

# Eye on Campus

## Pop culture, and how we're all a part of it

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"It's cool." "It's interesting." "It's fun."

Believe it or not, these are students talking about a class. The Class of the Month: American Studies 105: Popular Culture. This class was chosen for its dynamic look at how popular culture exists in the United States and how it is portrayed in other countries.

"We find out more about ourselves when we study another culture," said professor Patricia Hillen of her class, taught every spring. She defines pop culture as "the world in which we live with signs all around us."

American Studies 105 is divided into two sections, one that travels to Barcelona, and one that revolves around a classroom setting that uses different media to enhance learning popular culture.

One student enrolled in the non-trip aspect of the course is Damien Figueroa, a sophomore communications major. He says he's not sure what to expect because "there's so much to it." He also says the class makes him see pop culture in a different way.

"It's interesting how pop culture is depicted," Figueroa said.

Another student, Andy Fernandez, a freshman business administration major, said, "The class goes more in-depth than what you would see on TV."

## African textile artistry speaks a cultural language all its own

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Fine examples of African art are currently on display in the Vairo Library.

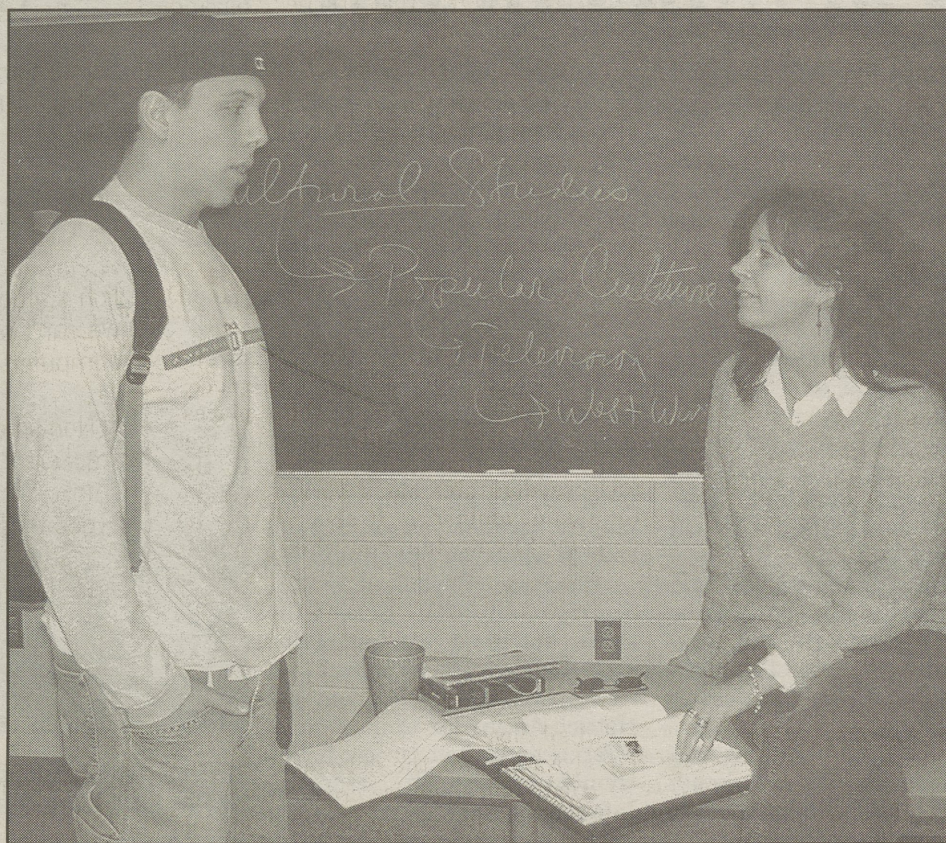
The cloth in the cases near the circulation desk represent three examples of African textile artistry, which, at first glance may seem simple. However behind the colors and symbols there lies a deep meaning. The cloth is on loan from faculty member Dr. Nancy Wyatt.

"They were already weaving when the Portuguese came in the 15th century," said Wyatt who brought the cloth back from a six-week trip to Ghana in which she participated in a Fulbright Senior Specialist program.

In the rectangular case is a type of cloth known as adinkra. To decorate adinkra, a stamp made from a gourd is used along with a dye that comes from the sap of a tree.

The images stamped on the cloth carry symbolic importance; it is a

### CLASS OF THE MONTH



Instructor Pat Hillen meets with Damien Figueroa prior to her class in popular culture. One section of the class will travel to Barcelona over Spring Break.

Photo by Jennifer Rufo

The class goes so in-depth that it offers a section for students to travel to Barcelona over this semester's Spring Break. The American Studies

105 traveling class challenges students to write a five- to seven-page paper comparing cultures, among other things.

Note the following from the syllabus: "Readings and assignments prior to the trip will consider the strong American Spanish community, understanding aspects of the culture, including food, language and religion. Assignments to be completed in Barcelona will allow students to choose between a concentration in the arts and humanities and a concentration in the social sciences. Assignments to be completed in Barcelona will require detailed observations and comparisons of various aspects of popular culture to be documented through photography, interviews and journals."

The class is small, which makes for great interaction, especially for new students who can take it as a first-year seminar. And, the trip is affordable at under \$1,000.

Of course, if you don't want to travel, there is always the classroom section of the course.

"There was a time when the study of popular culture was not accepted by academia," Hillen said. This changed, however, when pop culture was recognized as a way society views itself.

"We're so immersed in pop culture that we don't realize it, it surrounds us the way water surrounds a fish," said Hillen.

The class offers a great way to learn and theorize about pop culture through films, articles, and current events.

It's definitely not a class that you would want to snooze through.

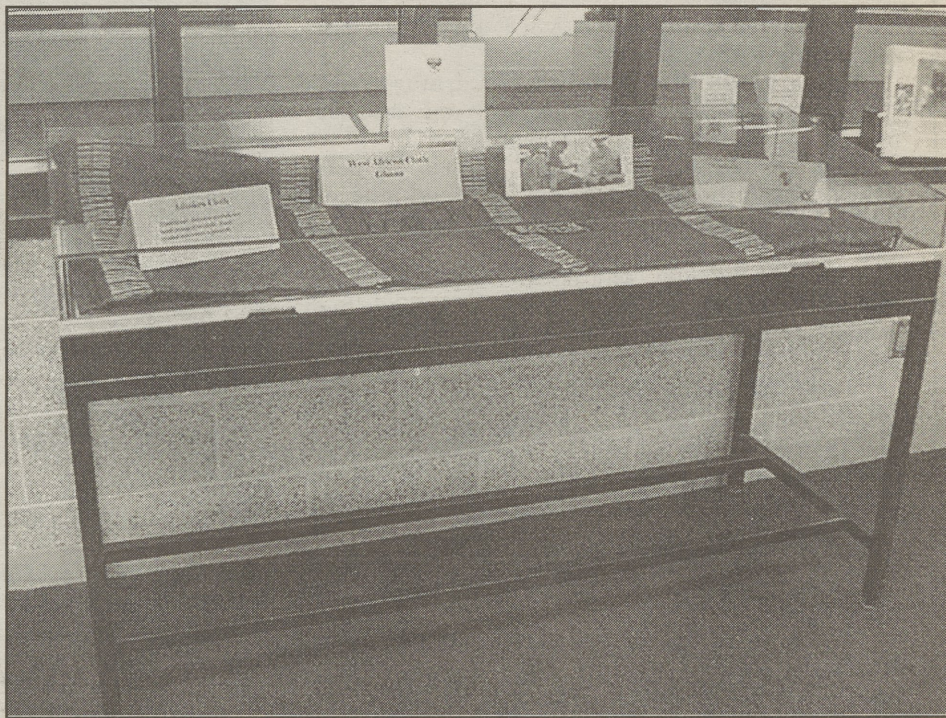


Photo by Jeff Huber

Cloths displayed in Vairo Library are examples of African textile artistry, and are on loan from Dr. Nancy Wyatt, who accumulated the art during a trip to Ghana.

Vairo Library are machine made.

The wax batik cloth is purchased in sets of two pieces, each 4 yards long. To make a woman's dress one piece is worn as a skirt and the other is cut and tailored for a top. Symbols on the cloth

are sometimes created as a way to honor and remember a person who has died as well.

"Women buy the fabric by the name and the symbolic significance," Wyatt said.