Cozy up to these winter reading recommendations

From classic memoirs like “Kitchen Confidential” to a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about trees and an updated spin on tales from King Arthur’s court, GPS professors share the books they can’t put down.

The academic interests of professors at the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy (GPS) are wide-ranging, from climate policy to expertise in Asia and Latin America, from global economics to human rights. And just as varied are those GPS professors’ bookshelves.

GPS News surveyed professors to get their recommendations for the best reads this winter. Here were their answers:
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<th>Jennifer Burney</th>
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<td>“The Overstory” by Richard Powers is just a beautiful book, though it’s hard to say too much without encroaching on how future readers might interpret it! Directly speaking, it’s a novel about trees that interweaves stories about how different characters see and understand and are moved by these amazing organisms. More broadly, I think it belongs in the canon of great American environmental literature – it’s fiction, but exquisitely researched, and really asks us to step back and examine what it means to live on our planet. I’ll just say that few books have moved me so much, and since I’ve finished it, I haven’t been able to stop thinking about it and going back to it to see if I can put its pieces together.</td>
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<th>Peter Cowhey</th>
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<td>Jonathan A. Knee’s “The Platform Delusion: Who Wins and Who Loses in the Age of Tech Titans” brings good GPS contrarianism to the hyperbole about the power of big digital platforms. Its combination of practitioner and academic insights is both fun and a start to better policy strategies. I only discovered Etienne Davodeau’s graphic non-fiction work “The Initiates: A Comic Artist and a Wine Artisan Exchange Jobs” because it was a gift from my son. It is a candid encounter between a comic book artist and wine maker who are learning each other’s creative worlds. Finally, for those of us fascinated by Fermi’s Paradox, the first third of Gregory Benford’s latest novel “Shadows of Eternity” offers a mind-stretching answer. Benford is also a UC San Diego Ph.D. in physics.</td>
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**Jesse Driscoll**

When I’m not prepping classes, my “light” reading these days is “The Dead Hand: The Untold Story of the Cold War Arms Race and Its Dangerous Legacy” – a fairly chilling book recommended by Vice Admiral Charlie Martoglio. I am humbled by how many important turning points that might have ended the species hinged on political leadership – personalities, really – at the very top.

**Rafael Fernández de Castro**

This year I have truly enjoyed the books by Barack and Michelle Obama, “A Promised Land” and “Becoming.”

“A Promised Land” is great at breaking down very difficult foreign policy issues in a very simple and concise prose. Regardless of whether you consider yourself a Democrat or a Republican, if you lean left, right or center, the book’s chapters on U.S. foreign policy are a must read for all students interested in diplomacy and geopolitics.

On the other hand, Michelle Obama’s book is more of a memoir about the former First Lady growing up in the impoverished south side of Chicago and dealing with racial and gender tensions and prejudice while trying to excel at top educational institutions. Moreover, she provides great insight into how public figures of her stature must navigate the blurring lines of personal and political life.
Peter Gourevitch
“Apeirogon” by Colum McCann is a novel on two guys – one Israeli, one Palestinian – who each lose a daughter killed in Jerusalem and bond together going around and speaking of the need for peace. Very powerfully done and based on true people – you can see an interview with the author and the real people on YouTube.


Uma Karmarkar
I recommend “Sword Stone Table: Old Legends, New Voices,” edited by Swapna Krishna and Jen Northington. Tales of King Arthur’s court and the Knights of the Round Table are foundational in Western culture. Not surprisingly, tellings and retellings of Arthurian legend generally hold themselves to a time, a place and a people. The diverse authors of the stories in this book are freed from those bindings and build a range of perspectives and character voices (often from marginalized groups) that pull familiar story elements into new times and places. It was a very cool read.
“The Riddle of the Labyrinth: The Quest to Crack an Ancient Code” by Margalit Fox is a great true story of language detectives racing against each other to crack one of the long lost ancient languages.

“A Very English Scandal” by John Preston is a hilarious, true, but unbelievably ridiculous story. It’s extremely funny in a very English way.
Ellis Krauss

I recommend “Tokyo Junkie: 60 Years of Bright Lights and Back Alleys...and Baseball” by Robert Whiting. Whiting is a longtime Tokyo resident who has written books on Japanese baseball and the yakuza. I read something about this, and since he arrived in Tokyo just four years before I did as a grad student, I got interested in it. It’s quite fascinating as his personal journey coincides with the evolution of this fantastic city from the early 1960s - just as the "economic miracle" was beginning and the 1964 Olympics were held - to the present. I could recall many of the things he describes along the way.

I saw a webinar the other day with Merry White describing her book “Coffee Life in Japan,” so I bought it and started reading it. It’s an anthropological study of coffee and coffee shops in Japan which, starting out as an exotic Western innovation has become so integrated into daily Japanese life with Japan at the forefront of serving the world’s greatest coffees in diverse modern and nostalgic venues.

“The Man Who Made Vermeers: Unvarnishing the Legend of Master Forger Han van Meegeren” by Jonathan Lopez is just escapism. It’s an interesting tale of a talented, lying forger of great masterpieces who seems to have fooled everyone, including Hermann Göring and the Nazis and the Western-occupying Allies after the war.
**Elizabeth Lyons**

Two books I’ve recently read and really enjoyed are: “Antitrust: Taking on Monopoly Power from the Gilded Age to the Digital Age” by Amy Klobuchar. This provides an in-depth overview of the evolution of thought on and enforcement of antitrust law in the U.S. and some ideas for how antitrust policy might be adapted for modern antitrust concerns.

I also recommend “The Remains of the Day” by Kazuo Ishiguro. I took this off my mom’s bookcase recently, and couldn’t put it down until I had finished it. I can’t believe it took me until this year to read it! It’s a beautifully written story that, I think, pushes the reader to reevaluate the importance of some taken-for-granted life essentials.

**Susan Shirk**

Bob Davis and Lingling Wei’s “Superpower Showdown: How the Battle Between Trump and Xi Threatens a New Cold War.” Fascinating stories of how domestic politics in both countries led to our current hostile relationship. It’s tragic because it didn’t have to turn out this way; personalities and events mattered a lot.

**Jakana Thomas**


In this book, Jones chronicles black women’s fight for freedom and equality as they worked to escape the bondage of slavery at the same time they fought for voting rights for women. Jones describes how, facing the double oppression of sexism and racism, black women and their interests were not completely represented by black male abolitionists or white female suffragettes. Instead, black women had to build and leverage their own political power to secure rights for all women and all blacks.
You should be skeptical of any theory that boils history to single causes – but mosquito-borne disease is a contender. Timothy Winegard’s “The Mosquito: A Human History of Our Deadliest Predator” is a well-informed and wide-ranging book that puts a bug lens on world history, just at the moment when our colleagues at UC San Diego are engineering the critters to become impotent.

No matter what you think about the scandalous voice synthesis in “Roadrunner,” last summer’s documentary of the life of troubled chef Anthony Bourdain, there’s no better Bourdain than the original “Kitchen Confidential.” Smart and irreverent – fun to read, even if its spotlight on kitchen life will convince any diner to keep the Cipro handy.
Barbara Walter

I’ve been reading books about the effects of social media recommendation engines on the decline of liberal Democracies around the world, the rise of ethnic nationalism and political polarization, and the increase in political violence. I think this will become one of the biggest issues the world will be facing over the next five years. Right now, I would recommend four books:

“An Ugly Truth: Inside Facebook’s Battle for Domination” by Sheera Frenkel and Cecilia Kang. Written by two New York Times reporters, this is a forensic investigation of the many ways in which Facebook’s leadership has willfully ignored the ways in which its platform helps hate-mongers, criminals and corrupt political regimes.

“Mindf*ck: Cambridge Analytica and the Plot to Break America” by Christopher Wylie. Written by a whistleblower at Cambridge Analytica, it gives an inside scoop into how social data can be weaponized against liberal democracy.

“This Is Not Propaganda: Adventures in the War Against Reality” by Peter Pomerantsev. Pomerantsev is a former journalist from Moscow who reveals exactly how Vladimir Putin is using social media (Twitter, in particular) to try to destabilize the West. This is a much bigger problem (and Putin’s interventions are much more extensive) than most people realize.

“Antisocial: Online Extremists, Techno-Utopians, and the Hijacking of the American Conversation” by Andrew Marantz. This book lays out how conspiracists, white supremacists and nihilist trolls have used social media to advance their corrosive agenda. Again, the most shocking thing about this book (at least to me) is that people like Mark Zuckerberg know that this is happening - and are doing nothing to stop it.