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Featured Bookshelf: 2020 Staff Favorite Reads

Megan M. Haught

Univeristy of Central Florida, megan.haught@ucf.edu

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2020 Staff Favorite Reads Featured Bookshelf



Each December, the UCF Libraries' Featured Bookshelf celebrates the favorite books of employees of the UCF Libraries. And you know a major thing about librarians and library staff? They love talking about their favorite books. The books listed below are some of the favorite books we read in 2020.

Keep reading below to see the full list, descriptions, and catalog links for our favorite 2020 titles. These 20 books plus favorites from previous years are also on display in the 4th floor Reading Room of the John C. Hitt Library.

And if you find someone has checked the one you're interested in out before you had a chance, did you know you can place an interlibrary loan and have another copy sent here for you? [Click here for instructions on placing an interlibrary loan.](#)

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[A Furious Sky: the five-hundred-year history of America's hurricanes](#) by Eric Jay Dolin

From the moment European colonists laid violent claim to this land, hurricanes have had a profound and visceral impact on American history--yet, no one has attempted to write the definitive account of America's entanglement with these meteorological behemoths. Eric Jay Dolin presents the five-hundred-year story of American hurricanes, from the nameless storms that threatened Columbus' New World voyages, to the devastation wrought by Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico and the escalation of hurricane season as a result of global warming. Populating his narrative with unlikely heroes such as Benito Vines, the nineteenth-century Jesuit priest whose revelatory methods for predicting hurricanes saved countless lives, and journalist Dan Rather, whose coverage of a 1961 hurricane would change broadcasting history, Dolin uncovers the often surprising ways we respond to natural crises.

Suggested by Megan Haught, Student Learning & Engagement/Research & Information Services

[Children of the Land](#) by Marcelo Hernandez Castillo

With beauty, grace, and honesty, Castillo recounts his and his family's encounters with a system that treats them as criminals for seeking safe, ordinary lives. He writes of the Sunday afternoon when he opened the door to an ICE officer who had one hand on his holster, of the hours he spent making a fake social security card so that he could work to support his family, of his father's deportation and the decade that he spent waiting to return to his wife and children only to be denied reentry

Suggested by Sara Duff, Acquisitions & Collections

[Dark Matter: a novel](#) by Blake Crouch

A mind-bending, relentlessly paced science-fiction thriller, in which an ordinary man is kidnapped, knocked unconscious--and awakens in a world inexplicably different from

the reality he thought he knew. "Are you happy with your life?" Those are the last words Jason Dessen hears before the masked abductor knocks him unconscious. He awakens to find himself strapped to a gurney, surrounded by strangers in hazmat suits. Before him, a man Jason's never met smiles down at him and says, "Welcome back, my friend." In this world he's woken up to, Jason's life is not the one he knows. His wife is not his wife. His son was never born. And Jason is not an ordinary college physics professor but a celebrated genius who has achieved something remarkable. Something impossible.

Suggested by Katy Miller, Student Learning & Engagement

Do Nothing: how to break away from overworking, overdoing, and underliving by Celeste Headlee

We work feverishly to make ourselves happy. So why are we so miserable? Despite our constant search for new ways to "hack" our bodies and minds for peak performance, human beings are working more instead of less, living harder not smarter, and becoming more lonely and anxious. This manifesto helps us break free of our unhealthy devotion to efficiency and shows us how to reclaim our time and humanity with a little more leisure

Suggested by Katy Miller, Student Learning & Engagement

Eleanor Roosevelt by Blanche Wiesen Cook

A study of the complex and political figure of Eleanor Roosevelt begins with her harrowing childhood, describes the difficulties of her marriage, and explains how she persuaded Franklin to make the reforms that would make him famous.

Suggested by Richard Harrison, Research & Information Services

From Here to Eternity: traveling the world to find the good death by Caitlin Doughty

Fascinated by our pervasive fear of dead bodies, mortician Caitlin Doughty set out to discover how other cultures care for the dead. In rural Indonesia, she watches a man clean and dress his grandfather's mummified body, which has resided in the family home for two years. In La Paz, she meets Bolivian natitas (cigarette-smoking, wish-granting human skulls), and in Tokyo she encounters the Japanese kotsuage ceremony, in which relatives use chopsticks to pluck their loved-ones' bones from cremation ashes. She introduces deathcare innovators researching body composting and green burial, and examines how varied traditions, from Mexico's Dias de los Muertos to Zoroastrian sky burial help us see our own death customs in a new light. She argues that our expensive, impersonal system fosters a corrosive fear of death that hinders our ability to cope and mourn. By comparing customs, she demonstrates that mourners everywhere respond best when they help care for the deceased and have space to participate in the process.

Suggested by Katy Miller, Student Learning & Engagement

Indelicacy by Amina Cain

A cleaning woman at a museum of art nurtures aspirations to do more than simply dust the paintings around her. She dreams of having the liberty to explore them in writing, and so must find a way to win herself the time and security to use her mind. She escapes her lot by marrying a rich man, but having gained a husband, a house, high society, and a maid, she finds that her new life of privilege is no less constrained. Not only has she taken up different forms of time-consuming labor - social and erotic - but she is now, however passively, forcing other women to clean up after her. Perhaps another and more drastic solution is necessary

Suggested by Sara Duff, Acquisitions & Collections

Interior Chinatown by Charles Yu

Every day Willis Wu leaves his tiny room in a Chinatown SRO and enters the Golden Palace restaurant, where Black and White, a procedural cop show, is in perpetual production. He's a bit player here too, but he dreams of being Kung Fu Guy-- and he sees his life as a script. After stumbling into the spotlight, Willis finds himself launched into a wider world than he has ever known, discovering not only the secret history of Chinatown, but the buried legacy of his own family, and what that means for him in today's America.

Suggested by Sara Duff, Acquisitions & Collections

Outlander by Diana Gabaldon

Scottish Highlands, 1945. Claire Randall, a former British combat nurse, is just back from the war and reunited with her husband on a second honeymoon when she walks through a standing stone in one of the ancient circles that dot the British Isles. Suddenly she is a Sassenach—an “outlander”—in a Scotland torn by war and raiding clans in the year of Our Lord . . . 1743. Claire is catapulted into the intrigues of a world that threatens her life, and may shatter her heart. Marooned amid danger, passion, and violence, Claire learns her only chance of safety lies in Jamie Fraser, a gallant young Scots warrior. What begins in compulsion becomes urgent need, and Claire finds herself torn between two very different men, in two irreconcilable lives.

Suggested by Katie Kirwan, Acquisitions & Collections

Paradise Lost: a life of F. Scott Fitzgerald by David S. Brown

In this comprehensive biography, Brown reexamines Fitzgerald's childhood, first loves, and difficult marriage to Zelda Sayre. He looks at Fitzgerald's friendship with Hemingway, the golden years that culminated with Gatsby, and his increasing alcohol abuse and declining fortunes which coincided with Zelda's institutionalization and the nation's economic collapse.

Suggested by Andrew Hackler, Circulation

Recursion by Blake Crouch

Reality is broken. At first, it looks like a disease. An epidemic that spreads through no known means, driving its victims mad with memories of a life they never lived. But the force that's sweeping the world is no pathogen. It's just the first shock wave, unleashed by a stunning discovery—and what's in jeopardy is not our minds but the very fabric of time itself.

Suggested by Mary Rubin, Special Collections & University Archives

Solutions and Other Problems by Allie Brosh

Brosh's second book includes humorous stories from her childhood; the adventures of her very bad animals; merciless dissection of her own character flaws; incisive essays on grief, loneliness, and powerlessness; as well as reflections on the absurdity of modern life.

Suggested by Sara Duff, Acquisitions & Collections

Spillover: animal infections and the next human pandemic by David Quammen

This work examines the emergence and causes of new diseases all over the world, describing a process called "spillover" where illness originates in wild animals before being passed to humans and discusses the potential for the next huge pandemic. The emergence of strange new diseases is a frightening problem that seems to be getting worse. In this age of speedy travel, it threatens a worldwide pandemic. We hear news reports of Ebola, SARS, AIDS, and something called Hendra killing horses and people in Australia; but those reports miss the big truth that such phenomena are part of a single pattern. The bugs that transmit these diseases share one thing: they originate in wild animals and pass to humans by a process called spillover. As globalization spreads and as we destroy the ancient ecosystems, penetrating ever deeper into the furthest reaches of the planet, we encounter strange and dangerous infections that originate in animals but can be transmitted to humans. The author tracks this subject around the world. He recounts adventures in the field, netting bats in China, trapping monkeys in Bangladesh, stalking gorillas in the Congo, with the world's leading disease scientists. He takes the reader along on this quest to learn how, where from, and why these diseases emerge, and he asks the terrifying question: What might the next big one be?

Suggested by Megan Haught, Student Learning & Engagement/Research & Information Services

Squeeze Me by Carl Hiaasen

It's the height of the Palm Beach charity ball season: for every disease or cause, there's a reason for the local luminaries to eat (minimally), drink (maximally), and be seen. But when a prominent high-society dowager suddenly vanishes during a swank gala, and is later found dead in a concrete grave, panic and chaos erupt. Kiki Pew was notable not just for her wealth and her jewels--she was an ardent fan of the Winter White House resident just down the road, and a founding member of the POTUSSIES, a group of women dedicated to supporting their President. Never one to miss an opportunity to

play to his base, the President immediately declares that Kiki was the victim of rampaging immigrant hordes. This, it turns out, is far from the truth.

Suggested by Richard Harrison, Research & Information Services

[The Lady's Guide to Petticoats and Piracy](#) by Mackenzi Lee

A year after a whirlwind grand tour with her brother Monty, Felicity Montague has returned to England with two goals in mind: avoid the marriage proposal of a lovestruck suitor from Edinburgh and enroll in medical school. But the administrators see men as the sole guardians of science. When a doctor she idolizes marries a friend of hers in Germany, Felicity believes he could change her future. A mysterious young woman will pay Felicity's way, if Felicity will let her travel along-- as her maid. Soon they're on a perilous quest that leads them across the promenades of Zurich to secrets lurking beneath the Atlantic.

Suggested by Megan Haught, Student Learning & Engagement/Research & Information Services

[The Power of Now: a guide to spiritual enlightenment](#) by Eckhart Tolle

Much more than simple principles and platitudes, this book takes readers on an inspiring spiritual journey to find their true and deepest self and reach the ultimate in personal growth and spirituality: the discovery of truth and light. In the first chapter, Tolle introduces readers to enlightenment and its natural enemy, the mind. He awakens readers to their role as a creator of pain and shows them how to have a pain-free identity by living fully in the present. The journey is thrilling, and along the way, the author shows how to connect to the indestructible essence of our Being.

Suggested by Sandy Avila, Research & Information Services

[The Scarlet Sisters: sex, suffrage, and scandal in the gilded age](#) by Myra MacPherson

A fresh look at the life and times of Victoria Woodhull and Tennie Claflin, two sisters whose radical views on sex, love, politics, and business threatened the white male power structure of the nineteenth century and shocked the world. Here award-winning author Myra MacPherson deconstructs and lays bare the manners and mores of Victorian America, remarkably illuminating the struggle for equality that women are still fighting today.

Suggested by Dawn Tripp, Research & Information Services

[The Shifting Realities of Philip K. Dick: selected literary and philosophical writings](#) by Philip K. Dick

Philip K. Dick has established himself as a major figure in American literature. The landscape of his imagination features a wealth of concepts and fictional worlds: Nazi-rule in a postwar nightmare; androids and the unification of man and machine; and an existence that no longer follows the logic of reality. This first-time collection assembles

his nonfiction writings essays, journals, speeches, and interviews. In these writings he explores issues ranging from the merging of physics and metaphysics to the potential influences of "virtual" reality and its consequences to a plot-scenario for a potential episode of "Mission: Impossible," to the challenge that fundamental "human" values face in the age of technology and spiritual decline."

Suggested by Sandy Avila, Research & Information Services

[The Wild Heart of Florida: Florida writers on Florida's wildlands](#) selected and edited by Jeff Ripple and Susan Cerulean

Coming from a variety of backgrounds--fiction, journalism, poetry, and environmental writing--the writers turn their talent to one thing they have in common--a love for Florida's natural beauty and a commitment to preserve it. Their essays--some old favorites, most appearing here for the first time--are both a celebration and a pointed reminder of what we stand to lose.

Suggested by Rebecca Hawk, Circulation

[There Will Come a Darkness](#) by Katy Rose Pool

The Age of Darkness approaches. Who will stop it... or unleash it? For generations, the Seven Prophets guided humanity. Using their visions of the future, they ended wars and united nations-- until they disappeared a hundred years ago. All they left behind was one final prophecy, foretelling an Age of Darkness and the birth of a new Prophet who could be the world's salvation-- or the cause of its destruction. Will it be a prince exiled from his kingdom? A ruthless killer known as the Pale Hand? A once-faithful leader torn between his duty and his heart? A reckless gambler with the power to find anything or anyone? Or a dying girl on the verge of giving up?

Suggested by Pam Jaggernaut, Curriculum Materials Center

Tumblr post: <https://ucflibrary.tumblr.com/post/636318122874486784/each-december-the-ucf-libraries-featured>

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