This marks the 20th year that Achieving the Dream President and CEO Dr. Karen A. Stout shares her annual summer reading list.

Lessons Learned from Summer Reading

Summer is a time for many people to unwind, connect with family and friends, and recharge for the remainder of the year. For me, reading is interwoven into my ATD travel and my time with family and friends. I keep a running list of books throughout the year, and I dive into many of them once the calendar hits May. Many of these books are directly connected to higher education, and others lend important lessons and connections to my work.

The tradition of sharing my reading list began before my time as president of Montgomery County Community College, and I continued that at MCCC by sharing my list during fall convocation. I have the great fortune of speaking at a handful of convocations this fall, and it feels appropriate to share my list during this time. This marks the 20th anniversary of sharing my reading list, and I hope that you’ll find these books interesting and full of lessons for our shared work in higher education.

2019 Summer Reading List

*Questions Are The Answer: A Breakthrough Approach to Your Most Vexing Problems at Work and in Life* by Hal Gregersen

Gregersen reminds us that in our search for successful student success strategies, we should first pause to ask the right questions, and that a significant role for leaders is to ask questions to help their leadership teams reframe the answers. He asks, “What is the grand challenge question that gets our hearts beating fast and causes us to step back and say, ‘Wow. To achieve that I’m going to have to think and act completely differently.’” I particularly love the section on using “question bursts” to solve problems.
Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do by Jennifer L. Eberhardt

For our colleges deeply engaged in equity work, this is a must read. Dr. Eberhardt’s chapter on Higher Learning offers some important insights on the importance of “empathy, wise feedback, affirmation and high-quality” faculty-student contact in student success. Her descriptions of how speed and ambiguity are triggers of bias are compelling.

Range: Why Generalists Triumph in a Specialized World by David Epstein

Epstein makes a case for why an individual’s range of skills versus deep specialization is important in today’s workforce. There are parallels to our work with community colleges in that we must develop organizational range to take on what he labels the “wicked” challenges chapter on tools, he forced me to ask a key question: “What tools should we drop to better serve students?”

Turning the Flywheel: A Monograph to Accompany Good to Great by Jim Collins

This is a newly released short monograph that goes deeper into Collins’ “turning the great. It convinces me that we do not need to go looking for the “next big thing” in our student success work. Rather, we need to understand the underlying architecture of what is working at the ATD Network colleges that are seeing accelerated gains in student success, then articulate that architecture.
**The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World**
by Melinda Gates

“What takes us past the tipping point when the forces pushing us up overpower the forces pulling us down and we’re lifted from the earth and begin to fly?” That’s the questions that Gates attempts to answer in this inspiring read about work around the world that is changing the lives of women and girls.

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**The Long Walk to Freedom**
by Nelson Mandela

I visited South Africa in late June and early July as part of ATD’s work with several South African universities, and read this book on my way there. I wish that I had read it sooner, but I am thankful that I read it before my visit to the Apartheid Museum and before two cancelled trips to Robben Island.

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**Sing, Unburied, Sing**
by Jesmyn Ward

One of two fiction books on my list, I read this immediately after the death of Toni Morrison because it was recommended as a book she might write. I could not put this one down. The story is written from the eyes of three characters and captures three generations of a struggling Mississippi family.

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**Less**
by Andrew Sean Greer

A Pulitzer Prize winner, this fictional read was much lighter and reminds us that it is never too late for an adventure or learning about oneself. I picked this one up at the Harvard bookstore because it was a top recommendation of the student staff there.
**Born a Crime** by Trevor Noah

This was on my South Africa reading list, suggested by my colleagues at The Kresge Foundation, and the memoir certainly offered me important history and context for my visit. But it did much more than that. It left me with a deep respect for his journey into his profession. It was a memoir that I could not put down and the ending stayed with me for weeks.

**The Privileged Poor: How Elite Colleges are Failing Disadvantaged Students** by Anthony Jack

Dr. Jack is a Junior Fellow at the Society of Fellows at Harvard University and an assistant professor of education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Known for his research that documents the overlooked diversity among lower-income undergraduates, this is his first book and it is a powerful account of students he calls the “doubly disadvantaged” and the “privileged poor.” It raised a number of “cause to wonder” questions for me about lower-income and first-generation college students on our community college campuses.

**Our Towns: A 100,000 Mile Journey Into the Heart of America** by James and Deborah Fallows

This is a recounting of the Fallows’ visits to towns across the country, most with community colleges, and led to James Fallows’ recent article in The Atlantic where he speaks to the contributions of community colleges to the economic and civic fabrics of their communities. I love his observations that “any ambitious community can have a community college” and that the people working hardest toward solutions were “disproportionately at community colleges.”

**Only Humans Need Apply: Winners and Losers in the Age of the Smart Machine** by Thomas Davenport and Julia Kirby

Davenport is one of my favorite authors on data and analytics. In this book, he and Kirby articulate the types of jobs that will be automated, debunk some of the myths about how smart “smart” machines are, and make a case for augmentation over automation. They suggest that future workers can step up, step aside, step in, step narrowly or step forward to manage augmentation. Their suggestions on the implications for education and the design of curriculum are important.
Dr. Darling is a community college professor in California and a first-generation college graduate who writes with a deep passion about ways we can create growth mindsets in our classrooms to break down barriers for our most vulnerable students. She says, and I agree, that faculty are uniquely positioned to disrupt systemic and institutional inequity at the classroom level and she offers many tangible ways for faculty to lead that disruption.