

Students Join Cross-country Book Club

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A novel about an awkward teenager born in the Dominican Republic but raised in New Jersey is this year's choice for the Tulane Reading Project. Incoming students attending summer orientation were presented with the book ? *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz. And it has been mailed to first-year students who didn't travel to New Orleans this summer.



At a coffee shop on the uptown campus, incoming students read *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Rich in Dominican history and culture, the coming-of-age story depicts Oscar Wao's cultural and personal struggles.

"It's all about finding a new place," says Claire Starcke, a senior at Tulane and a member of the committee that selected the book. "Oscar questions whether his true home lies in New Jersey or in the Dominican Republic."

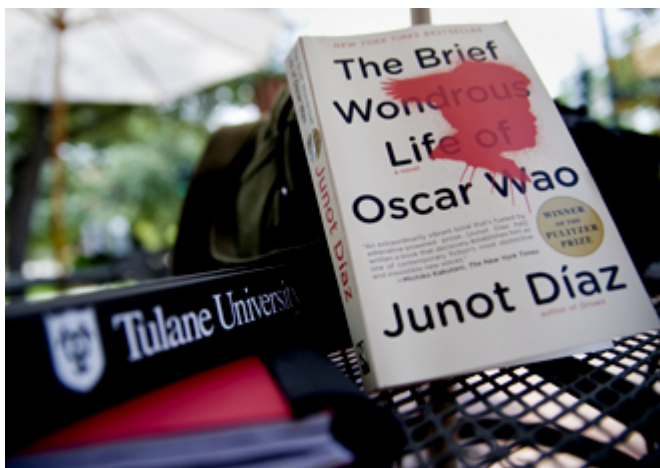
Díaz pairs the use of Spanglish and street slang throughout the dialogue. The book

? a Pulitzer Prize winner in 2008 ? is extensively footnoted, grounding the storyline in a historical context and offering additional insight into Oscar Wao's world.

The [Tulane Reading Project](#) committee, comprised of faculty, students and staff, selected the book because it is "gripping and compelling," says Barbara Mousset, a sophomore and member of the committee.

The committee was determined to pick a novel that new students would not want to put down, says Trina Beck, director of Newcomb-Tulane College Programs. "We're focusing on great literature."

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao has qualities similar to last year's successful choice, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* by Mohsin Hamid, says Beck. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a novel about a Pakistani man educated in America.



Junot Díaz' book is this year's selection for the Tulane Reading Project.

"What we liked so much about *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* was that it got students talking and engaging in a dialogue that mostly took place outside the classroom," she says. "We hope to recreate that type of experience with *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*."

In addition to reading the book, students are encouraged to attend Reading Project

events, including a talk during fall orientation by Felipe Smith, associate professor of English, on Aug. 23 and a lecture by author D  az on Aug. 31. Also during the week of Aug. 31, group discussions in TIDES classes will focus on the book. And for a little lagniappe, on Oct. 6, comedian Ruperto Vanderpool will give his humorous take on growing up Dominican-American.

"Through these events, we hope that students will begin to learn how to approach a topic ?in this case, a great work of fiction ?from different angles, and relate to their peers as fellow scholars, no matter what they might be majoring in," says Beck.

Mary Cross is a senior majoring in communication at Tulane University.