



UPDATE

Summer 2025



HOW WE MET *Honors Summer Read*



FRIENDS FROM THE BEGINNING—

Daisy Calero Estrella and Estrella Balderas met a few days before their first day of college at Lamar University, in the Honors Summer Book Club, to discuss *Empire of Pain*. They became fast friends and have gone on to win recognition as Model UN Delegates, serve as elected leaders in the Honors Student Association, and can be seen representing Cardinal Spirit together at various campus-wide events as part of the LU Ambassador family.

Although both have different career aspirations—Daisy is studying Nursing and Estrella is studying Biochemistry Pre-Dental—they have lifted each other up and shared lots of laughs along the way.

To learn more about Daisy's experience, read her story from *Cadenza* magazine in this guide.

Whether you're a brand-new student to the Reaud Honors College or a current student, you never know who you'll meet in our book clubs.

Get your read on!

CHOOSE YOUR BOOK from the following pages and [JOIN SUMMER BOOK CLUB HERE](#)

**Plus: Get Paired
with a Peer Mentor!!!**

Mentor: Dr. Tilisa Thibodeaux



Dean of the Reaud Honors College, Dr. Tilisa Thibodeaux proudly introduces you to our wonderful cohort of Honors faculty leading this summer's book clubs.

Her summer read discussion is held with our elected student leaders of the Honors Student Association to prepare them to best serve you during the upcoming academic year.

Dean Thibodeaux helps students, educators, administrators, and corporations use technology innovation as a catalyst for change within their organizations by setting up significant learning environments that give learners choice, ownership, and voice through authentic learning opportunities.

Summer book clubs is one of many growth opportunities she hopes you engage in throughout your Honors journey.

Mentor: Dr. Nicki Michalski



The Chair of the Department of Communication and Media and Associate Professor of Communication at Lamar University, Dr. Nicki Michalski teaches "Honors Public Speaking" for the Reaud Honors College.

Dr. Michalski has taught numerous Honors Topics and Seminars, most recently "Fairy Tales as Reality," "Communicating with Deity," and "Serial Killers."

She primarily researches the intersection of popular culture and communication and rhetoric, and she is the co-author of *Martian Pictures: The Cinema of the Red Planet*. She is a faculty sponsor for student groups that include SETX E-Sport Group and Woman to Woman, and she mentors undergraduate researchers.

Mentor: Dr. Daniel Bartlett



An instructor of English at Lamar University, Dr. Daniel Bartlett teaches "Honors Comp & Rhetoric II" for the Reaud Honors College.

He enjoys teaching courses in American Literature, Technical Writing, Professional Writing, and Composition. Besides teaching, he has also worked in retention, advising, and academic success programs.

A published fiction writer who specializes in Mystery/Crime, Dr. Bartlett includes among his publication credits: *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *Crab Creek Review*, *Thrill Ride*, *Crimeucopia*, *Mickey Finn*: 21st Century Noir, and *Twisted Voices: Stories from Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*. His fiction has also been recognized among "Distinguished Mystery and Suspense" in *The Best American Mystery and Suspense* short fiction collection.

Join Summer Book Club

Sign Up By: June 30
READ: Select Your Book Club

Honors Summer Book Club is a great way to meet other Reaud Honors College students and counts toward **Honors Experiences** OR **Non-Course Credit**, depending on your transcript.

You will need to obtain and read the book over the summer, and a discussion will be held in early Fall.

The titles at the top of this year's books are linked to Amazon only to help you confirm the book you are selecting is the correct one. You may purchase your book anywhere.

Enjoy your Summer Reads!

***Failing Forward* by John C. Maxwell**
Mentor: Dr. Tilisa Thibodeaux

BY INVITE ONLY



Written by an internationally recognized leadership expert who speaks to organizations as diverse as the National Football League and the United Nations, this book is a strategic guide that will help you move beyond mistakes to fulfill your potential and achieve success.

***The Colony* by Annika Norlin**
Mentor: Dr. Nicki Michalski



Have you ever woken up and not wanted to get out of bed? You're living a busy life—late nights studying, coffee dates with friends, kicking a ball around on the field—yet you suddenly want to toss your iPhone in the lake and escape from your life? That's what Emilie does.

She went from this:

"First I stayed late, then I went out. I went to football games, to plays, to parties, to the gym. I drank cocktails at bars, went running, joined book clubs."

to trying to convince herself to keep her social engagements:

"I hear you, my body said, but nothing happened.... My texting thumbs were still with me. They never fail!"

to living in a tent in the woods, a la Cheryl Strayed in *Into the Wild* and Melville's Ishmael.

Seeking a change in scenery when life becomes too much is a Great American trope. When Emilie does so, she comes across a seven-strong band of misfits who have escaped society for their own reasons.

What happens when this outsider, Emilie, tries to become a part of their Colony, attracted to the idea of living apart from society and its expectations, yet cannot help stirring up issues through her questions and observations?

Called a "disturbing, engrossing portrait of a tiny community living beyond society" by *The New York Times Book Review*, Annika Norlin's debut novel *The Colony* is the biggest Swedish literary phenomenon since Fredrik Backman's *A Man Called Ove*.

Would you give up the daily grind to live in a commune?

***Ordinary Grace* by William Kent Krueger**
Mentor: Dr. Daniel Bartlett



Finding your place in a world that is both familiar and unfamiliar can feel equally exciting and terrifying. The day you move into your dorm room with a selection of your favorite clothes, posters, music; the loss of a friend who is studying in a town or state or country seemingly eons away from you; the homemade split baguette filled with spicy meat and pickled vegetables exchanged for a Dining Hall grilled chicken market salad.

Contrast the above against the day you meet your first college friend who feels like your second half, and the semester you discover your talent for data collection and sample processing.

In your own way, you are Frank Drum. Frank is attempting to forge his own path and identity while navigating societal expectations and family pressures from his Methodist minister father and artist mother. His summer is one of loss and change. The world seems to be falling apart around him. Everyone in his close-knit small town knows everyone else and secrets spread quickly.

During a summer filled with playful excursions, Frank encounters a series of deaths—accidents, a suicide, possibly murder—including within his own family. Two families, separated by class, collide in tragedy. Everybody is left to practice ordinary grace in all their brokenness.

What empathy can come from violent loss? How do we show compassion when caught in the clash of cultures and traditions?

Loss comes for everyone, often when least expected. Frank's story teaches how grief—in all its various forms—can shape you, but it doesn't have to break you. You can find grace in the everyday.

Mentor: Dr. Sheila Springer



An instructor in the Department of Communication and Media at Lamar University, Dr. Sheila Springer teaches “Business and Professional Speech” as a Petition for Honors course and “Honors Public Speaking” for the Reaud Honors College.

This year, the Center for Teaching and Learning Excellence honored Dr. Springer for her work on course design. She teaches a variety of both online and on-campus classes in the areas of theory and performance.

Her research examines how media influences audience attitudes and beliefs about ingroups and outgroups. She also mentors undergraduate researchers and is the faculty sponsor for the K-Pop Club.

Mentor: Mr. Andre Favors



An instructor in the Department of Communication and Media at Lamar University, Mr. Andre Favors teaches “Business and Professional Speech” as a Petition for Honors course for the Reaud Honors College.

This year, he won the OUR Faculty Mentor Award for the HASBSEB division for his work with undergraduate researchers.

Favors is co-chair of the First Generation Connections Advisory Council and actively participates in the First Gen Forward work group, which provides campus resources and support for First-Generation students.

While earning his bachelor's degree as a First-Generation Chilean-American scholar at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, Favors was immensely proud to support his father in his successful pursuit of an associate's degree and license as an RN.

Mentor: Dr. Sanaz Alasti

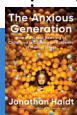


A professor of Criminal Justice and the director of the Center for Death Penalty Studies at Lamar University, Dr. Sanaz Alasti teaches Honors Topics that challenge students to analyze justice systems through historical and global lenses.

This year, she won Reaud Honors College's prestigious “Faculty of Distinction.”

Author of several books about the criminal justice system, Dr. Alasti counts among these a textbook for which *Convict Cowboys* author Mitchel P. Roth wrote the foreword: *Judicial Corporal Punishment as an Alternative to Incarceration in the United States*. This comprehensive tome sets aside mainstream alternatives to incarceration to examine lessons learned from Islamic criminal justice systems.

***The Anxious Generation* by J. Haidt**
Mentor: Dr. Sheila Springer



Twentysomethings are not broken adults; your malleable brains help you stay open to change and figure out your identity.

Yet Jonathan Haidt is worried that you are broken and dubs your smartphones and tablets as “experience blockers.”

While you're sitting in class, a part of your mind might drift off and wonder what is happening in the social metaverse. Being “forever elsewhere” is an existence Haidt calls a “profound transformation of human consciousness and relationships.”

Pre-Internet youth were happier and more sociable thanks to the “discover mode” of unsupervised play-based meanderings, compared to today's youth who are chronically in “defend mode,” Haidt argues. “They tend to see new situations, people, and ideas as potential threats, rather than as opportunities.”

When your bully can follow you into your house, through your fiber optic cable line, the world does feel less safe than the one older generations experienced. Used to be taunts were left to die on the playground. Today, constant social comparison, sometimes unforgiving and cruel, is also your constant companion.

Even more, youth feel powerless about climate change, rising inequality, global conflict. Well, turns out, earlier generations also grew up in the shadows of global instability, yet felt greater social solidarity and purpose, Haidt argues.

Yet is Haidt going too far—overstating the link between technology and mental health issues and distracting us from how to effectively respond to the real causes of mental health crisis in youth? Or is he prescient in identifying a simple source for the sadness and pain reported by this generation? Or a bit of both? You decide.

***First Gen* by Alejandra Campoverdi**
Mentor: Mr. Andre Favors



What does it take to achieve the American Dream?

Especially when you're a First-Generation college student, used to taking on the role of an adult—as family translator, doctor go-between, dictionary. Yet your confidence often belies your persistent self-doubt and fear of being exposed as a fraud.

The good news is: You're not alone in feeling that way. Particularly on a college campus. Some of your classmates, no matter their backgrounds, also worry that they don't deserve their achievements.

At the same time, the nuances and complexities First and Onlys experience during their journeys to belong are unique. Career risks are magnified by the absence of a safety net. Climbing the ladder of success may widen the distance from those you love. Constantly adapting to fit into spaces not designed for you can feel exhausting.

Would be nice to hear someone say, “I know you. You're not alone.”

Enter into the picture: LA-based Mexican-American Alejandra Campoverdi. She reveals a life lived in contradictory extremes. She's been a child on welfare and a gang member's girlfriend, and she has also been a White House aide to President Obama, a Harvard graduate, a double mastectomy survivor, and a former *Maxim* model who ran for U.S. Congress.

Yet she doesn't have it all figured out. The truth is: everybody's lives are complicated. What the memoir explores is how bridging different parts of yourself can lead you to being the first person to “make it” and, even more important, how to pass that threshold where you feel you don't have to prove you belong. You matter because you are you.

***Convict Cowboys* by Mitchel P. Roth**
Mentor: Dr. Sanaz Alasti



In Fall 2025, Lamar University is launching its first rodeo team, giving college students the opportunity to showcase their talents and compete in a variety of events that include bull riding, steer wrestling, and barrel racing.

This presents a wonderful opportunity to learn more about one of America's most historic sporting traditions...in a way that also helps you gain a better understanding of our criminal justice system.

In *Convict Cowboys*, you get sports. You get entertainment. You get popular singers. You get a surprisingly refreshing race relations experience.

You also get the prison system, questions about inmate rehabilitation, insight into government finance, and the potential for abuse of power.

The first book on the nation's first prison rodeo, *Convict Cowboys* explores the death-defying entertainment of the Texas Prison Rodeo, which ran from 1931 to 1986, against a backdrop of history that covers the prison system, the rodeo, and influential figures in Texas penology.

Surprising tidbit: As far back as the 1930s, decades before the 1954 Supreme Court landmark decision outlawing racial segregation in public schools, Texas offered a rare chance for black and white convicts to compete in the same rodeo.

Whether you're critical or supportive of mass incarceration, you're bound to enjoy the book, states one of our very own LU professors, Dr. Robert Worley, who reviewed *Convict Cowboys* as “one of the finest academic books I have read within the past several years...”

Open this window into history to explore a social phenomenon that was more than just a sporting event.



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Honors Student Association *Invitation*



Transition Smoothly to College Life

GET PAIRED WITH AN HONORS PEER MENTOR!

As an HSA peer mentee, you will receive guidance, advice, and answers to questions you may have—all from someone who has been in your shoes before! Your peer mentor will support you not only during your first year, but also as you continue to grow throughout your college experience in the Reaud Honors College.

Please check your LU email for an invitation from HSA's Peer Mentor coaches Alyvia and Kinsey to sign up for 2025-2026.

Already know you want to be a peer mentee? [Sign up here!](#)

FROM PEER MENTORING TO PERU—

Amber Maredia had an idea to create a service leadership opportunity on campus...and she reached out to her HSA Peer Mentor Mackenzie Savage.

Together, they started a chapter at Lamar University for MedLife, a college student peace corps that focuses on medical and community support in impoverished places around the world.

Fast forward two years later, just as Mackenzie was about to graduate: the pair had successfully led the student chapter through a global pandemic; MedLife was named LU's Student Organization of the Year; and student leaders were about to embark on the chapter's first service-learning trip—to Lima, Peru.

That summer, the crew volunteered in free mobile medical clinics, filled up heartily on Peruvian cuisine, and went on adventures that ranged from exploring baroque churches to riding a dune buggy through the Huacachina desert so they could slide down the dunes on sandboards.

Peru marked the last "official" LU adventure for Mackenzie and Amber, yet the ties that began as peer mentor/peer mentee through HSA and the Reaud Honors College will connect them forever.





Honors Summer Read |

Building Connections While Discussing Big Pharma

First-Year student and her mentor share their experiences in the Reaud Honors College's summer book club.

As an aspiring nurse anesthetist, I have closely followed the conversation revolving around Big Pharma, its marketing tactics and its role in the opioid epidemic ravaging the United States. *Empire of Pain*, a research-based narrative written from the perspectives of members of a prominent family in the pharmaceutical industry, was my first exposure to the history behind this critical issue. Thanks to the Reaud Honors College's summer book club, I was introduced to what would soon become my favorite book genre while learning the extent of how professionals' failures to manage their ambitions can be detrimental to a nation.

Under the mentorship of Communication and Media professor Dr. Sheila Springer, my honors peers and I discussed the beginnings of medical marketing and deliberated on the factors that influenced Americans' struggle against opioids. Although nobody in our book club lives like the Sackler family, the founders and owners of Purdue Pharma known for its

production of the controlled substance OxyContin, we made connections to the narrative based on what we see in our communities.

At that book club meeting held last fall, a few days before my first day of college, I met two individuals who would become crucial members of my support system over the next year. Because our discussion went beyond the narrative into also sharing our personal stories, we developed deep bonds of connection. And I found a supportive mentor in Dr. Springer, who I, as a nursing major, might never have met outside of the book club.

Dr. Springer finds the program benefits not only honors students, but also the professors leading the discussions. "The book club helps us have an understanding of what students know and how we can tie it into your own experiences," she said.

The advantages of the program are threefold, she said: "You're connecting with peers prior to the semester starting. You're getting to know somebody. This

allows you a comfortable and safe space to start the conversation. Number two, you're meeting a faculty person, so you get an idea of how faculty interacts with students. There's a lot of differentials in between where my degree is and where you're coming in. We want to limit that distance; we want you to know that we want to talk to you on your level. We want to hear about your experiences, and we want to include those in a way that is going to help you learn. The third thing that comes out of it is that it re-sparks a love for reading that maybe has been lost for a while."

Having just completed my first year of college, I now feel prepared to participate in discussions in my classes and to engage in self-exploration. I am eternally grateful I signed up to participate in the honors summer book club, as I gained confidence in my ability to hold my own in a room full of scholars.

—Daisy Calero Estrella

[READ: Select Your Book Club](#)

What's Next? Summer Social!



WE WANT TO HELP YOU get to know some of your Honors peers before Fall semester starts!

Keep your eye on your LU email for the invite to our **Summer Social**.

Held in July, this is a fun social gathering where you can mingle with other incoming Honors Cardinals and our student leaders from the Honors Student Association.

We are excited to get to know you!

Stay Connected to Reaud Honors College

