



**RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
The Pre-College Experience Program**

**Cultural Enrichment and Literacy
Summer 2010 Course Syllabus 3 Credit Option**

Course Information

Class Meeting Days: Mon-Fri.

College Web Address: www.ramapo.edu

College Closings/Special Announcements Phone No.: (201) 236-2902

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Peter Scheckner, Professor of Literature

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Course Description

The overall objective of this course is to familiarize the students with various aspects of American and world culture and some of the critical issues of our times. What is the minimum students should know that is part of our shared or common knowledge about who we are as citizens of an American and global culture?

The word "culture" itself has a multitude of meanings. Here, in the following six paragraphs, is how Wikipedia begins its lengthy discussion of this complex and multi-layered word:

Culture (from the [Latin](#) cultura stemming from colere, meaning "to cultivate,") generally refers to patterns of human activity and the symbolic structures that give such activities significance and importance. Cultures can be "understood as systems of symbols and meanings that even their creators contest, that lack fixed boundaries, that are constantly in flux, and that interact and compete with one another." Different definitions of "culture" reflect different theoretical bases for understanding, or criteria for evaluating, human activity.

Culture is manifested in music, literature, lifestyle, food, painting and sculpture, theater and film and similar things. Although some people identify culture in terms of consumption and consumer goods (as in [high culture](#), [low culture](#), [folk culture](#), or [popular culture](#)), anthropologists understand "culture" to refer not only to [consumption goods](#), but to the general processes which produce such goods and give them meaning, and to the social relationships and practices in which such objects and processes become embedded. For them, culture thus includes art, science, as well as moral systems.

[Cultural Anthropologists](#) most commonly use the term "culture" to refer to the universal human capacity and activities to classify, codify and communicate their experiences [symbolically](#). This capacity has long been taken as a defining feature of humans. (although some [primatologists](#) have identified aspects of culture among humankind's closest relatives in the animal kingdom).

Culture can be defined as all the ways of life including [arts](#), beliefs and institutions of a population that are passed down from generation to generation. Culture has been called "the way of life for an entire society." As such, it includes codes of [manners](#), [dress](#), [language](#), [religion](#), [rituals](#), norms of behavior such as law and morality, and systems of belief as well as the art.

Various definitions of culture reflect differing theories for understanding, or criteria for evaluating, human activity. [For example] Culture or [civilization](#), taken in its wide [ethnographic](#) sense, is that complex whole

which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

More recently, the United Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([Unesco](#)) (2002) argued that “culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to [art](#) and [literature](#), [lifestyles](#), ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.”

Keeping all these various definitions in mind, students will be introduced to, primarily, American cultural issues, but also to some global issues. We will use an anthology of essays, personal narratives, and images from the media called *Rereading America*. The subtitle of this text, *Cultural Contexts for Critical Thinking and Writing*, captures the design and purpose of this book: to give the reader various opinions on the myths and institutions that define American culture: the family, education, money and success, gender roles, race, religion, the melting pot, and liberty--America as seen from a global perspective. These myths or issues are presented in ways that are controversial, thought provoking, and challenging.

In addition, the class will subscribe to *The New York Times* and gain an appreciation of what is happening in international and domestic events and in the world of science. The Times is an excellent vehicle for doing this and, equally important, reading this paper develops critical reading skills. The course will ask that the students maintain a journal about their experiences and submit three papers describing the guided tours.

Required Materials and Texts

Rereading America, seventh edition, edited by Gary Colombo, Robert Cullen, and Bonnie Lisle, published by Bedford/St. Martin's.

The New York Times, which will be provided by the College

A good notebook

Course Requirements

* Student oral presentations from *The New York Times*. I'd like to begin every class with brief presentations from each student as to what, that day, you found interesting in this paper: an article, an editorial, a letter, an OP ED piece, a picture, an advertisement, some information you learned, in short, something that stood out for you. Tell the class.

* For every class students should be prepared to talk about or to present one or more of our readings to the class to facilitate discussion. This is most certainly NOT a lecture class. It is a small class, and we will all participate. Your book has three sets of questions after each reading to make it easy for you to make your presentations. All you need to do is to do the assigned readings and then look at the questions and decide which ones you'd like to address.

* Keep a journal of no fewer than ten (10) typed pages. Create this journal as a WORD document on your computer. Put here on a week-to-week basis all your thoughts about our readings and class discussions. Double space, number each page, and use one inch margins on all sides. Put the dates for each entry. Titles for all readings are put in quotation marks. Titles of books and newspapers are put in italics (italics). Maintain this journal as you would a diary—but a literary diary, not so much a personal one. Aim for a minimum of ten pages by the end of the semester. This will make a perfect record of your time in this program.

* Take notes in class to help you remember what we said. This will make your journal much easier.

* After each of the field trips, submit a 2-3 page paper (typed and double spaced) about what you saw, what you learned, what additional information you might want to learn about what you saw, and what your overall impressions were.