

DESCRIPTION OF FIRST YEAR COURSES

2009-2010



**Residential College in the Arts and Humanities
Academic Orientation Program
Summer 2009**

RCAH PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

(First year courses are in **bold**)

a. All of the following core courses (32 credits):

RCAH	111	Writing in Transcultural Contexts	3
RCAH	112	Writing, Research and Technologies	3
RCAH	192	First Year Seminar (D)	2
RCAH	201	Transcultural Relations through the Ages	4
RCAH	202	The Presence of the Past	4
RCAH	290	Second-Year Tutorial (D)	4
RCAH	291	Creative Workshops	4
RCAH	292A	Engagement Proseminar (D)	2

b. Complete 6 credits from the following (6 credits):

RCAH	292B	Engagement and Reflection (D)	1 to 4
RCAH	292C	Independent Engagement (D)	2 to 6

c. Two of the following courses (6 credits):

RCAH	295	Special Topics in the Arts and Humanities	3
RCAH	310	Topics in Childhood and Society (D)	3
RCAH	320	Topics in Art and Public Life (D)	3
RCAH	330	Topics in Nature and Culture (D)	3
RCAH	340	Topics in Technology and Creativity (D)	3

d. Five elective courses totaling 15 to 20 credits taken outside of the Residential College in the Arts and Humanities chosen in consultation with the student's academic adviser. At least 8 of these credits must be at the 300-level or above.

e. Demonstrate proficiency in a world language or American Sign Language.

f. The following course (4 credits):

RCAH	390	Immersion in Language and Culture (D)	4
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g. One of the following capstone courses (4 credits):

RCAH	491	Senior Thesis (W)	4
RCAH	492	Senior Seminar (W)	4

FALL 2009 COURSES

RCAH 111: Writing in Transcultural Contexts

002 Aronoff

Telling Stories: Composing Knowledges in Transcultural Contexts

We will focus on the connection between culture and “storytelling,” broadly conceived. That is, we will examine the ways in which culture shapes the ways we perceive the world around us, and how we organize those perceptions into oral and written narratives – be they what we conventionally would call “stories” like personal narratives, myths or novels, or other genres like scientific, academic or philosophical writing, each with their own generic rules for the “stories” they tell. Drawing primarily on short stories, novels and film, we will be particularly interested in what happens when different “cultures,” or ways of knowing and writing, collide, clash or mix, in a process we will call “transculturation.”

003 Monberg

Travel, Migration, & Exile

This course explores competing definitions of “travel writing” by juxtaposing transcultural narratives of tourism with narratives of exile. Readings and discussion will focus on “exiles” to unravel transcultural connections between home and travel, migration and exile, individual and collective identities. Writing projects will ask students to apply concepts to their own experiences and to parallel cases of tourism or exile. This course promises to challenge your notions of both “travel” and “writing.” Students will have numerous opportunities to conceive, draft, revise, and complete writing projects tailored to various audiences.

004 Sheridan

Transculturation in Michigan

As a class, we will explore a set of readings that dramatize transcultural themes within a variety of Michigan contexts, from urban Detroit to rural villages. We will produce our own compositions with/against/on these readings. Among other questions, we will ask whether all writing is inherently transcultural.

006 Jackson

Race, Rhetoric, and the Arts of Resistance

Takes a critical examination of the role that language plays in popular struggles for racial, social, and economic justice. Our task this semester is three fold: we will: 1) explore the nature of American language and culture, its role in inscribing or overcoming difference based on various conceptions of race, class, and gender; 2) read and discuss a radical diversity of “texts” – ranging from critical social theory to Rap music and Hip Hop culture, exploring the potential of writing and rhetoric in raising individual and collective political consciousness; and 3) experiment with various forms of argumentation, composing individual and collective rhetorical and cultural productions (including academic essays, individual and group presentations, dialectic journal writing, poetry and/or visual art), composing in various genres or styles for multiple audiences and differing rhetorical situations. In the process, we will engage in writing that has the possibility of altering the world around us. Possible readings include Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States* (1980/2003), *Faces at the Bottom of the Well*, by Derrick Bell (1992), and *Critical Intellectuals on Writing*, edited by Lynn Worsham and Gary Olson (2003).

007 Fraiberg

Transculturation: Writing Across Campus and Communities

In this course, we will cross geographical and cultural borders across the university and Lansing community—a process of *transculturation*—and design texts for real audiences. This will necessitate students researching a culture or community (community library, literacy organization, Lansing political organization, student group), identifying a need, and creating texts to fill that need, such as web sites,

newsletters, articles, advertisements, and more. As part of this process, students will read research on writing and design, write reflective pieces about this research, and implement concepts in their own texts.

008 Fraiberg

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RCAH 192: First-Year Seminars

001 Loeb

On the Scene: Documentary Photography

In a Photoshopped world, is documentary photography possible? We'll try to answer this question by looking at works by photographers, past and present, who devote their careers to – and critique – this genre. This is less a course in making photographs than about looking at them and thinking about how they function: what do documentary photographs ask of us as viewers? Students will write short essays and work on a project with guidance.

002 Miner

Sport, Symbol, Society

Throughout history, 'leisure' activities have performed a principal role within all societies. An understanding of sport, as the most popular leisure activity, is paramount to an engaged understanding of culture, history, and contemporary society. Since both Western and non-Western cultures have used sport to maintain social, cultural, and political structures, this course will be cross-cultural and interdisciplinary in perspective. We will investigate sporting activities throughout history, particularly looking at 1: their role within society, 2: how they function to create and maintain identities, and 3: their role within contemporary movements of resistance. Additionally, I am interested in beginning to conceive of sport in aesthetic terms and possibly as 'art.' By looking at sports as art, this course will introduce students to a multiplicity of approaches that re-investigate our preconceived notions. Students will begin to question assumptions about sport within our society, see the historical roots of those assumptions, engage in athletic activities, and revision sports within a critical framework.

003 Jackson

The Message: Rap Music, Hip Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere

This seminar examines the impact of Rap music and Hip Hop culture on the public sphere. Emerging from the streets of the South Bronx in the aftermath of the civil rights/Black power struggles, Rap/Hip Hop represented a radical cultural response to the failures of the 1954 *Brown* decision and other liberal racial reforms to end both *de jure* and *de facto* segregation and socio-economic marginalization of Blacks and Latinos in the 1970's. Today, Rap/Hip Hop is a dominate cultural force occupying two parallel, oppositional spaces: on the one hand, the music and culture is now the *lingua franca* of global youth popular culture, and on the other, Rap/Hip Hop is an invaluable marketing tool and corporate commodity, used to sell everything from name-brand clothing to Taco Bell-brand tacos. This apparent contradiction – Rap/Hip Hop as an art of resistance and corporate commodity – raises a number of questions that we will explore this semester: What accounts for the immense popularity of Rap music and Hip Hop culture? How has it been (re)appropriated by various communities? For what purposes? Does Rap/Hip Hop provide useful space for open dialogue and opportunities for critical social-political engagement? Or is such engagement undermined by problematic representations of sexual exploitation, violence, and gangsterism in Hip Hop?

004 Rogers

Gender and Society

In the modern era, Western societies have come to understand both their cultures and identities (cultural and individual) through a number of social categories, including gender and sexuality. Although often

viewed as biological and thus unchangeable, these categories (along with race and class) are culturally created and, as such, shift over time and across societies.

Beginning with the Enlightenment in early modern Europe, we will examine how these categories have been defined over time in both Europe and the United States. More broadly, this course will examine the ways in which cultural assumptions about gender and sexuality have shaped Western societies. Course materials will focus primarily on Europe and the United States, moving from the early 1600s forward to contemporary society.

006 Keller

Art and Spirituality in Africa

This course will introduce you to a variety of arts and spiritual beliefs in Africa that have been practiced on the continent for centuries and remain prevalent today. Our studies will highlight the ways in which communities' values and worldviews are visually articulated and emphasized in their artistic productions, while considering the significance that artworks have—often as spiritual mediators—in the daily lives of individuals. In addition to studying the arts of Africa, in this course, you will be able to work with objects in museum collections on campus and create artworks of your own.

RCAH 201 Transcultural Relations

002 Torrez

The Transcultural Relations of Immigration

When “Americans” speak of immigration, it is generally in reference to the US-Mexico border. In reality, however, immigration moves beyond this particular “line in the sand” continuing throughout the hemisphere and to/from other continents. The reasons individuals cross borders differ and reflect the political climate of that particular time period. When migrating, immigrants bring with them their past (and the past of their respective “homes”) which then affects all of our present and future narratives. Looking at the multilayered dimensions of immigration throughout history, we will use personal essays to create a space where we can understand how immigrant narratives have shaped and continue to shape our own personal narratives. The framework for this course is based on the following questions: What happens to immigrants' narratives once they reach their ‘new home’? How have these narratives shaped both the past and present histories of “Americans” (as well as others around the globe)? What are the similarities and differences between these stories and our own stories? How has immigration changed over the past 500-plus years?

004 (Honors Section) Loeb

Visual Arts and Transcultural Studies

In this course, we will look at what art can tell us about contact and connections between different cultures at selected periods in the past. We'll talk about what art is; we'll look at a wide range of images and objects and discuss how they were made, how they functioned, and what they mean; and we'll draw these examples from a range of historical periods and places in Europe, the Islamic world, the Americas, and Asia. In addition to discussing readings and slides, we'll hear from guest speakers and visiting artists, visit exhibits at the MSU Museum, and use the collections in the Kresge Art Museum, across the street from Snyder-Phillips. Students will write journal entries and essays and work on a project with guidance.

005 Miner

To fully comprehend history in its complex and nuanced forms, we must first investigate the varied, albeit simultaneous, global histories from a transcultural perspective. As such, this course will attempt to decipher world history by investigating the similarities, differences, disjunctures, and ruptures between and amongst various peoples across multiple temporal zones. Our focus will be on the diverse societies in the Western hemisphere (commonly known as the Americas), particularly focusing on cultural studies and the political implications of cultural practice. To properly explore hemispheric relations, we must first analyze and decode the multifaceted role that Indigenous, African, Asian, and European cultures have played and continue to play in the development of ‘American civilization.’ Throughout this course we will interpret the

world as a transcultural network that links all humanity into a common and interconnected world-system. Using this critical and historical knowledge, future systemic transformation becomes our collective responsibility. (Special Note to Prospective Students: Oh yeah, it's actually more fun than it sounds!!!)

006 Esquith

The four cornerstones of the RCAH curriculum (world history, art and culture, ethics, and engaged learning) are introduced in this course through a discussion of the process of transcultural change. We live at a time when different cultures are mixing, resisting, and absorbing each other rapidly, and in this process of transcultural change challenging questions are inevitably raised. This is nothing new, although the speed and scale on which transcultural change occurs has been accelerated.

- How have art and culture defined the 'known world'?
- Are all cultures the same in value, or are there higher and lower cultures?
- What can we learn about our own culture through encounters with other different cultures?

To understand these questions and others they have spawned, this semester we will use examples of the transcultural evolution of religious and political cultures in Europe, West and North Africa, and North America. We will use examples from classical literature (the Iliad, Herodotus's History of the Persian Wars, and the West African myth of Sundiata) as well as Shakespeare and contemporary writers such as Amitav Ghosh and Ryszard Kapuscinski to better understand the four cornerstones of the RCAH curriculum

008 Houston

"The Social Construction of Gender through the Ages"

This course will explore gender as a "social construction". If the concept "woman" is a social construction this means that social expectations have more to do with making a woman a woman than does her biology. The same holds true for a man. Contact with other societies and cultures over time can impact these social expectations.

SPRING 2010 COURSES

RCAH 112: Writing Research Technologies

001 Aronoff

"Our America:" Cultures of American Modernism, 1916-1930

This section will examine debates over "American" culture, race, national identity and art in the modernist period (roughly 1916-1930). With particular attention to the arts (modernist poetry, literature, jazz and other media), we will examine the ways in which, in the context of rising consumer culture, labor unrest, rapid immigration and racial violence, figures from a wide variety of disciplines – anthropologists, social scientists, artists and critics – sought to redefine "American culture," by redefining ideas like "culture," "race," "nation" and art and the relation between them. Looking at various literary and historical documents, we will ask: how do these texts imagine the relationship between "race," "nation," and "culture"? How do these constructions engage debates over immigration, assimilation and pluralism? What is the relationship between racial and /or cultural identity and political identity (or citizenship)? What is the relationship between "culture," art, and new modes technologies? Is industrialism and its methods the end of "culture" as "high art," or the beginning of a new kind of "culture"? How did new forms of artistic expression (broadly speaking, "modernist" art) respond to, challenge, or incorporate these new social conditions? We will then think about how these modernist debates reverberate in contemporary, 21st Century contexts, in questions of transnational migration, national identity, cultural "ownership" and authenticity, etc. The breadth of these questions will allow for a wide variety of approaches and specific interest: like all sections of 112, we will be able to pursue the burning questions we raise by developing our skills as researchers and writers.

002 Sheridan

This course will introduce students to research methods in the humanities. In order to explore how these various research methods work, we will apply them to popular culture, including movies, music, films, advertisements, and websites. The specific challenge of generating interesting research about popular culture will serve as a starting point for doing effective research in the humanities more generally.

003 Fraiberg

Writing Ethnography: Composing Culture and Community

To examine the links between language and culture, ethnographers go into the "field" to participate in everyday activities and observe patterns and norms. Taking up this framework, we will read ethnographic accounts of gangs in Chicago, the homeless on the sidewalks of New York, hidden literacies in language classrooms (note passing, graffiti, gossip), boxing, and a range of other local and global ethnographic studies. Drawing on theories and methodologies from these studies, we will conduct our own ethnographic research on specific sites across the university and local community: fraternities and sororities, video gaming culture, student theater troupes, hip-hop culture, coffee shops, and a range of other contexts. Based on this work, we will write-up ethnographic accounts of languages and cultural practices that we observe in these communities.

004 Bosse

Meaning in Music and Movement: The Ethnography of Performance.

Music and dance are sign systems for expressing how we feel about our place in the world, and together they are particularly adept for capturing the paradoxical nature of existence. Using a variety of music/dance traditions from around the world, this course will explore performance—everyday people who dance and musick as a means of expressing themselves, connecting with other people, and seeking joy. In addition to reading important scholarly works on the topic, students in this course will explore the power of such performance first-hand through ethnography—by both observing and participating in social music and dance contexts, and then by sharing what they have learned through ethnographic writing.

005 Jackson

Black Popular Culture and Social Movements

This section explores the function of culture in maintaining or resisting unjust power relations in society. As positionality is always an important part of critical inquiry, our work this semester will begin with self-reflection and exploration. We will consider how subjective knowledge or personal experiences impact the ways that individuals and groups “read” or interpret race, class, and difference in society. We will then turn to critical social theory (especially Marxism, Black Feminism, and Critical Race Theory) for close readings of various socio-cultural “texts” -- from civil rights/Black power aesthetics to Rap/Hip Hop polemics – for insight into the ways that “the voices on the margins” assert forms of agency to resist the forces of domination and cultural hegemony. From this perspective, we will construct critical research projects that consider the potential of Black popular culture and “new media” technologies as important means of communal problem-solving central to contemporary movements for racial, social, and economic justice.

RCAH 192: First-Year Seminars

001 Folino-White

Introduction to Performance Theory and Analysis

In this course, students will engage with a variety of dramatic and performance styles, genres, and venues to enhance their understanding of the dynamics of mode, content, embodiment, space/place, and spectatorship. In addition to more conventional materials such as published plays and documented performances, students will attend a series of diverse theatrical, cultural and everyday performance events. These may include plays, performance art, parades, interactive installations, food events, festivals, and sporting events.

002 Torrez

Critical Investigation of Children's Literature

The strand that binds stories from years past to contemporary children's books is that they all are meant to engage, entertain, and inform. Traditionally a select group has told the stories of others, sometimes transforming them that no longer reflect the cultures from which the stories began. Marginalized peoples are now telling their own stories, creating their own children's books and reclaiming that which has been taken from them. This class will focus on: “traditional children's literature,” stories told by marginalized peoples, and stories recreated by mass media (such as Walt Disney, Nickelodeon).

003 Loeb

On the Scene: Documentary Photography

In a Photoshopped world, is documentary photography possible? We'll try to answer this question by looking at works by photographers, past and present, who devote their careers to – and critique – this genre. This is less a course in making photographs than about looking at them and thinking about how they function: what do documentary photographs ask of us as viewers? Students will write short essays and work on a project with guidance.

004 Houston

The context of our topic is established by the fact that a transcultural reality of life in the U.S.A. is that in our pluralistic society public life is often a struggle for recognition. RCAH 192 is concerned with the life of political communities whose cultural identities have emerged as consequence of these struggles. This course will explore the notion of ideological colorblindness. Colorblindness would seem to be an admirable and even legally preferable stance for society however some argue that it defeats the very struggles for recognition and identity that give meaning to cultural affiliations and power in politics. Our thesis for research: Does ideological colorblindness inhibit the kind of democratic and cultural engagement necessary and desired in a highly diverse or pluralistic society?

RCAH 202: The Presence of the Past

001 Rogers

We will explore the presence of the past by examining influence of the Roman Empire on Western imagination. In order to analyze this topic we will look at three empires: the Roman, Ottoman, and British empires. At the same time, we will ask and attempt to answer the question: is the United States currently an empire?

002 Houston

The Presence of the Past in Art and Politics

Art is a social production and often a political production not simply an individual enterprise. Political beliefs spring from assumptions, biases and other social values. The way we think about art has changed through history. We will discuss and explore the underlying political beliefs that have colored our perception of public art.

004 Torrez

The Presence of the Past in the US Educational System

Schools based on revolutionary pedagogy have strong historical roots in Latin America and Europe. In fact, schools, which are based on anarchist ideologies and the development of “full human beings”, date as far back as 1869 in France. Unfortunately, the materialization of this educational environment in the United States has yet to occur. Instead, the US American educational system has strived to “inculcate values of American citizenship,” based on the historical principle of maintaining a class of manual laborers. So, what has changed since the inception of the US educational system? Have these foundational ideas continued to guide how schools are conceived and facilitated? Or are they a part of the past? This course will look into the early factors of the educational system that may have changed, shifted, transformed, or remained to inform the present classroom. We will investigate these ideas specifically looking at how race, class, gender, language, and citizenship status were/are addressed in the past and present. In the end, we will analyze the presence of the past as manifest in the US educational system.

006 Loeb

Hard Times

Discussions of today’s economic and other crises frequently refer to similar times in the past, specifically during the 1930s, the period of the Great Depression. What are the parallels between then and now? What can we learn from the Thirties? In order to explore these questions, this course focuses on the rich outpouring of artistic expression during the 1930s, mainly but not solely in the United States. Against the backdrop of the economic, political, and social developments of that period, we examine how the arts responded to the events of their time and how they contributed to people’s ability to understand and grapple with their situations. We consider painting, photography, sculpture, architecture and planning, music, theatre, film, and design. The course includes a field trip, guest speakers, and visits to campus exhibitions. Students will write essays and work on a project with guidance.

007 Esquith

The Presence of the Past: Myths We Live By

One way to grasp the presence of the past is through the dominant myths that we live by. What stories do we tell about the past and its development over time? How do these stories – whether they take the form of poetry, theater, novels, constitutions, or the everyday rituals of popular culture – structure and guide our lives? In what sense are these stories present? In what sense are they myths we live by? Our primary goal in this course is to understand how certain myths about **heroism, appearance vs. reality, and good and evil** have been carried forward and how they empower some people while disabling others.