Dear First-Year Students,

Welcome to Johnson State College and the College’s Common Reading Initiative, an interdisciplinary endeavor supporting active and engaged learning. This is one of many initiatives at Johnson State College dedicated to providing you with amazing opportunities; opportunities to take chances (much like Adam Braun), to ask questions, probe for answers and make great things happen.

It is my hope that this year’s common read, *The Promise of a Pencil*, will inspire you to take what you have learned from your reading and accompanying experiences and make the world better in some way. This may mean raising money for a class sponsored initiative, running for office, participating in a service project, or identifying that “big, hairy, audacious goal” that will actualize your passion.

This fall, you will have many opportunities to exchange ideas about *The Promise of a Pencil* with your peers, faculty and staff. In October, you will meet with the book’s author. Please make it a point to look at the background material presented in this guide.

I look forward to getting to know each of you and sharing this very special learning community. I challenge you to do your best and we will be there to support you every step of the way. Again, welcome to Johnson State College!

Best wishes for a great start,

Elaine C. Collins
President
CONTENTS

About the Author and the Book ........................................... 1

Events .................................................................................. 2

The Promise of a Pencil ...................................................... 3-4

Questions ............................................................................. back cover

JSC’s Common Reading Initiative is a program of the Office of First-Year Experience
Dewey Hall • 802-635-1474

Margo Warden, Director: margo.warden@jsc.edu
Emily Neilsen, Coordinator of First-Year Events: emily.neilsen@jsc.edu
Jennifer Stefanski, Coordinator of First-Year Support: jennifer.stefanski@jsc.edu

Support for the 2015 Common Reading Initiative provided by Jane White.
Adam Braun is the Founder of Pencils of Promise, an organization that has built more than 300 schools in poverty-stricken areas of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. The seeds of the organization were planted while Braun was travelling abroad in India. While there, he asked a young boy what he wanted more than anything else in the world. His answer: “A pencil.” With this inspiration and $25, Braun grew PoP into an organization that trains teachers, works with communities on a number of health initiatives, and builds schools for those most in need. Braun is also the Director of the Global Education Platform, an initiative conceived by the UN which works to identify and promote breakthroughs in education. His work has been recognized by the UN, Wired, Forbes’ “30 Under 30,” the Clinton Global Initiative, Business Insider’s “40 Under 40,” as well as World Economic Forum’s first ten “Global Shapers,” among others. In 2015 he received the Jefferson Award, our nation’s most prestigious award for public service.

The Promise of a Pencil: How an Ordinary Person Can Create Extraordinary Change, is a first-person account of Braun’s journey from high-powered Wall Street consultant to founder of Pencils of Promise. In the book, Braun tells the story of his decision to leave behind a prestigious job and its guarantee of financial success, and the expectations of his family and society, in order to follow his passion. While following one’s dream is central to the book, The Promise of a Pencil is about so much more. It sheds light on the challenges and joys of starting an organization from scratch and the reward of working to better the lives of others. In chronicling the story of building schools for children in poverty, The Promise of a Pencil implicitly raises questions: How does education (or the lack of it) impact an individual? A community? A nation? The world? And ultimately, what is the value of education?
**AUTHOR TALK & BOOK SIGNING**

**Adam Braun**  
**Monday, October 26 | Dibden Center for the Arts | 8pm**

Join us for an evening with Adam Braun, the author of this year’s Common Book. Braun will discuss the events that led him to found Pencils of Promise, his experience growing the organization, and the mantras which guide his business and structure his book, *The Promise of a Pencil*. The evening will end with a Q&A and a book signing.

---

**PICTURES OF PROMISE**  
**This event is ongoing throughout the year**

Which aspects of yourself do you want to highlight as you enter this next chapter in your life? Who do you want to become in your time at JSC? During the first weeks of school, Office of First-Year Experience staff will be photographing you in and around the I AM sculpture created by students in Professor Zebrowski’s Art Build class. Need inspiration for your photo? Consider Mantra #11, Speak the Language of the Person You Want to Become. Or, Mantra #21: There is Only One Chance at a First Impression. Photos will be printed and displayed in the Office of First-Year Experience (Dewey 154) along with your mantras (see card insert in this guide).

---

**ERASE, WRITE, SHARPEN:**  
**Processing Worldwide Education Challenges**  
**Thurs. Sept. 3 | Julian Scott Memorial Gallery | 3pm**

Join Gallery Director and Assistant Professor of Fine Arts, Michael Zebrowski for a discussion of this book-related exhibit.

---

**FUNDRAISER**

Inspired by PoP’s work? Submit your ideas for a campus and community-wide fundraiser. Money raised will be split between Pencils of Promise and the JSC Emergency Fund, which provides small grants to JSC students when financial emergencies arise.

---

**DOCUMENTARY: TO EDUCATE A GIRL**  
**Mon. Sept. 14 | Bentley 207 | 6pm**

Worldwide, over 100 million children are not in school. Around 2/3 of them are girls. Filmmakers Frederick Rendina and Oren Rudavsky travelled to Nepal and Uganda seeking to answer one (incredibly complex) question: what does it take to educate a girl?

---

**FILM: Baraka**  
**Time, Date, Location TBD**

Watch the film Adam Braun called a transformative educational experience in *The Promise of a Pencil*. *Baraka* was originally shot in 25 countries on six continents bringing together beautifully photographed scenes. Together these shots create what director Ron Fricke calls, “a guided meditation on humanity.”

---

**SERVICE PROJECT**

Badger Alternative Breaks, a chapter of the national Break Away Alternative Breaks network, helps you build leadership and organizational skills while traveling to sites in the U.S. (or some years, abroad). Over Winter Break (February 2016), selected students will travel to Managua, Nicaragua to participate in a school rehabilitation project. While on site students will have the opportunity to work alongside community members, learn about the culture, and understand why these communities rely on volunteer groups to rebuild their infrastructure. Visit the SERVE Office, Stearns 408, to learn more. Applications will be accepted until September 2015.
Access to education is not universal or equal. Country of origin, gender, age, race, and household income (among many factors) all impact one’s ability to obtain an education.

**POVERTY**
- is the most pervasive barrier to education and overlaps with other bottlenecks.

**CHILD LABOR**
- affects over 150 million children, who have to work to support their families, often missing or dropping out of school completely.

**GENDER DISCRIMINATION**
- stems from societal perceptions and norms around gender. In combination with other barriers, it disproportionately affects girls’ chances to education.

**CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**
- Around 90% in the developing world do not go to school. Inapt and ill-equipped education systems and social stigma serve as a double barrier.

**LANGUAGE CHALLENGE**
- At school experience nearly 40% of the world population. Schools that do not work in languages children can understand do not allow them to learn, participate and demonstrate what they know.

**CONFLICT**
- affected countries account for 50% of all out-of-school children.

---

**YEARS OF EDUCATION BY REGION**

North America and Western Europe

Central and Eastern Europe

Latin America and the Caribbean

East Asia and the Pacific

Arab States

South and West Asia

---

0

5

10

15

20

YEARS OF EDUCATION
61 million primary-aged children are out of school. 32 million of these are girls, and over 28 million are in conflict-affected poor countries. Most are shut out because of poverty, but others lack a classroom or go to school hungry.

**HERE’S HOW:**

- Eliminate cost barriers to attending and completing school.
- Identify and help children who need nutritional, health and social support.
- Close the gender gap at all education levels.
- Build 4 million more classrooms, especially in rural and conflict areas.
- Double education’s percentage of humanitarian aid.
1. What do you think of Braun’s focus on educating students in the developing world when there are educational needs here in the United States? Why might he be motivated to help children in nations other than his own? What obstacles to education have you faced? What obstacles exist for others in your community?

2. What is the value of an education? How does education, or the lack of an education, impact individuals? Families? Communities? Countries? The world? How do you hope your education at JSC will shape your life?

3. Which mantra(s) in the book speak(s) to you the most? Why? Choose one or two that best represent you or your goals for the future.

4. In a recent blog post, Braun claimed, “life’s biggest winners are motivated by something different from happiness.” He went on to say that happiness is temporary and fleeting, but that meaning and purpose light internal fires that last. What do you think if these ideas? Do you agree? Are meaning and happiness connected? Which is more important to strive for?