



Spring 2-14-2005

Winthrop Freshmen to Read Common Book, "A Hope in the Unseen"

Winthrop University

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Recommended Citation

Winthrop University, "Winthrop Freshmen to Read Common Book, "A Hope in the Unseen"" (2005). *Winthrop News 2005*. 141.
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02/14/2005



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Winthrop Freshmen to Read Common Book, "A Hope in the Unseen"

Quick Facts

- This year's selection is Ron Suskind's book "A Hope in the Unseen" about Cedric Jennings' struggle to get out of one of the worst public high schools in Washington, D.C. and to attend Brown University.
- Virginia Williams, director of Winthrop's foundational ACAD 101 program, said the book was chosen because it best raised many of the issues that freshmen face.

ROCK HILL, S.C. - For the second consecutive year, **incoming Winthrop freshmen** will read a common book this summer and discuss it in their entry-level classes – and area residents will have a way to participate, too.

This year's selection is **Ron Suskind's book "A Hope in the Unseen"** about **Cedric Jennings' struggle** to get out of one of the worst public high schools in Washington, D.C. and to attend **Brown University**, an Ivy League school.

Virginia Williams, director of Winthrop's foundational **ACAD 101 program**, said the book was chosen because it best raised many of the issues that freshmen face. "It raises the differences between high school and college and of living with someone of another race for the first time," she said.

Jennings, now a social worker in the District of Columbia metropolitan area, will tentatively visit the campus during the first week of classes as part of the university's back-to-school activities. He will attend **Convocation** on Aug. 22 and speak that night at the **York County Public Library** and then address the freshman class on Aug. 23 in Byrnes Auditorium.

The **Rock Hill community** also will be encouraged to read the book and participate in discussions about its message of hope and perseverance.

Jennings has traveled to several colleges to tell his story, including Appalachian State University. He holds a B.A. in mathematics from Brown, a M.Ed. from Harvard and a master's degree in social work from the University of Michigan. His goal is to become a psychologist.

The author of "**A Hope in the Unseen**," Ron Suskind, won the Pulitzer Prize for feature writing in 1995 for his stories on Jennings, a talented black teen-ager whose mother is a single parent and whose father is in and out of prison for drugs. Suskind expanded those features into a full-length nonfiction narrative, following Jennings beyond his high-school graduation to Brown.

There, **Jennings** finds himself far behind most of the other freshmen and must deal with a bewildering array of intellectual and social challenges. He had hoped to fit in at college but found that he has little in common with white students who may have come from privileged backgrounds, or with the middle-class blacks. **Jennings** ended up relying on his faith, intelligence and determination.

"Cedric made the leap from inner city ghetto to the Ivy League," **Williams** noted. "Some of our students are making a similar leap, although the distance is not as great."

The book also challenges readers to examine how society continues to self-segregate. "It raises a lot of issues about race that we are uncomfortable in dealing with," **Williams** said.

"**A Hope in the Unseen**" was selected by a Winthrop book committee made up of faculty members,

staff and students. After considering nearly 20 books since the fall, they made their final selection in January. Once again, members purposely chose one that is not read in high school courses, had not been made into a movie, or had “Cliffs Notes” available.

University College Dean Brien Lewis said group members wanted students to have a common topic for discussion when they begin Winthrop. The common book reading ties in with the general education emphasis on “**Who Am I?**” and other first-year experiences.

Lewis anticipates the book will generate other campus events, residence hall discussions and a public art installation by an undergraduate or a graduate student. He and other committee members hope various departments can integrate the book into various classes beyond those taken by freshmen students.

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