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**RAMAPO COLLEGE STUDENTS RALLY TO THE CAUSE IN ALTERNATIVE
SPRING BREAK PROGRAMS**

(Mahwah) – Forty Ramapo College of New Jersey students will be soaking up the sun on spring break as they rebuild homes in hurricane-ravaged Gulfport, MS; plant trees in indigenous villages in Oaxaca, Mexico; provide urgently needed home repairs to families in the Appalachian region of Asheville, NC; and work on a farm in Rutland, MA. Ramapo College’s Spring Break is March 18 – 25.

The trip to Gulfport, MS will give art students a chance to rebuild homes while using their artistic talent to reflect upon the alternative break experience and tell the stories of those affected by the hurricane. They will record the untold stories of hurricane survivors in the *Katrina Chronicles*, a “zine” the students will publish containing stories and artwork. While in Gulfport, the students will sleep in tents set up by The Morrell Foundation and Community Collaborations International, organizations that provide assistance to people who have been affected by natural disaster, armed conflict or poverty, through a wide variety of programs and volunteer coordination.

Students who opt to travel to Oaxaca, Mexico will engage in a reforestation project, planting trees in indigenous villages. They also may assist with an organic garden, cleaning up litter or working with youth and children’s groups in the San Javier area. “The Alternative Spring Break allows students to further their understanding of our geographic neighbor, which is separated from us by barriers of language, culture and history,” says trip leader Paula Straile Costa, a professor of history and Latin American studies. “Students find themselves eagerly welcomed into the hearts of the people and return overwhelmingly changed by their experiences.”

(more)

Mountain Housing Opportunities (MHO), a non-profit housing development corporation serving Asheville, NC, provides affordable housing for low-income people. Ramapo College students will work through MHO's Emergency Home Repair program to provide a variety of repairs and construction work for low-income residents. The students will build wheelchair ramps and decks, and repair roofing, siding and floors.

Students traveling to Rutland, MA will work on the Heifer Project's Overlook Farm. Heifer Project International helps families become more self-reliant through the gift of livestock and training in their care. Participants in this program will help with a variety of chores on the farm, including feeding, milking and cleaning. They also will participate in workshops on environmental sustainability and equitable food distribution.

"These programs provide students with the opportunity to challenge their comfort zones and to effect grass roots social change on many levels," says John Yao, service-learning coordinator with the College's Cahill Center. "We provide students with a constructive and safe alternative to the traditional cliché spring break party scene."

Ramapo College professors or administrative staff will accompany the students. The Alternative Spring Break program provides opportunities for participants to engage in hands-on service that addresses critical, but unmet social needs, to receive training to carry out the tasks, and that meet the educational objectives of the College.

The four programs are sponsored by the College's Cahill Center for Experiential Learning and Career Services, the Community Service Center and the Community Builders' Coalition.

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