



RAMAPO COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY
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Ramapo College Professors Travel to Ethiopia; Present Talk on Literacy Development through Comic Books

MAHWAH, N.J. -- Ramapo College of New Jersey professors Michael Bitz (Teacher Education) and Tilahun Sineshaw (Psychology) of the School of Social Science and Human Services traveled to Ethiopia in January to share their expertise in exploring learning and development through creativity with educators in the African nation.

Bitz and Sineshaw, traveling through a Sub-Saharan Africa Travel Grant from the Office of the Provost, worked with Ethiopian teachers, faculty and graduate students at Addis Ababa University to build creative pathways to literacy. Their talk, titled *Literacy, Creativity and Cognition: Exploring Learning and Development Through Youth-Generated Comic Books*, was well-received.

“Comic books are not part of the cultural norm in [Ethiopia] but they are a creative element in the telling of stories, whether fictional or real life,” said Bitz, who also serves as Director of the Instructional Design Center at Ramapo College. “Literacy educators, no matter where they are, face the same challenges: how to excite students to write, how to foster a love of reading, how to engage students in language. Our goal was to introduce the process of writing, designing and telling a story through a different art form, namely comic books.”

Sineshaw, a native of Ethiopia, said integrating different socio-cultural perspectives into thinking and problem solving strategies encourages learners to become even more creative and utilize sustained novel approaches in literacy acquisition and development. This integrative approach is believed to be an important factor in bridging the gap between theory and practice.

“Every young person has his or her own story to tell, regardless of their background or life experiences,” he said. “This is just one more way to introduce literacy to students who might otherwise not know how to express themselves in creative ways.”

Bitz and Sineshaw also visited the St. Joseph School in Addis Ababa, which enrolls more than 1,600 students in grades K-12. The Ramapo professors shared comic books created by grade school children in the United States and are working with educators to launch a school-based comic book workshop in the Ethiopian capital.

“We are a whole world away but not very different,” Bitz said.

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Ranked by *U.S. News & World Report* as one of the top in the Best Regional Public Universities North category, Ramapo College of New Jersey is sometimes viewed as a private college. This is, in part, due to its unique interdisciplinary academic structure, its size of approximately 6,000 students and its pastoral setting in the foothills of the Ramapo Mountains on the New Jersey/New York border.

Established in 1969, Ramapo College offers bachelor's degrees in the arts, business, humanities, social sciences and the sciences, as well as in professional studies, which include nursing and social work. In addition, Ramapo College offers courses leading to teacher certification at the elementary and secondary levels. The College also offers eight graduate programs as well as articulated programs with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New York Chiropractic College, New York University College of Dentistry, SUNY State College of Optometry and New York College of Podiatric Medicine.