In the post-Cold War world, the most important distinctions among peoples...are cultural.

—Samuel P. Huntington

Eclecticism is the degree zero of contemporary general culture: one listens to reggae, watches a Western, eats McDonald’s food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and “retro” clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games. It is easy to find a public for eclectic works.

—Jean François Lyotard

Real thinking cannot be learned from books. It also cannot be taught unless the teacher remains a learner well into old age. Therefore, let us hope for a dialogue.

—Martin Heidegger

In a certain sense, culture is not only close to us, surrounding our every act, our every thought: there is no “us” without culture. It constitutes the very beings that we—individually and collectively—are. In spite of this, or rather just for this very reason, it often escapes our notice. For that which lies closest is often the last to be seen and understood. As the manner in which we relate to the divine, to our natural and social worlds, to others, and to ourselves, culture is the very air we breathe, the food we eat. Nevertheless, “our own” culture may be further away from us than the most distant stars.

This semester, we will begin—but in no way finish—a long journey to nearness. We will undertake an investigation of “culture in general” as well as an examination of cultural diversity and cultural change around the world. To do this, we will call upon various perspectives drawn from the social sciences, the humanities, and the arts. We will explore human experience from prehistory to the present. And we shall do this through classroom lectures accompanied by films, live performances, and guest speakers.

The study of world cultures may be more important today than at any time in human history. We live in an ever more interconnected world; a world in which the actions of those who live far from us can have a profound impact on our lives; a world in which our simple everyday activities can have untold
influence on the lives of others half a world away. We are presented with heretofore unimagined promise as well as unimagined risk. Are we drawing near to a global radical participatory democracy? Or are we sinking further into an abyss of ethnic and cultural hatred fueled by mutual ignorance and misunderstanding? Perhaps both simultaneously? Or something altogether different?

It is appropriate that a course such as this be a part of one’s general education. For we are not here in virtue of our interest in mechanical engineering, or computer science, or wildlife biology. We are here in virtue of a shared humanity; a humanity that to be shared requires knowledge and understanding of the world in which we live; a humanity that also requires of us the ability to appreciate and understand what moves others to think and act as they do.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Eccentric Culture: A Theory of Western Civilization, Rémi Brague, South Bend: St. Augustine’s Press, 2002. (EC)


So Long a Letter, Mariama Bá, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1989. (SLAL)


There are also others who know something.

—Severus Sebokt

Not to know what happened before one was born is always to be a child.

—Cicero
The examination is nothing but the bureaucratic baptism of knowledge, the official recognition of the transubstantiation of profane knowledge into sacred knowledge.

—Karl Marx

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Education is a part of culture. In different cultural contexts, education will take different forms and function in different ways. In U.S. culture, as in many other cultures, the educational system has developed examination and grading systems as means by which credentials may be conferred and powers and titles thereby distributed within the wider society. (In other words, examination and grading systems are cultural artifacts.) Developing along with other disciplinary institutions such as the prison, the factory, and the army, the U.S. educational system functions as a filtering and distribution mechanism by which individual and group outcomes can be made to appear as if based almost exclusively upon effort and merit. The purpose of this course is not to deconstruct this myth. Rather, we will function within it.

Your success in this class will depend upon regular class attendance—which involves more than your physical presence—as well as keeping up on the assigned reading. However, while regular class attendance and sustained reading of the assigned material are necessary conditions for success, they are not sufficient conditions for your success. The material that we will engage is not something that can be mastered by oneself nor can it be learned without patient and sustained attention. Thus, listening attentively to lectures and videos, actively participating in the process of asking and answering questions—those of the authors we will read, those of your classmates, as well as your own—and taking the time to reflect upon what you have read and heard will also be required if your are to get the most out of this class and the material that will engage us. In addition to regular class attendance, your success will depend upon attending several events that will take place outside of class time at either the Rozsa Center for Performing Arts or the Walker Arts and Humanities Center. The cost of these performances is covered by your lab fee. A schedule of these performances along with instructions for obtaining tickets and satisfying course requirements regarding these activities can be found on the final page of this syllabus.

Your progress in this class will be assessed in several ways. First, there will be four exams throughout the semester. These exams will be based upon the assigned readings as well as upon material from class lectures and cultural activities. The exams will be “objective”—that is, they will be multiple choice, true/false, etc. Each exam will account for 15% of your final grade. Second, you produce a music CD (with liner notes) from various cultures. This assignment will account for 10% of your final grade. Further and detailed instructions for this assignment will be provided in the course of the semester. Third, you will write a letter to your future self that will serve as a reminder of the material we have studied in this course. This letter will account for 10% of your final grade. In addition to these assignments, there will be frequent, unannounced in-class exercises based upon the lectures, the assigned readings, and the cultural activities. These exercises will cumulatively account for 20% of your final grade. These exercises will not require mastery of the material, but will demand a familiarity that can only be gained from a close and sustained engagement with the material.

No late work will be accepted. Nor will there be an opportunity for extra credit.
The school system... has no place for the rugged individual. It is, indeed, the homogenizing hopper into which we toss our integral lots for processing.

—Marshall McLuhan

COURSE OBJECTIVES

* to awaken an interest in and to cultivate an enthusiasm for asking substantive questions about culture

* to increase our knowledge and understanding of the contributions of various cultures

* to develop a better understanding of why the world is the way it is and how it came to be this way

* to acquire and hone the skills needed to study how different groups of people are organized and structured

* to gain greater insight into and appreciation for our humanity

NOTE

MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Associate Dean of Students, 487-2212. For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department chair, or the Affirmative Action Office (487-3310).
**PROPOSED SCHEDULE**

**Week One: General Introduction** (WCAG, pp. 3-11; 25-31)

January 9th: Introduction to the Course; Strategies for Success—Making Connections; Writing Center & Study Teams; Learning Languages; Laws of Hospitality

January 11th: “World” “ Cultures”; “Defining” Culture—Family Resemblances; Cultural Categories—Members of the Family

January 13th: Globalization: Competing Accounts (Fukuyama, Huntington, /Bourdieu/ Stiglitz, Soros)


**Week Two: General Introduction** (EC, pp. 1-42)

January 16th: NO CLASS—Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

January 18th: Globalization; International Institutions: UN, IMF, WB, WTO, WHO, OPEC, NAFTA, ASEAN, FTAA, NGOs, Amnesty International, etc.; Questions of Perspective: Ethnology and Ethnocentrism (Language, Maps, History, etc.); Cardinality and Calendarity

January 20th: Cultural Activity—The Yes Men

**Week Three: Europe** (EC, pp. 43-109; WCAG, pp. 39-42)

January 23rd: Romanity: Religious and Cultural

January 25th: Eccentricity: Europe and Islam

January 27th: Cultural Activity—Before the Rain

**Week Four: Europe** (EC, pp. 110-151)

January 30th: The Improper Proper: Review for Exam #1

February 1st: Exam #1

February 3rd: NO CLASS
Week Five: Islam (I:RHC, pp. xi-74)

February 6th: Islam as Religion: Doctrines and Beliefs
February 8th: Islam as Culture: Practices and Institutions
February 10th: NO CLASS—Winter Carnival

Week Six: Islam (I:RHC pp. 91-113, 115-152, 173-186; WCAG, pp. 93-96)

February 13th: Contemporary Islam
February 15th: The Middle East: A History of Conflict; Movie Preview
February 17th: Cultural Activity—West Beirut

Week Seven: India (AI, pp. ix-xvii, 3-72, 220-250)

February 20th: Historical Overview (Who writes history?); Hinduism; India: Large and Small
February 22nd: Gender, Education, Population, and Economy; Sixteen Decisions; Movie Preview
February 24th: Cultural Activity—Mr. and Mrs. Iyer

Week Eight: India (AI, pp. 204-219, 317-333)

February 27th: Movie Recap; Calendarity; Review for Exam #2
March 1st: Exam #2
March 3rd: Cultural Activity—Monsoon Wedding

Week Nine: China (WCAG, 235-246; AC, pp. ix-xi, 1-65)

March 13th: Historical Overview
March 15th: Daoism
March 17th: Confucius
Week Ten: China (AC. pp. 71-81, 89-94, 126-133, 152-170, 202-217; WCAG, pp. 77-79)

March 20th: Filial Piety, Jen, Li; Movie Preview

March 22nd: Cultural Activity—Shower

March 24th: NO CLASS

Week Eleven: Africa (SLAL, pp. 1-45)

March 27th: The Mosaic of Africa; So Long a Letter

March 29th: Cultural Activity—Mama Africa

March 31st: NO CLASS

Week Twelve: Africa (SLAL, pp. 46-89; WCAG, pp. 59-63)

April 3rd: So Long a Letter; Gender and Land in Zimbabwe

April 5th: Review for Exam #3

April 7th: Exam #3

Week Thirteen: Latin America (OVLA, pp. 11-170)

April 10th: Indigenous Cultures; Colonization; School of the Americas

April 12th: Chile; Ariel Dorfman’s “The Black Hole”

April 14th: Chile Today; Obstinate Memory; Movie Preview

Week Fourteen: Latin America (OVLA, pp. 173-261)

April 17th: Cultural Activity—Machuca

April 19th: Cultural Activity—Black Robe

April 21st: Review for Final

Finals Week

Date to be Announced: Exam #4

Final Writing Assignment Due
ADVICE FOR SUCCESS

1. Participate in the World Culture Study Teams and make use of the Writing Center.

2. Keep up on the assigned reading.

3. Attend all classes—come to class prepared to participate fully.

4. Attend all assigned cultural activities—and remember to prepare for these activities by reading supporting materials as well as to review the cultural significance of the activity.

5. Study frequently—making reviews of the reading, the lectures, and any notes from the cultural activities.

6. Avoid printing papers at the last minute. Printer and computer problems are NOT acceptable reasons for attempting to turn in work late.

7. Keep up on current world events by reading respected international newspapers—this is a great way to learn about various cultures and to better integrate what you are studying into what is happening throughout the world.

8. Listen to radio and television broadcasts from countries around the world. Here are some sites at which this can be done: www.comfm.com; www.scola.org.

9. Talk—and more importantly listen—to students, faculty, and community members who come from different cultures.

REQUESTS

1. If you bring a cell phone to class, please turn it off. Under no circumstance are you to answer a phone call during class.

2. Never ask if you have missed anything (important) if you have missed a class.

3. Provide as much advance notice as possible for all excused absences. All requests for excused absences must be in writing and given to one of the instructors prior to the absence.

4. Be on time for class. Arriving late will unfairly distract others who have been more considerate.

5. Do not engage in behavior that may be distracting to others—reading other books, newspapers, etc.; talking with others; removing or replacing things in your backpack.

6. Sit in your assigned seat—attendance will be determined by whether your assigned seat is filled.
OUT-OF-CLASS CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Tickets for these performances have been paid for through your lab fees. Thus, by going online to http://www.aux.mtu.edu/tickets/ you can apply for your tickets. On the left-hand side of the ticket page, towards the bottom, you will find the link for World Cultures. In addition to the required performances, you must select an optional performance. For the optional performance, you will specify your preference for particular performances as well as identify others with whom you would like to sit. You can begin this process anytime after Wednesday, January 11th. You can begin picking up your tickets anytime after February 1st, but should NOT plan to pick up your tickets the night of the first performance you will attend.

You are required to attend “Sarakasi—The Amazing African Acrobats” and “Festival in the Desert: Tinariwen and Ramatou Diakite,” but will have a choice of the following days and times for these performances:

**Sarakasi:**
- Saturday, March 18th at 3:00 PM
- Saturday, March 18th at 7:30 PM

**Festival in the Desert:**
- Sunday, April 9th at 3:00 PM
- Sunday, April 9th at 7:30 PM

In addition to these performances, you are required to attend one Optional Performance from the following list:

- Alan Parson’s Live Project
- Acting Company—*The Three Musketeers*
- Fine Arts: *Henry V*
- Yellowjackets
- Fine Arts: Brahms’ *German Requiem*

Seating is limited at all of these performances. So to increase the likelihood that you are able to attend the performances that most interest you and/or that best fit into your schedule, it is advisable to obtain your tickets as soon as possible.

You are required to keep all ticket stubs from these performances as well as any programs distributed at the performance. To earn full credit for attending these performances, **you must submit the ticket stub stapled to a 3 x 5 index card with your name clearly printed on it to one of the instructors at the end of the class period immediately following the performance.** There may be in-class exercises based upon these performances, so it is worthwhile to pay critical attention to the performance.