Purdue students and alumni have always been partners in creating the Purdue experience, through time-honored traditions, exciting athletic events, and above all pursuing a world-class education. Now there’s another way for alumni to share in the experiences of Purdue students — through Purdue’s new Common Reading Program.

Starting this fall, all incoming students and the Purdue community will be encouraged to read a common book each year. The inaugural book, Stealing Buddha’s Dinner by Bich Minh Nguyen, will be provided free to all incoming freshmen and transfer students this summer. The book was selected by a University-wide committee from more than 100 suggested titles.

“The Common Reading program was a specific initiative that emerged from Purdue’s recent strategic planning process,” says Drew Koch, director of Student Access, Transition, and Success Programs (SATS). “It reinforces the high academic expectations of Purdue by promoting literacy, critical thinking, and understanding of different cultures, while at the same time giving the class of 2013 a shared first year experience — something that generates academic-based discussions when they get to campus.”

About the book

Nguyen came to the Midwest from Vietnam with her family when she was less than a year old. Her memoir Stealing Buddha’s Dinner shares her attempts to “be more American” in Grand Rapids, Michigan, during the 1980s, primarily through a fascination with American snack food.

Stealing Buddha’s Dinner is a book that every student can relate
to,” comments Ashley Scott, a senior in the College of Liberal Arts and a student member of the selection committee. “Through her relationship with food, Nguyen confronts everything from religion to race. This book provides Purdue students with a basis to address some of the problems associated with diversity that our campus strives to overcome every day.”

Stealing Buddha’s Dinner received the PEN/Jerard Award in 2005 and also has been named a Chicago Tribune Best Book of 2007. Nguyen is an associate professor of English at Purdue, and will be releasing Short Girls: A Novel this summer.

How to get involved with the program

The program will kick off with two convocations with the author on August 23. Throughout the year, instructors will incorporate the book into their curricula, and co-curricular programs and events will be held to reinforce the shared experience on campus.

Alumni and friends of Purdue are encouraged to read the book and participate in the campus activities. More information about specific events for alumni will be available in the July/August issue of the Purdue Alumnus.

The program is also part of the University’s Access & Success campaign, with a goal to endow the program so that Purdue can continue to provide all incoming students with free copies of each year’s selected title and host the author for events.

For more information about how to give to the Common Reading Program, please contact Garet Rhys Turner, (765) 494-5269 or gturner@purdue.edu. Questions about the Common Reading Program itself should be directed to Drew Koch, (765) 496-3618 or akkoch@purdue.edu.

—Kayla Gregory