

First-Year Academic Seminars

Fall 2021

“Kids, Teens, and Screens”

Donna C. Celano (Assistant Professor of Communication)

Although media are one of the most powerful forces in all young people’s lives, not all media use is equal. This course first provides a historical look at changes in children’s and teen’s media use since 1960, including books, television, film, music, computers, video games, and social media. It examines a variety of contemporary and historical perspectives on media effects, including aggression, stereotyping, health, social anxiety, and academic achievement. We will focus particularly on how differences in media access between children living in poverty and their wealthier peers leads to differences in media use and varying effects.

“Saints Among Us”

Br. John M. Crawford (Associate Professor of Religion & Theology)

This course invites students to investigate religious exemplars in contemporary society. The Catholic tradition has a formal process for naming “saints,” who are outstanding examples of devout faith and practice. Does 21st century life still have a place to recognize extraordinary persons whose holy lives are worthy of emulation and imitation? What does sainthood mean today? What is the place of everyday holiness for contemporary persons, especially college students?

“Good Genes: The Monstrous Quest for ‘Perfection’”

Jason Diaz (Assistant Professor of Integrated Science, Business, & Technology)

This course explores the historic and modern manifestations of eugenics and its relationship to systems of oppression. These ideas became the bedrock for the genocidal programs of Nazi Germany and provided a rationale for the sterilization of the disabled and the mentally ill in the USA. The Human Genome project and modern technologies like CRISPR have reignited an interest in “correcting” mutations and “unlocking” the genetic potential of the human race. In this course, students will learn the basic genetic systems that govern human evolution, the technologies that can be used to influence those systems, and ultimately debate the ethical ramifications of these technologies. This course will explore manifestations of eugenic policies in the USA, Latin America, and Europe.

“Starry Night as Screensaver”

Susan M. Dixon (Professor of Art History)

How does one appreciate and understand the Mona Lisa when an infinite number of copies are distributed throughout the world? Many of these are digital images, and they are sometimes modified and re-contextualized. This course will investigate 4 topics or themes related to the current proliferation of copies of original works of art: the history of the reproduction of art, from the mid-15th century to the present (how did we get here?); the purposes of copying over time, from aiding in artistic training to selling commercial goods, and from signaling an appreciation of a work of art to subverting its original intentions (why did it happen?); the many issues that arise when works are copied, including issues of legality, ethics, and aesthetics (what are the challenges that unlimited copies pose?); and the varied responses of some contemporary artists to the situation (how are artists dealing with it?).

“Paths of Enlightenment, Ways of Wisdom”

S. Joel Garver (Assistant Professor of Philosophy)

Monks and metaphysicians. Buddha and Bonhoeffer. Stoics and saints. Over the centuries thinkers, mystics, and sages sought wisdom, pursued ultimate Reality, and gained enlightenment to make a difference in the world and in their lives. This course looks at three traditions: Hellenistic philosophy, Buddhist wisdom, and Christian faith. We will read and write about secular and sacred texts, their theories and thinkers. But we will also journey into (and journal about) practices: meditation and mental focus, fasting and philosophy, self-discipline and centering. This is an opportunity not only to explore these traditions, but also to learn about yourself and embark on a pathway of your own.

“Literature Asks ‘Who Am I?’”

Kevin J. Harty (Professor of English)

This seminar looks at literary texts that have attempted to depict the struggles young people such as yourselves have had in figuring out who they are. Such struggles might be related to issues of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, levels of ability, family, geography, and a number of other factors. Figuring out who you really are or who you want to become is an ongoing, sometimes challenging process that literature has repeatedly examined. Students will read, discuss, and write about contemporary literary texts reflecting the challenges that characters face when they ask who they are and who they hope to be.

“The 1960s: Literature & Culture”

James R. Jesson (Associate Professor of English)

This course focuses on the literature of the 1960s, a controversial period in American history that has prompted widely varying responses during the subsequent five decades. Students will study literary works that illustrate cultural and political issues that divided Americans during the decade, as well as non-fiction readings about the intense ideological debates that defined the 1960s. Many of these same debates still rage today. Perspectives on the 1960s to be explored will include various liberal and conservative views from the time (New Left, counterculture, Black Nationalist, Rockefeller Republican, Goldwater Conservative) and of the present (liberal, progressive, conservative, libertarian, evangelical).

“Food in Our Culture”

Victoria L. Ketz (Professor of Global Languages, Literatures, & Perspectives)

Sustenance is vital for human existence, but few ponder the many ways in which food is used in our society. This course will examine food as a biological need and a cultural identifier as well as the problematics surrounding this topic including sustainability and shortage. By studying historical, biological, psychological, and cultural factors, a greater understanding will be obtained about this need/privilege.

“Alchemy: Science of Body & Spirit”

Vincent R. Kling (Professor of German & Comparative Literature)

Tarot reading and alchemy are looked on as anti-scientific, but in an age when science investigated both physical and spiritual, they were noble vehicles of bridging matter and mind. Used with historical understanding, which we will study, they are powerful means of connecting intellect and intuition, science and psychology. We will study the history and practice of these arts by learning principles of alchemy, especially color symbolism, and by practicing Tarot readings. We will read *Harry Potter* but also see alchemy at work in *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. The course includes discussions, position papers, other readings, and a potential visit to the American Chemical Heritage Museum.

“Diverse Representations: Film & TV”

Mark C. Lashley (Assistant Professor of Communication)

The characters we love on television and in film often reflect our own experiences. Historically, members of minority or marginalized groups have seldom seen their experience reflected on screen; too often, screen representations include stereotypical portrayals (when portrayals are included at all). Using current literature on media and diversity (as well as visual source materials), this course will look at diverse representations through history and in the present day,

engage with the discourse around gender, race, class, religion, disability, and sexual orientation in media, and examine what it means to have one's identity represented in popular culture.

“Entrepreneurship: Philly Style”

Francis T. Mallon (Assistant Professor of Economics)

This course will analyze the role of Entrepreneurship and Innovation on the economic well being of the community. Historical and current day entrepreneurial pursuits engaged in here in the City of Philadelphia provide the framework (via case study analysis directed by the professor) for student research, discussions and writings regarding the evolution of the economic state of our City. Students will examine and debate the role of government to both regulate, while at the same time inspire, entrepreneurial activity to enhance the economic living standard of the citizens of the city. Entrepreneurs currently engaged in business operations in the City will present to the class their experiences in identifying business opportunity, founding their business in the city, navigating the dual challenges of serving the needs of their market while satisfying their responsibility related to governmental controls and regulation. Students will question/develop their personal perspective on the value of economic development associated with entrepreneurial action and responsibility for social justice in the development and perpetuation of the businesses formed by these entrepreneurial actions.

“The Origins & Evolution of Human Communication”

James M. Mancinelli (Assistant Professor of Communication Sciences & Disorders)

This course will engage the student in the study of the evolution of human communication which includes the biological, sociological, and linguistic prerequisites to human communication as we now know it. The student will be read literature in the above areas and engage in discussions to compare and contrast the various theories proposed by researchers in this area of study. Students will engage in hands-on experiments related to the material being discussed. Comparisons and contrasts will be made with non-human, primate species, and differences highlighted. The student will be required to develop and explain their own theory of the evolution of human communication, incorporating the biological, cognitive, sociological, and linguistic aspects discussed. Applications to communicative differences in today's society will also be discussed, e.g., male vs. female, cultural differences, etc.

“Trusting Penn & Hinkie's Process”

Francis X. McKee (Director of American Studies)

We will examine the literary, cinematic, artistic, musical, and photographic history of Philadelphia and its citizens both real and imagined who have breathed life, controversy, and character into the city for the past four centuries. William Penn envisioned a “City of Brotherly Love,” where people seeking religious freedom and individual rights would find a home. And so, the process of building and becoming a city infused with unique character and characters began.

Through founding fathers, eminent bankers and physicians, immigrant artisans and factory workers, religious scholars and the religious faithful, beloved entertainers, artists, and athletes, Philadelphia has grown from Penn's principles and Benjamin Franklin's virtues to current contributors to its character in Rocky Balboa's "going the distance" resilience and Charlie Kelly's wry one-liners in "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia."

"Trauma & Resiliency as Told through Hip Hop"

Trent W. McLaurin (Assistant Professor of Education)

Students will develop an understanding of trauma and resiliency through the narratives told through Hip Hop music. Hip Hop artists and other musicians have shared stories of trauma and resilience through their lyrics since the inception of the genre. Students will develop an understanding of trauma, protective factors, and resilience while studying the art form of Hip Hop.

"America's Sports Films"

Br. Gerard F Molyneaux (Professor of Communication)

This course will provide a survey of the genre: America's Sports Movies. Students will examine a variety of films that focus on different sports. The key questions asked are these: "Are these films supporting or questioning the belief that sports benefits American society?" and "Is the playing field level for all prospective players?" In responding to these questions, students will learn and employ the language of film production and film analysis.

"Food in Literature, Film, and Culture"

Judith Musser (Professor of English)

Food, like books, can sustain and celebrate life. But also like books, food can serve as an agent and expression for discipline, joy, fear, hunger, and loss. Through fiction and non-fiction texts, film, media/popular culture, and discussions, this course will examine the relationship between food and identity. We will examine ancient rituals surrounding food, the development of food traditions in various societies, the politics of food production, and the contemporary manifestation of culture's portrayal of food in television and film.

“Welcome to Belfield: Religious Belonging”

Maureen H. O’Connell (Associate Professor of Religion & Theology)

In this seminar you will use elements of our Lasallian mission that foster collaborative learning for the sake of the common good to explore the University’s historic Belfield neighborhood. We will use themes of religious identity and belonging to engage the history, values, beliefs and practices of the diverse cultures in our neighborhood, past and present. We will consider the ways in which religious communities have shaped our northwest corner of Philadelphia and identify elements of La Salle’s Catholic tradition that might contribute to the flourishing of all people who live, work, and study here. As part of a “Together and by Association” teaching and learning cohort (TABA), we will join students in another First Year Seminar in Public Health in some of our explorations of our Belfield neighborhood.

“Racism and Ableism in Latin America”

Luisa Ossa (Associate Professor of Spanish)

Often eugenics is only discussed from a (pseudo)scientific standpoint and its influence and impact on society at large is often left unexamined from an interdisciplinary standpoint. However, in the case of Latin America, eugenics ideologies were utilized to justify national narratives and policies that promoted white supremacy and ableism and these narratives and policies continue to have lasting impacts. My course will be a cultural course that will examine the pervasiveness of racism and ableism in Latin American and connect these issues to the ideologies and discourses rooted in eugenics. We will also make connections between Latin America and the United States. These discussions are always important, but the Covid-19 crisis has magnified these issues as we see how racial inequities and ableism are currently very present in discussions of how to handle the pandemic, who is most affected, who should be treated on a ventilator if there is a ventilator shortage, etc.

“Health, Wealth, and the American Dream”

Adam J. Pellillo (Assistant Professor of Economics)

This course will examine several contemporary economic policy issues in a seminar format. Specifically, we will consider the potential effects of proposed health care reforms, potential policy responses to rising income inequality, and how international economic relations can be improved, among other pressing issues. Time permitting, we will also explore how we can achieve more inclusive economic growth through changes in fiscal policy, immigration reform, education reform, structural reform (e.g., building a green economy), and housing reform.

“Brave New World: Ethical Issues in Modifying Nature”

William A. Price (Professor of Chemistry & Biochemistry)

This course creates an interactive atmosphere to discuss and evaluate several scientific issues that challenge some of our basic human values. Some of these issues challenge us to reassess the role of humans in the world from passive observers of nature to active modifiers. Humans have been changing nature for generations as we untangle challenges in medicine, genetics, and agriculture. An overriding question will address the meaning of “human nature” in both philosophical and scientific perspectives. We will get past the sensational headlines and carefully evaluate a number of modern scientific issues that cause division along ideological, religious, and scientific fronts. Some of these issues did not even exist a decade ago and thus we may find ourselves at the front lines of a controversy. Others have existed for generations and continue to present controversy. Historical examples involving modification (e.g., vaccine discovery, biological weapons, chemical synthesis) and modern perspectives (e.g., gene therapy, stem cell research, gene editing) will be presented and discussed.

“Welcome to Belfield: Public Health”

Candace J. Robertson-James (Assistant Professor of Public Health)

This course introduces students to some of the core components of urban life, specifically with the context of Belfield and surrounding communities (Germantown, Logan, Olney, West Oak Lane, etc.) around the La Salle University Campus. Local community health assets will be explored along with public health challenges and concerns. Students will explore specific aspects of the Belfield Community (e.g., housing, transportation, food and hunger, faith, crime, poverty, arts, culture, healthcare access) and their impact on health and implications for healthy communities. Programs and policies that influence the health of urban populations in general, in Philadelphia and Belfield specifically will be discussed and contemporary and historical perspectives will be considered. As part of a “Together and by Association” teaching and learning cohort (TABA), this course uses elements of our Lasallian mission oriented toward collaborative learning to explore the intersection of health, wellbeing and religious belonging as we collaborate with another First Year Seminar Course.

“Immigration, International Trade, and Regulations”

H. David Robison (Professor of Economics)

This course will examine several contemporary economic policy issues in a seminar format (read, research, and discuss). As suggested by the title of the course, the key topics will be immigration, international trade, and economic regulation, but additional policy debates will be included. Rather than attempting to draw specific policy conclusions or even build a policy consensus, the primary goal of the course is to help students understand the nature of the debates from their historic underpinnings to the contemporary views on the issues. A secondary goal is

having students understand the trade-offs necessary to support a policy position, because no policy is free of costs.

“Literacies of Change”

Laura A. Roy (Associate Professor of Education)

The course is designed to address organizing, activism, and resistance literacies related to issues of social justice. This course examines the potentials and benefits that accrue from exploring histories, models, and pedagogies of change at the grassroots level. Grounded in the notion of “city as classroom,” this course will connect students with local organizers, activist, and ally groups committed to issues of social justice such as linguistic human rights, racial justice, environmental justice and sustainability, public health, educational access, and immigration reform through authentic engagement with grassroots organizations

“Philadelphia in Wartime”

Br. Edward Sheehy (Associate Professor of History)

What role did Philadelphia play during the major wars in American history, from the Revolutionary War to the military conflicts of the 20th Century? What were the effects of that participation in warfare on the city and its people, both in the short and in the long term? This course will examine the rich history of the city’s institutions and people in wartime, including specific battles, logistics, military leadership, and wartime participants such as women, Quakers, and African-Americans. It also will consider Philadelphia’s articulation of attitudes both for and against participation in war, and of its approaches to conflict, at various moments in the city’s history.

“Black Philadelphia”

Anthony Paul Smith (Associate Professor of Religion & Theology)

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 addition to possible field trips to historic sites 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.

“The Image of God”

Cornelia Tsakiridou (Professor of Philosophy)

This course leads students to discover and explore late antique and medieval Christian literature about our inner transformation to spiritual images of God and learn about contemporary practices stemming from that tradition. It combines a theological, aesthetic, and metaphysical approach to the sacred imagery of Christianity and shows its continuity with the Jewish mystical tradition, especially on the theme of the vision of God as light. The course integrates the study of Byzantine and post-Byzantine iconography through exposure to contemporary icons, films, and videos, and examines the practice of spiritual or noetic prayer in the presence of sacred imagery.

“Crime, Case Studies, Current Events”

Brian R. Wyant (Associate Professor of Sociology & Criminal Justice)

This course examines current and high-profile criminal justice events in the United States from the mid-1960's to present day. For example, students will study the Attica prison revolt, L.A. riots, the Central Park Five, and the more recent Black Lives Matter movement to develop a better understanding of the characteristics of these significant historical events but to also aid in making sense of current events. Students will use works of historical and contemporary scholarship in order to try to understand the period and as well as stay current with ongoing events. A knowledge of the historical development and portrayals of crime and justice may provide a clearer understanding and solutions for current-day problems.