The 2015-2016 Synergy Common Reading Selection is Chasing Chaos by Jessica Alexander

Synopsis (Penguin Random House):

Jessica Alexander arrived in Rwanda in the aftermath of the 1994 genocide as an idealistic intern, eager to contribute to the work of the international humanitarian aid community. But the world that she encountered in the field was dramatically different than anything she could have imagined. It was messy, chaotic, and difficult—but she was hooked.

In this honest and irreverent memoir, she introduces readers to the realities of life as an aid worker. We watch as she manages a 24,000-person camp in Darfur, collects evidence for the Charles Taylor trial in Sierra Leone, and contributes to the massive aid effort to clean up a shattered Haiti. But we also see the alcohol-fueled parties and fleeting romances, the burnouts and self-doubt, and the struggle to do good in places that have long endured suffering.

Tracing her personal journey from wide-eyed and naïve newcomer to hardened cynic and, ultimately, to hopeful but critical realist, Alexander transports readers to some of the most troubled locations around the world and shows us not only the seemingly impossible challenges, but also the moments of resilience and recovery.

Praise for Chasing Chaos:

“In Chasing Chaos, Jessica Alexander serves up a sharp critique of the multi-billion dollar humanitarian aid industry, wrapped in a tender coming-of-age story. Her quietly evocative prose recreates the painful, poignant, and sometimes hilarious experience of marching into ‘the field’ of armed conflict and disaster to relieve suffering, supported by donations from those who expect heroism. With remarkable honesty and empathy, Alexander reveals how absurd and presumptuous it is to imagine we can fix the world and, even more profoundly, why we must continue to try. An important book.”
—Sheri Fink, New York Times bestselling author of Five Days at Memorial

Chasing Chaos as a Synergy Selection:

The Synergy Common Reading selection for the 2015-2016 academic year is Chasing Chaos. The book will be required reading in all First-Year Seminar classes, however all students are encouraged to participate in the Synergy Common Reading Experience. Faculty are encouraged to incorporate Chasing Chaos and/or its themes into their fall and spring courses. The book was partly selected due to the multitude of interdisciplinary themes encompassing many academic departments such as History, International Studies, Business, Psychology, Cultural Anthropology, Communication Studies, Health and Applied Human Sciences, and Sociology. The book has the potential to engage students as they cope with their own transition to a new environment, giving them opportunities to explore important issues such as cultural diversity, effective communication, global conflict and unrest, humanitarian aid, and privilege.

First-year students will receive a copy of Chasing Chaos at orientation, as required summer reading. Several related events, including a keynote speaker, a faculty panel, discussion groups, an art exhibit, and films will be planned for the fall semester.

For more information, contact Gina Garera, Synergy Coordinator: garerag@uncw.edu or refer to the Synergy website: www.uncw.edu/commonreading