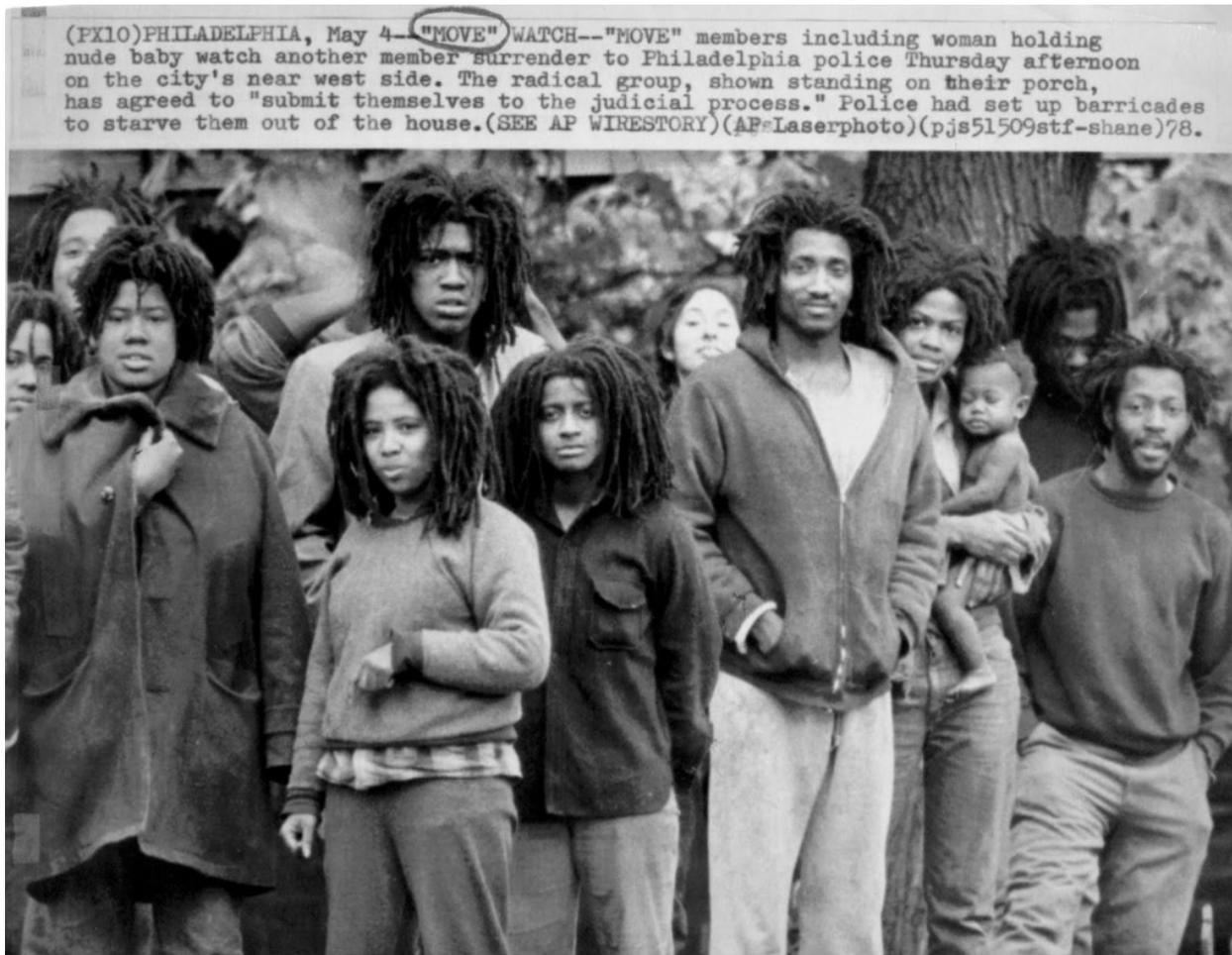


**Black Philadelphia: First-Year Academic Seminar (FYS 130-33E, Fall 2020)**  
[MW 11:00am - 12:15pm]

Instructor: Anthony Paul Smith, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor, Department of Religion & Theology

Email: [smithanthony@lasalle.edu](mailto:smithanthony@lasalle.edu) Phone: 773-931-9570 (Please use WhatsApp)  
Student hours: M 12:30-1:30pm , T 2:30-3:30, and by appointment. I am available to meet Monday through Friday. Please contact me through either my email (preferred) or cell number to arrange an appointment.



Photograph of members of the MOVE Organization during the siege of 1985.

## Email and Phone Policy

If you need to contact me for any other reason than to arrange an appointment then *first check this syllabus first to see if your question is answered*. Also please be aware there I will only answer my email during business hours (9am-5pm) during the work week (M-F) so if you email me after 5pm you will not get a response until the following day and if on the weekend not until the new week begins. I will return your email or phone call within 48 hours. While I have provided my personal cell phone you should only use this number for emergencies. Make sure you regularly check the email account associated with your Canvas account as I will use it to communicate with you regarding changes in the class or cancellations.

## Course Description

“I came into this world anxious to uncover the meaning of things, my soul desirous to be at the origin of the world, and here I am an object among other objects.”

— Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*

“This body whose flesh carries the female and the male to the frontiers of survival bears in person the marks of a cultural text whose inside has been turned outside.”

— Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book”

“Abolition, the political dream of Black Studies, its unconscious thinking, consists in the affirmation of the unsovereign slave – the affectable, the derelict, the monstrous, the wretched – figures of an order altogether different from (even when they coincide or cohabit with) the colonized native – the occupied, the undocumented, the unprotected, the oppressed. [...] If the indigenous relation to land precedes and exceeds any regime of property, then the slave’s inhabitation of the earth precedes and exceeds any prior relation to land – landlessness. And selflessness is the correlate. No ground for identity, no ground to stand (on). Everyone has a claim to everything until no one has a claim to anything. No claim. This is not a politics of despair brought about by a failure to lament a loss, because it is not rooted in hope of winning. The flesh of the earth demands it: the landless inhabitation of selfless existence.”

— Jared Sexton, “The Vel of Slavery”

“Yeah, well, the ones who happily claim and embrace their own sense of themselves as privileged ain’t my primary concern. I don’t worry about them first. But, I would love it if they got to the point where they had the capacity to worry about themselves. Because then maybe we could talk. That’s like that Fred Hampton shit: he’d be like, ‘white power to white people. Black power to black people.’ What I think he meant is, ‘look: the problematic of coalition is that coalition isn’t something that emerges so that you can come help me, a maneuver that always gets traced back to your own interests. The coalition emerges out of your recognition that it’s fucked up for you, in the same way that we’ve already recognized that it’s fucked up for us. I don’t need your help. I just need you to recognize that this shit is killing you, too,

however much more softly, you stupid motherfucker, you know?”

— Fred Moten, *The Undercommons*:

“Ain’t this what they’ve been waiting for?

You ready?”

— Meek Mill, “Dreams & Nightmares”

Black people make up 44.2% of Philadelphia's total population, as of 2016 according to the US Census Bureau, making the community even with whites as the two largest population groups in the city. Despite this fact, the political, religious, and intellectual story of Philadelphia is usually told from the perspective of the various white settler-colonial stories of the Founding Fathers and the white immigrant struggles of the Italians and Irish. This course seeks to prepare Freshman for their academic career through a serious and focused study of the Black tradition in Philadelphia. To study and explore Black Philadelphia we will employ diverse methods from sociology, religious studies, political theory, history, and literature. In times where we were not limited by COVID there would also be a walking tour (I will provide information for those who wish to do a tour on their own) and guest speakers. While we focus on understanding the ways in which various methods allow us to understand one part of "an object of study," we will come to see how employing these methods together allow for a richer understanding of the city we inhabit, that we shape, and that shapes us.

Throughout the course we will examine our own social position and sense of self in relation to what we are studying. Academic study has a relationship to the Black community that is fraught. Academics have taken part in the oppression of Black people in America and throughout the world. The university has not historically been a safe space for Black study, even as academics have engaged in the study of Black people. We will consider what it means to mark an ethical difference between "the study of Black people" and "Black study" and what our own raced identities means about how we approach that ethical problem.

I hope that this class will demonstrate the vitality and joy that can come from thinking and engaging with powerful and challenging ideas. You will also be engaging a new writing resource, a book called *They Say/I Say*. The course has built in a number of writing assignments where you can use this book to improve your academic writing in a ways that hopefully demystify what it means to express yourself in the written word.

In addition to that academic work this class recognizes that every student in it is a complex, living person. This is your first semester in college and you are coming to that work at a time of extreme uncertainty. Everything those of us who live United States are facing impacts each of you in a different way. For Black students the impact of the pandemic has been felt hardest in your community and the resistance and uprisings taking place throughout the country are in response to continued police brutality and killings of Black people. There are a million stress points and navigating a new college system, much of which is online or socially distanced, is difficult. The instructor of this course is available to you for any questions or concerns you might have regarding the year and the next four.

### **Method of Learning**

A mix of lecture and small group discussion. Students are expected to have read the assigned material, look up new words, and formulate questions regarding passages they find difficult to parse.

## Learning Outcomes

This course meets Institutional Learning Outcome 1.1 (Understanding Diverse Perspectives): Students describe the diverse contemporary and historical perspectives relevant to a specific context, issue, or problem.

This outcome is assessed through three Student Learning Outcomes:

- Students describe the diverse contemporary and historical perspectives relevant to the study of the Black political, religious, and intellectual traditions in Philadelphia.
- Students will be able to identify the uses and limits of various methods of academic study.
- Students will be able to evaluate an academic debate and articulate in an intellectually rigorous way their agreement or disagreement with some aspect of that debate.

## Grade Summary

The grade scale is as follows: 100-95 = A, 94-90 = A-, 89-87 = B+, 86-84 = B, 83-80 = B-, 79-77 = C+, 76-74 = C, 73-70 = C-, 69-67 = D+, 66-60 = D, 59 and below = F

Assignment	Possible Points (400 overall)	Percentage of Overall Grade
1. Attendance/Participation	100 points	10%
2. Discussion leadership	50 points	10%
3. Written Responses to Readings and Films (14)	150 points / 10 points each (+10 free points)	10%
4. Final Project	100 points	20%

## Attendance policy

Your attendance and participation is required for this course and makes up part of your overall grade. You have 100 points for attendance and participation. 25 points of this will be linked to an Opening Survey on Canvas. The other points will float around based upon your attendance. Attendance is required and if you miss more than three courses without contacting me with a reason you will lose all 75 points. If you miss more than 5 sessions without contacting me, either in face to face class or in our Zoom sessions, I reserve the right to give you a failing grade for the course. Attendance is necessary for all of us to gain from each other's perspective and insights. There is no educational experience without you, me, and the rest of the class.

Note this policy is not intended to penalize those who get ill during the semester with any illness. This includes those whose mental health sometimes becomes a problem. Contacting me immediately is the best thing to do if you get physically sick or if any mental health issues get in the way of attending and doing your work. I promise to be compassionate, and to work with you, within the bounds set by the university, to help get you back on track. A primary principle of my teaching philosophy is mutual respect, which means seeing you as a real human being and respecting when you make yourself vulnerable enough to share something that is, for many people, embarrassing or difficult.

## **Participation**

Participation from all students is an important part of this course. The work we are doing together is designed to be collaborative and dynamic. You are therefore required to ask questions during discussion, formulate informed and considered opinions to share during discussion, help out fellow students think through complicated issues, and other aspects of being a good partner and community member in the shared intellectual experience. If I think that your participation is suffering, I will ask to chat with you and we will talk through why that is or if I am wrong. Strategies for improving participation will also be shared with you if it's decided you want that. You may always discuss with me any problems you may have with participation (shyness, mental health, and so on). Your participation is, however, not only based on speaking in Zoom sessions or in face to face classes, but keeping on top of your written work will also count.

## **Discussion Leadership**

During one zoom session you will be assigned with one or more partners to lead one aspect of the discussion. For at least fifteen of the scheduled minutes you will be tasked with coming up with discussion questions related to the reading and calling on or finding other ways to help us engage the texts together as a class. You will be randomly assigned a day during the first week of class.

## **Cell Phone, Laptop and Tablet Policy (only really applicable for in class sessions)**

While I understand the addiction to smart phones, the material we are studying is very difficult and therefore requires your undivided attention. If you are caught using your phone during a lecture you will be given one warning (either verbally or by email). If you are caught a second time or more you will face a reduction of five points for each offense from your highest scoring piece of coursework. *Please turn all cell phones off during the lecture.* If I can do it, so can you.

Laptops and tablets are acceptable in the class, but for note taking only. If you appear not to be paying attention because you're distracted by something non-class related on your laptop then I will ask you to read the last line of notes you have just written. If you can't then you will be given a warning (either verbally or by email). If you are caught a second time or more you will face a reduction of five points for each offense from your highest scoring piece of coursework.

## **Canvas**

Please make sure that you check the email attached to your Canvas profile. I will be sending emails to that address. All course documents, slides, and other helpful links will be available on the Canvas course page. Much of this semester's work will be done via Canvas because of the strains of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Remarks on Lectures, Readings, Films, and Classroom Discussions**

We are dealing with adult themes and a range of different belief systems in this class. You will be exposed to different ways of thinking both in the readings, the lectures, and discussions in class. At times you may find yourself offended by one or more of the ideas presented and when you are not offended a fellow classmate may well be. This is ok! While of course verbal or physical abuse (name calling, use of hate speech directed at another student, etc.) is strictly not tolerated, we have to give each other permission to be offensive (within the bounds of respectful

discourse) and to be offended. By remaining in this course you are agreeing to have respectful conversations about a wide range of different beliefs which may sometimes become heated.

This goes especially for the films and clips we will watch in class. At times I have chosen material that may be offensive to some. Some films will be rated-R and some clips from TV shows will be rated TV-MA. By remaining enrolled in this class after the first session you are entering into a non-verbal agreement that you understand and accept you will be asked to watch these films and clips.

### **Course Content Note<sup>1</sup>**

At times this semester we will be discussing historical events that may be disturbing, even traumatizing, to some students. If you suspect that specific material is likely to be emotionally challenging for you, I'd be happy to discuss any concerns you may have before the subject comes up in class. Likewise, if you ever wish to discuss your personal reactions to course material with the class or with me individually afterwards, I welcome such discussions as an appropriate part of our classwork.

If you ever feel the need to step outside during a class discussion you may always do so without academic penalty. You will, however, be responsible for any material you miss. If you do leave the room for a significant time, please make arrangements to get notes from another student or see me individually to discuss the situation.

### **Notice Regarding the Recording of Lectures**

Lectures remain the intellectual property of the instructor and as such students may not record them for dissemination. Students requiring accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act or with personal needs may record lectures, but must first discuss this with the instructor and the recordings must be used for personal use only. By remaining enrolled in this course each student understands and recognizes that any recordings of lectures are for personal use only and that if they record and disseminate them without permission they do so under risk of legal and financial penalty.

### **Required Texts**

*(All texts are available from the bookstore, though sometimes may be cheaper to buy them online. Please check to make sure you are buying the correct edition by using the ISBN provided. Note that Kindle and other electronic book versions are acceptable. I have indicated below if that is the case.)*

***The first four books are ones you need to get copies of, either through the bookstore or any other means. The "course reader" is a collection of PDF scans that are free and on the Canvas site already.***

- Gerald Graff and Cathy Birkenstein, *They Say, I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing, 3rd Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014). ISBN 9780393617436. The 4th edition of this book is also fine to get and available as an electronic version.
- MK Asante, *Buck: A Memoir* (Random House/Spiegel & Grau, 2013). ISBN 9780812983623.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Angus Johnston's work. See <https://studentactivism.net/2015/08/25/trigger-warnings-for-syllabi-a-how-to-one-year-along/> for more on course content notes/trigger warnings and the like.

- (Kindle version acceptable.)
- Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (W.W. Norton, 2019). ISBN 9780393357622. (Kindle version acceptable.)
  - Course Reader
    - W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings"
    - Christina Sharpe, "Black Life, Annotated"
    - Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons* (selections)
    - Frank B. Wilderson and Tiffany Lethabo King, "Staying Ready for Black Study: A Conversation"
    - Frank B. Wilderson, "Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption"
    - Elijah Anderson, *Code of the Street* (selections)
    - Alfred J. Raboteau, *Canaan Land: A Religious History of African-Americans* (selections)
    - Absalom Jones and Richard Allen, "An Address to those who keep Slaves, and approve the Practice"
    - W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (selections)
    - Mumia Abu-Jamal, *We Want Freedom: A Life in the Black Panther Party* (selections)
  - There are a number of podcasts and films you will also be asked to watch. These are all listed on Canvas with links to sites where they are free.

### Outline of Course and Reading Schedule

*Readings listed are to be read for that class period. If the reading is listed under September 14th, it is to be read prior to the September 14<sup>th</sup> session of class. The schedule and procedures for this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances; changes will be announced in class.*

*Currently the schedule is created with the plan that we may eventually be forced to go completely online due to the COVID19 emergency. If we are allowed to meet on September 8th as currently planned then when you see "Zoom Session" that will become "Face to Face Class" in College Hall 408. Given the uncertainty and virulence of this virus, I have planned the semester for far less contact than usual even if we are allowed to meet. So we will usually only be meeting once a week in person or on Zoom. The other days I expect you to be doing the work on your own so that when we are together our class sessions will be more impactful and intense.*

Week 1

August 17th                      Introduction to the Course via Zoom  
**Opening Survey Due**

August 19th                      Read: Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" (on Canvas); *They Say/I Say* (TSIS), chapters 1-2 (chapters will be abbreviated as *chs.* from here on out).  
 You can also watch an animated version of Du Bois' essay if you feel more comfortable with that to start <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=z04KVyhZM5g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z04KVyhZM5g)>.  
 Watch: Conversation between Fred Moten and Robin D.G. Kelley (link on

Canvas). Watch at least the first 30 minutes.

Watch: Recorded lecture of a very short history of Black Philadelphia (link on Canvas).

**Write: Identify three words, ideas, or concepts that are unfamiliar with from the conversation with Moten and Kelley, look them up online, and write a few sentences defining them in your own words. Turn in via Canvas.**

Week 2

August 24th

Read: Sharpe (on Canvas)

Watch: Goffman TedTalk <[youtu.be/-2Dj9M71JAc](https://youtu.be/-2Dj9M71JAc)>

Recommended reading: Moten and Harney, *The Undercommons*, ch. 2 (on Canvas) and Wilderson, "Staying Ready for Black Study" (on Canvas).

**Write: 500 words using TSIS chs. 1-2 to summarize what Sharpe says about Goffman's book *On the Run*. Turn in via Canvas.**

August 26th

Read: TSIS, chs. 3-4

*Zoom session*

Week 3

August 31st

Listen: Podcasts with Frank B. Wilderson (links on Canvas)

Read: Wilderson, "Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption" (on Canvas)

**Write: 500 words free-writing on what your response to Wilderson's ideas are. It's ok if you don't fully understand what he said, just go with what you think you do. Use ideas from TSIS chs. 3-4 in your writing to quote Wilderson and for your response ("I say"). Turn in via Canvas.**

September 2nd

Read: TSIS, chs. 5-7

*Zoom session*

Week 4

September 7th

Read: MK Asante, *Buck*, chs. 1-15

Watch: *The Black Power Mixtape, 1967-1975*

**Write: No word limit, just free write in relation to the Asante memoir. See if you are able to connect any of the previous ideas and concepts with how the ideas and emotions provoked by the memoir. Turn in via Canvas.**

September 9th

Read: TSIS, chs. 8-9

*Zoom session*

Week 5

September 14th

Read: MK Asante, *Buck*, chs. 16-30

**Write: No word limit, just free write in relation to the Asante memoir. See if you are able to connect any of the previous ideas and concepts with how the ideas and emotions provoked by the memoir. Turn in via Canvas.**

September 16th      Read: TSIS, chs. 10-11  
*Zoom session*

*Week 6*

September 21st      Read: MK Asante, *Buck*, chs. 17-30  
**Write: No word limit, just free write in relation to the Asante memoir. See if you are able to connect any of the previous ideas and concepts with how the ideas and emotions provoked by the memoir. Turn in via Canvas.**

September 23rd      *Zoom session*

*Week 7*

September 28th      Read: Anderson (on Canvas)  
**Write: 500 words using Anderson to analyze *Buck*. Use tools from TSIS. Turn in via Canvas.**

October 2nd          *Zoom session*

*Week 8*

October 5th          Read: Raboteau (on Canvas) and Jones/Allen (on Canvas)  
**Write: No word limit, just free write in relation to the history of Black religion in Philadelphia. See if you are able to connect any of the previous ideas and concepts with how the ideas and emotions provoked by the history. Turn in via Canvas.**

October 7th          *Zoom session*

*Week 9*

October 12th        Read: Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro* (on Canvas)  
Watch: "A Legacy of Courage: W.E.B. Du Bois and The Philadelphia Negro" (link on Canvas)  
**Write: No word limit, just free write in relation to your thoughts Du Bois and *The Philadelphia Negro*. See if you are able to connect any of the previous ideas and concepts with how the ideas and emotions provoked by the material you have engaged with from and about Du Bois. Does this seem like an example of the study of Black people or of Black study? Turn in via Canvas.**

October 14th        *Zoom session*

Week 10

October 19th

Read: Hartman, chs. 1-4 ("The Terrible Beauty of the Slum," "A Minor Figure," "An Unloved Woman," and "An Intimate History of Slavery and Freedom")

**Write: No word limit, just free write in relation to your thoughts about Hartman's telling of Black women's stories. See if you are able to connect any of the previous ideas and concepts with how the ideas and emotions provoked by the material you have engaged with from Hartman. Is this history? Is it theory?**

October 21st

*Zoom session*

Week 11

October 26th

Read: Hartman, chs. 5-8 ("Manual for General Housework," "An Atlas of the Wayward," "A Chronicle of Need and Want," and "In a Moment of Tenderness the Future Seems Possible")

**Write: No word limit, just free write in relation to your thoughts about Hartman's telling of Black women's stories. See if you are able to connect any of the previous ideas and concepts with how the ideas and emotions provoked by the material you have engaged with from Hartman. How does she critique Du Bois?**

October 28th

*Zoom session*

Week 12

November 2nd

Read: Mumia Abu-Jamal (on Canvas)

Watch: *In Prison My Whole Life* (link on Canvas)

**Write: No word limit, just free write in relation to your thoughts about Abu-Jamal's recounting of life in Philadelphia as a Black Panther. See if you are able to connect any of the previous ideas and concepts with how the ideas and emotions provoked by the material you have engaged with in relation to Abu-Jamal's writings or the documentary.**

November 4th

*Zoom session*

Week 13

November 9th

Read: "Black and Blue" in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* (link on Canvas). This is a timeline of reporting on policing and the Black community in Philadelphia. Click through and read at least two articles and scan the timeline from start to finish.

Watch: *Let the Fire Burn* (link on Canvas)

Listen: Frank B. Wilderson Podcast (link on Canvas)

Read: There is a transcript of this podcast (on Canvas) if you prefer to read instead of listen.

**Write: No word limit, just free write in relation to your thoughts on**

**policing and the Black Philadelphia community. See if you are able to connect any of the previous ideas and concepts with how the ideas and emotions provoked by the material you have engaged with about policing. Think about your own relationship to the police. Does it compare to what you have read? Can you connect it to the movie? Turn in via Canvas.**

November 11th      *Zoom session*

*Week 14*

November 16th      **Write: 500 to 1000 words reflecting on the course.**

November 18th      *Zoom session*

*Finals week*

November 25th      **Final Project Due**

### **COVID-19**

If you or someone in your household is experiencing COVID-19-like symptoms, stay home. Leaving home when you are sick puts the entire University community at risk. Students are required to notify faculty when they are missing class due to suspected COVID-19-like symptoms and in order to create a personalized plan for continuing their academic coursework. (See the Self-Reporting section of the COVID19 plan online for further guidance.)

### **American Disability Act of 1990**

La Salle University abides by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 which mandates reasonable accommodations be provided for qualified students with disabilities. Rose Lee Pauline is the designated contact. Please call 215.951.1014 to speak with her or another representative. You will need to provide documentation of your disability if you seek accommodations, but the counselors are there to help.

### **Counseling Center and Alcohol and other Drug Counseling**

If you are struggling with anxiety, depression, or just having a hard time adjusting to the new semester, please do not hesitate to contact the Counseling Center. They have a variety of resources, most of which are free to you as a student. They are located in the Medical Office Building, Suite 112 and may be contacted via telephone (215-951-1355).

The Alcohol and Other Drugs Counseling Center is also located in the Medical Office Building, Suite 112 and may be contacted via telephone (215-951-1357) or by emailing their staff <<http://studentaffairs.lasalle.edu/aodec/about/staff/>>. If you are struggling with alcohol or drug use please reach out to them.

Both are fully confidential.

### **Center for Academic Achievement**

Students seeking tutoring support services (subject and writing tutoring, supplemental instruction, and FSGs), academic coaching, of disability accommodation services are

encouraged to speak with the professionals at ARC. They are located in Lawrence Building Suite 409 and can be contacted via email at [academicsupport@lasalle.edu](mailto:academicsupport@lasalle.edu).

### **Syllabus Change Policy**

This syllabus is a guide and every attempt is made to provide an accurate overview of the course. However, circumstances and events may make it necessary for the faculty member to modify the syllabus during the semester and may depend, in part, on the progress, needs, and experiences of the students. Changes to the syllabus will be made with advance notice.

*Please see the Canvas page “University Policies and Resources” for other essential policies*