

Edward Shannon, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Class of 1985

May 2016



In a higher education era whose verbiage is characterized by such terms as “workforce development,” “job skills,” “financial literacy,” and “career relevance,” Ramapo College Professor of Literature Edward Shannon – and Ramapo alumnus class of 1985 – thrives.

With a nationally renowned expertise in American culture and literature ranging from comic books to Woody Guthrie and Mark Twain, Dr. Shannon, a member of the Ramapo faculty since 1997, believes in the value of higher education as a vehicle for preparing students for the next era of their lives. The training, however, encompasses far more than knowing how to code, built a website, or create a spreadsheet, according to Dr. Shannon. He is a passionate advocate for liberal arts courses that will enhance skills in analysis/critical thinking, creativity, and communications to yield successful citizens, no matter what profession the student chooses.

For the past two and a half years, Dr. Shannon, the first Ramapo alumnus to get an appointment as a fulltime faculty member of Ramapo, has been chair of a task force to revamp Ramapo’s General Education curriculum. Dr. Shannon said that the recently released task force report expresses his sentiments about the value of liberal arts at Ramapo.

“The liberal arts teach us to cherish our curiosity and embrace the challenges of the coming world by pursuing a broad education – one that includes both a major and a rigorous general education program that puts that major into context. The student who navigates the channels between Ramapo’s many educational experiences see the web of ideas, histories, financial links, political bonds, natural systems, and cultural exchange that forms the modern world we share today and links that world to civilizations past. This world’s citizens must respond quickly to political, technological, and cultural change, be ready to shift careers, or reimagine themselves in an evolving field. A lifetime of learning is the passport to a productive, fulfilling future. The student who takes that path is ready to meet and shape tomorrow.” (General Education Planning Task Force II)

Specifically, the General Education Program – which the task force members recommended rebranding as the Ramapo Arch Program – comprises those courses that every Ramapo student has to experience. The Arch Program and Liberal Arts curriculum should accomplish the following:

- **Explore the world: Investigate human cultures and the natural world.**
 - Critically engage with the products of culture, through interpretation or creative expression.
 - Critically interpret history and society.
 - Apply methods of scientific inquiry effectively.
 - Apply mathematical concepts effectively.

- **Engage the world: Think critically and convey new understanding.**
 - Demonstrate logic and reasoning skills.

- Write effectively in scholarly and creative contexts.
 - Speak effectively in scholarly and creative contexts.
 - Develop the skills necessary to locate, evaluate, and employ information effectively.
 - Use technology to communicate information, manage information, or solve problems.
- **Experience your world: Integrate and apply your new learning.**
- Apply disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge and skills to address complex problems.
 - Practice reflective inter/intra-personal skills.
- **Expand our world: Develop compassion and ethical understanding across cultures and become an engaged global citizen.**
- Understand diverse communities on local, national, and/or global levels.¹
 - Analyze ethical implications of the global distribution of power and resources.
 - Question assumptions about individual and group identity.
 - Demonstrate intercultural understanding required to effectively negotiate a diverse global society.

Ed Shannon, as an undergraduate, started out as a business major but ended up never taking a business course. He became intoxicated by the “passion, engagement, joy, vibrancy, inspiration, and caring” of Literature Professor Denis Murphy.

“He is my model for a college professor – the best motivator with the highest standards . . . I know I went into the same field as Dr. Murphy, but it would not have mattered what area of study I pursued,” said Dr. Shannon. “Professor Murphy brought out the best” in Ed Shannon and gave him the intellectual skills and desire for excellence that prepared the young Ramapo student not only to be a scholar and author working alone in an Ivory Tower, but also to be a negotiator, mediator, convener, and implementer of programs and policies – even the father of two sons. Another benefit of Professor Murphy’s classes was matchmaking. It is where Ed met his wife, Kathleen, also a much revered literature professor who teaches part-time at Ramapo.

When not teaching or serving on a Ramapo academic task force or hiking or biking on the Appalachian Trail, Dr. Shannon is researching and writing on the general topics of literacy studies overlapping with popular culture; American folk music; and detective fiction. Specifically, his scholarly writings have included such topics as the “Punk Compassion and Folk Rebellion of Joe Strummer and Woody Guthrie;” “Robert Crumb’s Autobiographical Comics and Confessional Poets;” “Formal Innovation and Freudian Imagery in the Comics of Winsor McCay and Robert Crumb;” and “Where was the sex? Fetishism and Dirty Minds in Patricia Highsmith’s *The Talented Mr. Ripley*.”

His interest in comics is no joke. “I do a lot of writing, research, and teaching about comics. I always have loved comics for their complexity, not simplicity. The graphic novel mixes pictures and words – operates on two or three levels requiring the reader to be focused, to pay attention – and to think – all good life skills” that Dr. Shannon has been bringing to thousands of Ramapo students for nearly two decades.