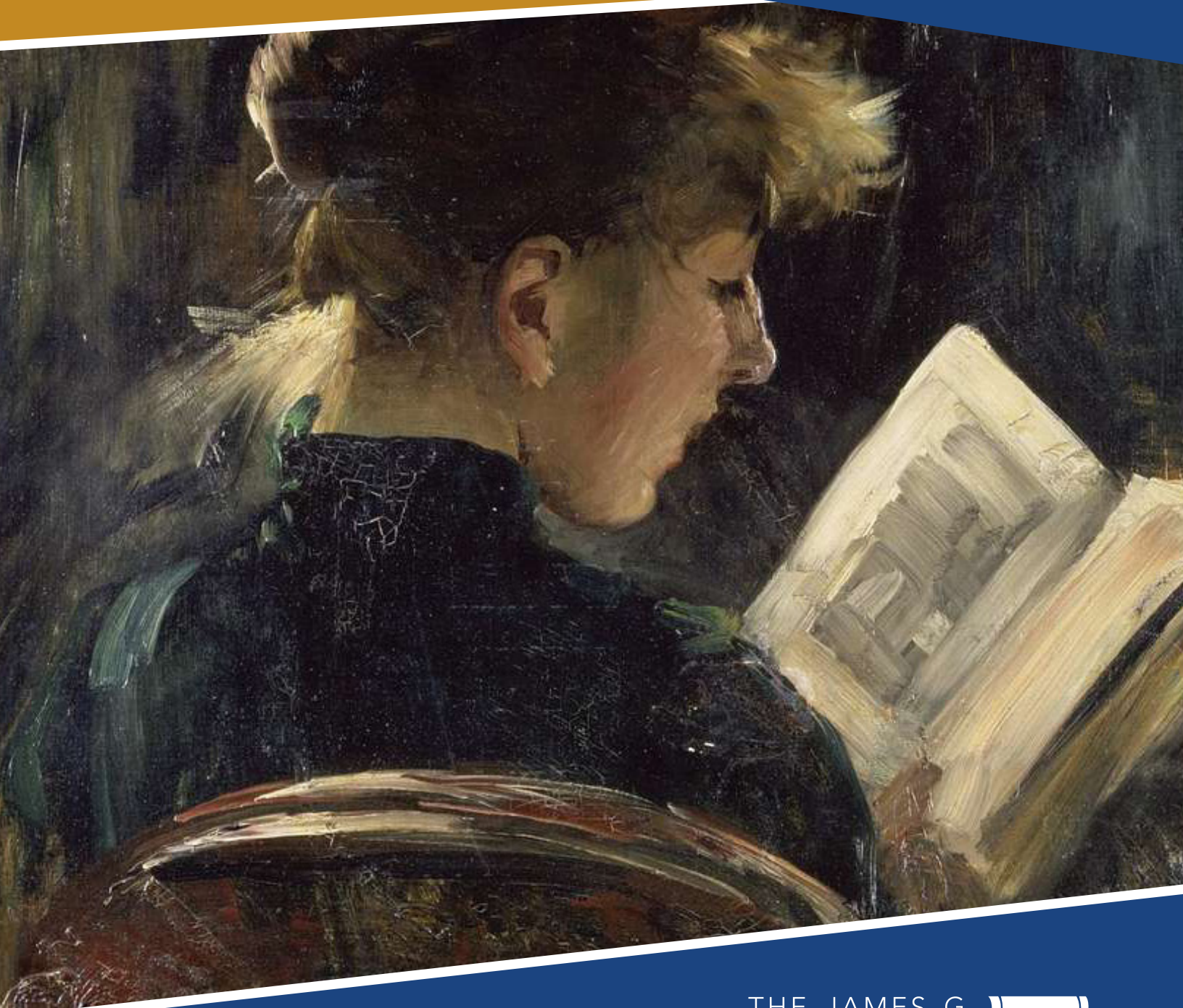


PRESERVING THE CANON

Great Books Programs
at America's Colleges and Universities



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THE JAMES G. 
MARTIN CENTER
FOR ACADEMIC RENEWAL



WHY STUDY THE GREAT BOOKS?

A rigorous study of the Great Books provides students with an in-depth understanding of the intellectual roots of today's social, political, and cultural movements, and gives them the opportunity to participate in a conversation that spans millennia. A student of the Great Books sits at the table with history's greatest thinkers, whose writings and contributions probe perennial questions that transcend time, place, and culture: what does it mean to be human? What is "the good" and how can one go about living a good life?

Grappling with the Great Works is no easy task. As advocate and teacher of the Great Works Mortimer Adler said, these texts act as a sharpening block for one's mind *because* of their difficulty. Such a study helps students form good habits of mind and grow in the intellectual virtues of understanding, wisdom, and humility. These intellectual virtues are the bedrock of a flourishing society.

But the great works deserve close study not merely because they help produce rigorous thinkers and upright citizens. An encounter with Great Books is intrinsically valuable. As Robert P. George puts it:

"... our critical engagement with great thinkers enriches our understanding and enables us to grasp, or grasp more fully, great truths—truths that, when we appropriate them and integrate them into our lives, liberate us from what is merely vulgar, coarse, or base. These are soul-shaping, humanizing truths—

"A library of wisdom, then, is more precious than all wealth, and all things that are desirable cannot be compared to it. Whoever therefore claims to be zealous of truth, of happiness, of wisdom or knowledge, aye, even of the faith, must needs become a lover of books."

—Richard de Bury,
The Philobiblon

truths whose appreciation and secure possession elevates reason above passion or appetite, enabling us to direct our desires and our wills to what is truly good, truly beautiful, truly worthy of human beings as possessors of a profound and inherent dignity."

Historically, higher learning was based on the study of the Great Works of thought of the Western canon. These works span a broad range of time, from the Classical period, to early Christianity, and the Enlightenment, all the way to the 20th century. Now, close study of Great Works is less common at most mainstream colleges and universities. Depending on the general education programs at a given institution, or students' particular course work, it is very possible for students to graduate from college with little to no exposure to the foundational texts of Plato, Aristotle, Homer, or Dante, to name a few.

If students desire a deep and broad understanding of the Great Works, they must actively seek it out. Although Great Works-specific coursework is less available, the good news is they nevertheless still exist. Not only do they exist, but there is a variety of programs in terms of length and degree type, oftentimes allowing students who are majoring in other subjects to at least get a taste of the canon's richness.

The Martin Center researched thirty-four academic programs that involve a close study of Great Books of Western thought. Although some of the programs in this report aren't advertised as Great Books programs, their curricula include an in-depth study of core texts. Uniting all these programs together is a desire for wisdom and understanding, and the belief that engaging with the Great Books can aid in this pursuit.

As a whole, one will find that many of the programs share common characteristics: no textbooks; an emphasis on discussion; courses that are seminar-based instead of lecture-based; "teachers" who don't lecture but rather act as guides or "tutors."

We encourage you to explore the information we've compiled. In this report, you will find a list of the top 50 common titles (25 fiction, 25 non-fiction) required (or examples of what *may* be required) or recommended at all of these institutions, as well as individual profiles with additional information on each program of study. This list isn't exhaustive, other Great Books programs surely exist. These are the programs the Martin Center found and was able to attain a sample reading list from.

We hope this information will act as a useful tool and inspire you and the students you know to crack open a Great Book.

"Books are full of such precepts, and all the sayings of philosophers, and all antiquity is full of precedents teaching the same lesson; but all these things would lie buried in darkness, if the light of literature and learning were not applied to them. How many images of the bravest men, carefully elaborated, have both the Greek and Latin writers bequeathed to us, not merely for us to look at and gaze upon, but also for our imitation!"

**—Cicero,
*For Archias, chapter 6, section 14***



METHODOLOGY

Determining which schools to include and how to list titles proved at times more of an art than a science. The Martin Center, however, endeavored to apply uniform criteria as much as possible in its data collection.

The Schools

The institutions in this report were included either because they have a designated Great Books program, or have a program of study with a significant emphasis on the study of the Great Books.

In general, schools that only had one or two courses were not included because they do not give students sufficient exposure to the Great Books. A possible exception is Boston College's Perspectives Program: students have the *opportunity* to take four year-long courses, but they may choose to take only one or two. Many programs were included because of a strong emphasis on the Great Books in their core curricula and because an adequate sample list of reading material was provided.

"Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books."

—C.S. Lewis,
Introduction to Athanasius' On the Incarnation

The Books/Works

We found over one thousand titles that are assigned in Great Books programs, varied as they are numerous. Perusing the full list, you will find titles and authors that span time and genre such as Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *A Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*. Authors as different as Thomas Aquinas, Michael Foucault, C.S. Lewis, and Friedrich Nietzsche all have a place on the list. Most won't be surprised to find Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Plato's *Republic*.

There are some books, however, that do not seem to belong on a Great Books list. Some books, for example, have been written very recently and shouldn't be considered Great Works. To be a Great Book, a title needs to stand the test of time to see whether its influence has proved enduring.

In general, the titles on each school's booklist were included, with some exceptions. In at least one case, a school lists both required and suggested readings; only the required readings were recorded in this report.

In several instances, schools did not provide a specific title but gave a general description of a work instead. Descriptions such as "a modern novel" or "a Roman author" followed by example texts were generally not included. Similarly, titles such as "Hegel: Selections" are vague and were not included.

Organization

A full list of titles, organized by schools, is available online.¹ The titles are listed in alphabetical order and categorized by the following color-coding scheme:

- Light blue is for non-fiction.
- Light green is for fiction.
- Light purple is for poetry, music, and film.

To simplify organization, titles within a larger work were listed as a single text. For example, some schools assigned one or more of the Gospels in the New Testament. Others required students to read the five books of Moses. All of these works are categorized under the "*Bible*." Similarly, Dante's three works the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* all fall under the "*Divine Comedy*" (the *Inferno* was the most commonly assigned).

"Until recently the Western world regarded it as self-evident that the road to education lay through great books...There was never very much doubt about which the masterpieces were; they were the books which had stood the test of time and had continued to be acclaimed as the finest creations, in writing, of the Western mind."

**—Robert Maynard Hutchins,
*The Great Conversation***

1. The full list is available at go.jamesgmartin.center/canon



NON-FICTION

- ☐ 1. Plato: *The Republic*
- ☐ 2. Augustine: *Confessions*
- ☐ 3. Aristotle: *Nicomachean Ethics*
- ☐ 4. *The Bible*
- ☐ 5. de Tocqueville, Alexis: *Democracy in America*
- ☐ 6. Machiavelli, Niccolo: *The Prince*
- ☐ 7. Hobbes, Thomas: *Leviathan*
- ☐ 8. Aquinas, Thomas: *Summa Theologiae*
- ☐ 9. Descartes, Rene: *Meditations on First Philosophy*
- ☐ 10. Madison, James; Hamilton, Alexander; Jay, John: *The Federalist Papers*
- ☐ 11. Plato: *Apology*
- ☐ 12. Thucydides: *The Peloponnesian War*
- ☐ 13. Pascal, Blaise: *Pensées*
- ☐ 14. Locke, John: *Second Treatise on Government*
- ☐ 15. Marx, Karl: *The Communist Manifesto*
- ☐ 16. Plato: *Meno*
- ☐ 17. Plato: *Phaedo*
- ☐ 18. Plato: *Symposium*
- ☐ 19. Descartes, Rene: *Discourse on Method*
- ☐ 20. Aristotle: *Poetics*
- ☐ 21. Aristotle: *Politics*
- ☐ 22. Augustine: *The City of God Against the Pagans*
- ☐ 23. Boethius: *Consolation of Philosophy*
- ☐ 24. Smith, Adam: *Wealth of Nations*
- ☐ 25. TIED:
 - ☐ Darwin, Charles: *On the Origin of the Species*
 - ☐ Kant, Immanuel: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
 - ☐ Nietzsche, Friedrich: *On the Genealogy of Morals*
 - ☐ Plato: *Crito*
 - ☐ Rousseau, Jean-Jacques: *The Basic Political Writings*



FICTION AND POETRY

- ☐ 1. Alighieri, Dante: *The Divine Comedy*
- ☐ 2. Homer: *The Odyssey*
- ☐ 3. Virgil: *The Aeneid*
- ☐ 4. Sophocles: *Theban Plays*
- ☐ 5. Aeschylus: *Oresteia*
- ☐ 6. Homer: *The Iliad*
- ☐ 7. Dostoevsky, Fyodor: *The Brothers Karamazov*
- ☐ 8. Milton, John: *Paradise Lost*
- ☐ 9. Shakespeare, William: *King Lear*
- ☐ 10. Shakespeare, William: *Hamlet*
- ☐ 11. Chaucer, Geoffrey: *Canterbury Tales*
- ☐ 12. Aristophanes: *Clouds* (play)
- ☐ 13. Austen, Jane: *Pride and Prejudice*
- ☐ 14. de Cervantes, Miguel: *Don Quixote*
- ☐ 15. Euripides: *The Bacchae* (play)
- ☐ 16. Goethe, Johann Wolfgang: *Faust*
- ☐ 17. Dostoevsky, Fyodor: *Crime and Punishment*
- ☐ 18. Euripides: *Medea* (play)
- ☐ 19. Ovid: *Metamorphoses*
- ☐ 20. Shakespeare, William: *Macbeth*
- ☐ 21. Shakespeare, William: *The Tempest*
- ☐ 22. Eliot, T.S.: *The Waste Land*
- ☐ 23. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*
- ☐ 24. Melville, Herman: *Moby Dick*
- ☐ 25. TIED:
 - ☐ More, Thomas: *Utopia*
 - ☐ Shakespeare, William: *Othello*



SCHOOL PROFILES

University of Chicago

(Chicago, Illinois)

The University of Chicago is a mid-sized private research institution. The school offers a four-year noncredit certificate program. The program is geared toward adult learners seeking a rigorous liberal arts education. No prerequisites are required.

St. John's College

(Annapolis, Maryland; Santa Fe, New Mexico)

St. John's is a small private liberal arts college. The school offers a four-year undergraduate Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts program. The college's undergraduate liberal arts curriculum is rooted in "the most important books and ideas of Western civilization." The college also offers graduate programs based on the great books. Founded in 1696, St. John's is the third oldest college in the United States.

Biola University, Torrey Honors College

(La Mirada, California)

Biola is a mid-sized private nondenominational evangelical Christian University. The school offers an undergraduate honors core program. The honors program is an alternative to the university's core curriculum that "allows students to experience the best of classical learning — no matter their major."

Thomas Aquinas College

(Santa Paula, California; Northfield, Massachusetts)

Thomas Aquinas is a small Catholic liberal arts college. The school offers a four-year undergraduate Bachelor of Arts degree. The college offers no other majors, minors, electives, or specializations. There are also no textbooks or lectures in the classroom. The college's entire curriculum is comprised of the Great Books of the Western canon.

Gutenberg College

(Eugene, Oregon)

Gutenberg is a small private Christian college. The school offers a four-year undergraduate Bachelor of Arts program. The college identifies as a classical Great Books institution. It does not participate in government financial aid programs. The college has less than 50 students.

Notre Dame University

(Notre Dame, Indiana)

Notre Dame is a mid-sized private Catholic university. The school offers an undergraduate major degree program entitled the Program of Liberal Studies. Six Great Books Seminars are central to the program.

Belmont Abbey College

(Belmont, North Carolina)

Belmont Abbey is a small private Catholic college. There are three options to complete the Honors College's Great Books program: 1) a 120-credit Great Books intensive major, 2) a 90-credit Great Books flexible major, and 3) a 75-credit Great Books core with a choice of major.

North Central College, Shimer Great Books School

(Naperville, Illinois)

North Central is a mid-sized private liberal arts college. The Shimer Great Books School offers a major program of study, but students can choose to concentrate in different areas: the Humanities, the Natural Sciences, and Social Sciences. A fourth major, Liberal Studies, includes courses from each of these areas. Regardless of the area of concentration, all students take a common set of core courses and complete a two-semester capstone. *Note: Only the required texts with listed titles were included in this report. At least two listed readings were omitted because the Martin Center could not locate them online. Academic articles were excluded.*

Mercer University

(Macon, Georgia)

Mercer is a mid-sized private nonsectarian historically baptist research university. The Great Books program, comprised of eight courses, is one of two general education "tracks" the university offers. Mercer is the oldest college in the state of Georgia.

"That the reading of good books, is like the conversation with the honestest persons of the past age, who were the Authors of them, and even a studied conversation, wherein they discover to us the best only of their thoughts."

—René Descartes,
*A Discourse OF A
METHOD For the well
guiding of REASON,
And the Discovery of
Truth In the SCIENCES*

"If I have seen
further it is by
standing on the
shoulders of Giants."

—Sir Isaac Newton,
*The Correspondence
of Isaac Newton*

Magdalen College of the Liberal Arts

(Warner, New Hampshire)

Magdalen is a small private Catholic liberal arts college. All students participate in the core called the Program of Studies. A list of Great Books is read in common, many of which make up the forty-eight credit Humanities sequence.

Kentucky State University

(Frankfort, Kentucky)

Kentucky State is a mid-sized public university. The honors program is based on studying Great Books. There are several ways to participate in the honors program. Students may complete the honors core, which fulfills all of the university's liberal studies requirements, earn a minor, or earn a bachelor's degree through the honors program. The institution is a historically black land-grant university. *Note: This is a booklist of texts that have been included in the honors program. It is not a complete list of all books read in the honors program.*

Boston College

(Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts)

Boston is a mid-sized private Catholic college. The Perspectives Program is a multi-year (up to four years) core program. Each course is a year-long 12-credit course. Students who take all four of the courses plus three philosophy electives may earn a degree in philosophy. Those who take three Perspectives courses, in addition to some core requirements, can earn a minor in philosophy. *Note: The courses have common reading lists, but texts may differ at the professor's discretion and from year to year.*

Thomas More College

(Merrimack, New Hampshire)

Thomas More is a small private Catholic college. The college offers one undergraduate degree in Liberal Arts. The program is entirely based on the Great Works of the Western canon. Students travel abroad during the course of their studies. Their education starts on the main campus in New England and then students travel to a mandatory semester in Rome. *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with a partial reading list of texts read by all students.*

University of Dallas

(Dallas, Texas)

The University of Dallas is a small private Catholic institution. The Great Books are the foundation of the core curriculum. The majority of students study Western Civilization abroad in Rome.

Benedictine College

(Atchison, Kansas)

Benedictine College is a small private Catholic institution. Students may choose the Great Books program as a way to fulfill general education requirements in a “more traditional Liberal Arts format.” *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with a booklist, which may slightly change at times.*

The University of Texas at Austin

(Austin, Texas)

The University of Texas at Austin is a large public university. The university offers the Certificate in Core Texts and Ideas, a Great Books path through UT’s core curriculum. *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with a list of the kinds of texts students may read, but there is no prescribed list. Professors are permitted to choose texts based on their strengths and interests.*

St. Olaf College

(Northfield, Minnesota)

St. Olaf is a mid-sized private Lutheran college. The Enduring Questions program is a sequence of five courses. During the first two years of college, students take one Enduring Questions course and three other courses each semester. By doing this program, students also complete seven core requirements. *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with a set of syllabi listing what students may read. School officials say the curriculum is flexible and changes yearly based on preferences and expertise.*

Franciscan University of Steubenville

(Steubenville, Ohio)

Franciscan is a mid-sized private Catholic institution. The Great Books of Western Civilization Honors Program is open by invitation to qualified students. The curriculum is completely based on the Great Books and is an alternative to the university’s core curriculum. *Note: The school provided a list to the Martin Center. It is a foundation list and subject to change.*

Baylor University

(Waco, Texas)

Baylor is a large private Baptist institution. The Great Texts program is offered as a major and a minor. Students study Western intellectual heritage from antiquity to the present. Students may also choose to have a secondary major in great texts. *Note: This is a list of possible texts.*

“Consider your origin. You were not formed to live like brutes but to follow virtue and knowledge.”

—Dante Alighieri,
The Divine Comedy

“The power that these ideas, figures, texts have is not circumscribed by class or culture. The reason why they are important is precisely because they transcend the limitations of class and culture from which they come.”

—Roosevelt Montás,
Scala Foundation
interview

New College Franklin

(Franklin, Tennessee)

New College Franklin is a small private Christian college. All students earn the same degree. The curriculum has a strong emphasis on reading and discussing the Great Books of Western civilization. All students take the same courses, with the exception of preceptorials. *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with a list of the Great Works students read.*

Hildegard College

(Costa Mesa, California)

The school is a small private ecumenical Christian college. All students earn a Bachelor of Arts with a minor in Entrepreneurship. Students must complete the Great Books core. The college is in the process of launching and expects to open in the fall of 2023.

Yale University

(New Haven, Connecticut)

Yale is a mid-sized private institution. The Directed Studies program is a two-semester program for select first-year students. The program consists of three “integrated full-year courses” in Philosophy, Literature, and Historical and Political Thought. Seminars are said to be the “heart and soul” of the program.

Columbia University, Columbia College

(New York, New York)

Columbia is a mid-sized private research university. The core curriculum is often regarded as a Great Books program because of a strong emphasis on the study of classic texts. The core includes two year-long courses: Literature Humanities and Contemporary Civilization. The Literature Humanities course has been a part of the core curriculum for seventy-five years. A few titles that have always been on the required reading list are: *The Illiad* by Homer, *Oresteia* by Aeschylus, and *The Inferno* by Dante.

Christendom College

(Front Royal, Virginia)

Christendom is a small private Catholic college. The 86-credit hour core curriculum has a strong emphasis on Western civilization and its reading list includes many Great Books. There are four courses on Western literature and four courses on the history of Western civilization required in the core.

Wyoming Catholic College

(Lander, Wyoming)

Wyoming Catholic is a small private Catholic college. There is a set four-year curriculum based on the Great Books. All students graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in the Liberal arts. Students do not use textbooks, but instead read directly from the Great Books. No cell phones are allowed on campus. *Note: This is a partial reading list.*

St. Mary's College of California

(Moraga, California)

St. Mary's is a mid-sized private Catholic college. The Integral Program of Liberal Arts is a four-year degree program based on the Great Books. There are no lectures or exams, learning is "based on conversational inquiry."

Northwestern State University of Louisiana, Louisiana Scholars' College

(Natchitoches, Louisiana)

Northwestern State is a mid-sized public university. The Texts and Traditions program is a four-semester sequence of courses housed in the honors college. *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with the list of texts students read last academic year.*

Faulkner University

(Montgomery, Alabama)

Faulkner is a mid-sized private nondenominational Christian institution. The Great Books Honors Program is an honors track available for every major. The track's core is a five-course sequence. Students complete a thesis that gives them "the opportunity to dig deeply into one concept through the lens of the Great Books." *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with its current reading list.*

Eastern University, Templeton Honors College

(St. Davids, Pennsylvania)

Eastern is a mid-sized private Baptist university. Templeton Honors College's undergraduate general education core program includes a series of seminar-style courses on "significant ideas, great texts, and important works of art." *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with its booklist.*

"Reading is a basic tool in the living of a good life."

—Mortimer J. Adler,
*How to Read a Book:
The Classic Guide to
Intelligent Reading*

“[C]ulture [is a] pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world.”

—Matthew Arnold,
Culture and Anarchy

Pepperdine University

(Malibu, California)

Pepperdine is a mid-sized private nondenominational Christian university. The Great Books Colloquium is an integrated sequence of four courses. There is also a Great Books minor. *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with its booklist. The possible texts professors may choose were not included in this report.*

Bethlehem College and Seminary

(Minneapolis, Minnesota)

Bethlehem is a small private Christian institution. The *Omnia* Extended Core program has a strong emphasis on the study of Great Books. The core program is three years long. *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with a representative list of books students might consider during their studies.*

Boston University

(Boston, Massachusetts)

Boston is a large private nonsectarian university (historically affiliated with the United Methodist Church). The Core is a common curriculum in which students engage with foundational texts. Participation in the Core is elective. The program has been a tradition at the university since 1989. *Note: Works without listed titles were not included.*

The College at Southeastern, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

(Wake Forest, North Carolina)

Southeastern is a mid-sized private Baptist institution. All students complete the core program which has a strong emphasis on the Great Books. *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with its list of books.*

St. Anselm College

(Goffstown, New Hampshire)

St. Anselm is a small private Catholic college. The school offers a Great Books major, as well as a Great Books minor. *Note: The school provided the Martin Center with its list of books.*

A portrait of a young woman, likely a character from Jane Austen's novels, seated and holding a book. She is wearing a light blue dress with a dark blue belt and a white headscarf with a blue band. The background is a dark, textured wall. The image is framed by a white line that forms a large 'L' shape, with small circles at the corners.

“A fondness for reading,
properly directed, must be an
education in itself.”

—Jane Austen,
Mansfield Park



About the Martin Center

The James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal is a private nonprofit institute dedicated to improving higher education policy. Our mission is to renew and fulfill the promise of higher education in North Carolina and across the country.

We advocate responsible governance, viewpoint diversity, academic quality, cost-effective education solutions, and innovative market-based reform. We do that by studying and reporting on critical issues in higher education and recommending policies that can create change—especially at the state and local level.

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