challenges Everything You Know About Drugs and Society* by Dr. Carl Hart (2013)

Background:

- The Common Read program is housed in the First Year Experience office. The goal of the Common Read selection is to engage in freshman students in a dialogue around a relevant topic while creating a sense of community amongst incoming students.
- All freshman students receive a copy of the selected text during their respective orientation session and are eligible to apply for one of two \$500 common read scholarships via the website: <http://fye.sdes.ucf.edu/commonreading>

Learning Outcomes:

- The book selection encourages students to: (1) build a sense of community among students via a common experience that will create connections and assist with their academic and social transition to college life; (2) provide students an opportunity to understand a wide array of diverse perspectives; apply Bloom's Taxonomy of Critical Thinking (1956) and application; (3) create a foundation for students to explore their values and ethics.

Book Selection Process:

- Each fall, a diverse committee representing UCF student affairs professionals, faculty, and undergraduate students (typically 10 members) identifies a long list of books that correlate to the Unifying Theme (Undergraduate Studies) where courses are encouraged to have discussions and activities related to the theme. For the past three years, this theme has been *Social Justice & Advocacy*. The theme is anticipated to change in 2018.
- Additionally, the selected text aligns with the Student Development and Enrollment Services (SDES) Strategic Plan and the UCF Collective Impact. Both are institutional policies that encourage student retention and success.
- *High Price* (2013) was selected from final list of five books where the committee was charged to read each text, provide feedback, and vote on which text would be selected.
- The text is implemented in SLS 1501 first-year seminar, Burnett Honors College Symposium, and several other undergraduate and graduate courses.

Foundation & Rationale for 2017 Book Selection:

- Based on student feedback from previous years, students relate to a text that is written in *narrative* form. *High Price* (2013) is written from the narrative/autobiography perspective of Dr. Carl Hart. The text highlights the societal, academic, and professional barriers he faced during his life.
- The text also correlates to themes of social justice and advocacy, health and wellness: both of which are significant discussion points we want freshman students to discuss and apply to their transition and persistence at UCF.
- The text also has a strong substance abuse theme that will challenge students to think and discuss why this epidemic is prevalent in the state of Florida amongst their age group (Siemaszko, 2017).

- For more information view the press release:
<http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/americas-heroin-epidemic/florida-gov-declares-state-s-opioid-epidemic-public-health-emergency-n755056>
- Furthermore, this narrative of Dr. Hart is supported as he is an esteemed tenured faculty in neuroscience at Columbia University. Dr. Hart’s research background centers around the impact of substance abuse on our community.

Student Application and Critical Analysis:

- In following the learning outcomes for the common read program, freshman students are encouraged to develop their own arguments and counterarguments to the selected text
- Following Bloom’s Taxonomy of Critical thinking (see Figure 1), *High Price* will challenge students to develop and strengthen their reading comprehension, analysis, and application. While students may not agree with certain themes of the text, that is a perfect opportunity to provide the counterargument (the evaluating level of Bloom). This is absolutely acceptable and encouraged as these are lifelong skills.

Figure 1



Harrington (2015)

Implementation into the SLS 1501 Curriculum:

- The SLS 1501 course strengthens student’s study and life skills to place them on a direct pathway towards graduating as a highly competitive UCF Knight. The course also prepares students for college success by discussing critical thinking skills and diversity and social justice. This is inclusive of discussing world events and the impact these could have on students and the community.
- The Common Read selection is implemented into the SLS 1501 curriculum. Students will read the book following the course schedule in their respective SLS 1501 section. Each week, the SLS 1501 Faculty will facilitate an impactful discussion around the text with a goal of encouraging students to progress through each level of Bloom’s Taxonomy starting with the base.
- Additionally, students will participate in a debate facilitated by their SLS 1501 Peer Mentor. The Peer Mentor is also responsible for reading the text and applying their narrative to class discussions. The debate will occur at the end of each semester and challenges students on each level of Bloom.
- Finally, students will complete a 3-page paper (four questions) reflecting on the impact *High Price* has had on their transition as a freshman to UCF. The following questions listed on the Common Read website provide a great foundation for students to begin to think this impact:

1. Why do you think UCF has chosen *High Price* (2013) for freshman students?
2. One of the major themes of the text is social barriers. These are defined as roadblocks that could prevent an individual from achieving success. Have you encountered any social barriers?
3. As you transition to being a college student at UCF, what resources will you utilize to ensure that you stay on a pathway towards being a highly-competitive UCF Knight?

Community Building:

- *High Price* illustrates Dr. Hart's narrative and observations when dealing with law enforcement and society. It also includes first- and second-person language that, while intense, highlights his personal experiences. Please note: these are Dr. Hart's personal experiences and in no way represents the values of the University of Central Florida.
- While not all students may agree with the discussion of law enforcement or other themes of the text, this is a perfect opportunity for students to discuss their counterargument which is the *analysis* stage of Bloom.
- The UCF Police Department is comprised of stellar law enforcement who do an exceptional job at protecting and serving our community. The UCFPD also provides an amazing level of support during campus, local, national, and international events. To further strengthen freshman students' connection to the UCFPD, First Year Experience will look to partner on a program that will further the discussion about their role and impact on campus to take place during fall semester.