

Spring 1-2015

# History 650 Syllabus Spring 2015

Barbara Allen

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## Recommended Citation

Allen, Barbara, "History 650 Syllabus Spring 2015" (2015). *All Oral Histories*. 75.  
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## **History 650-A: Oral History: Theory and Practice**

La Salle University, Spring 2015

Wednesdays 6:15-8:55 p.m.

Jan 12, 2015 - May 09, 2015

Olney 321

### **Instructor:**

Dr. Barbara C. Allen (Ph. D 2001, M. A. 1992, Indiana University Bloomington, Russian & Soviet History; B. A. 1989 University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, Modern European History)

Office: Olney 344

Office hours: 9:30-10:45 a.m. and 12:30-1:45 p.m. TTh

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Phone: 215-951-1179

### **Course Description:**

This seminar will provide students with the foundations for designing and executing oral history research projects. Students will read and discuss literature about oral history theory and methods and they will examine how historians use oral history interviews to construct interpretive historical narratives. The class requires prior knowledge of or the willingness to learn how to use digital recording devices, digital playback software, and digital methods of submitting course projects for archival preservation. Students will undertake independent fieldwork that will allow them to apply the methods and approaches studied in class. Field interviews will be either of someone from the community associated with La Salle University or of a U.S. war veteran (see below for more details).

### **Course Objectives/Learning Outcomes:**

- Students will learn how to analyze oral history interviews as a source for writing history
- Students will develop the skills to design and execute professional oral life history interviews
- Students will learn how to evaluate various approaches to presenting, processing, and analyzing oral life history interviews
- Students will process and contribute their oral life history interviews to the Library of Congress or to La Salle University Library & Archives, thus creating primary sources for the study of history

### **Required readings:**

Students must complete the required readings, in order to participate in discussion and in order to carry out the interviewing projects effectively.

1. Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, 3rd edition (Oxford, 2014)
2. Studs Terkel, *Hard Times*, any edition
3. John Neuenschwander, *A Guide to Oral History and the Law*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Oxford, 2014)
4. *A Revolution of Their Own: Voices of Women in Soviet History*, edited by Barbara Alpern Engel and Anastasia Posadskaya-Vanderbeck (Westview Press, 1997)
- 5.\* Peipei Qiu with Su Zhiliang and Chen Lifei, *Chinese Comfort Women: Testimonies from Imperial Japan's Sex Slaves* (Oxford, 2013)

6. Donald J. Raleigh, *Russia's Sputnik Generation: Soviet Baby Boomers Talk about their Lives* (Indiana University Press, 2006)
7. *After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember September 2001*, eds. Mary Marshall Clark et al (The New Press, 2011)

\*Substitute readings are optional, based on individual student request

**Recommended reading for La Salle interviews:**

John P. Rossi, *Living the Promise* (five copies are on reserve at Connelly Library)

Additional readings, essential documents, and samples of required work are on Canvas. See the schedule below for due dates of readings.

**Films to be viewed in class:**

Oral History: A Century of Living

The Uprising of '34

My Perestroika

**Evaluation (see below schedule for detailed explanations of assignments):**

- 10% Participation in discussion (ongoing)
- 15% Readings journal (ongoing; entries due prior to class discussion of readings)
- 15% Critical analysis of online oral history interview (due January 28)
- 15% Recorded practice interview, 20-min. transcript, field notes, self-assessment (February 11)
- 5% Oral report about formal field interview (April 15-29)
- 40% Field notes, complete log, and recordings of formal field interview(s) and legal release(s) signed by student and interviewee (due April 29)

**Failure to submit the original signed legal releases for the interviewee and the interviewer will result in a grade of incomplete.**

Because the assignments build upon one another (scaffolding), it is important that the assignments be executed in the order indicated in the schedule. No one should execute the formal field interview before carrying out the practice interview. All work should be performed in a professional manner. Late assignments will result in reduced grades. Penalties will be imposed for poor attendance. See the 2014-2015 Orientation Guide to the Graduate History Program for clarification of the attendance policy.

**Grading Scale:**

A	= 4 grade points
A-	= 3.67 grade points
B+	= 3.33 grade points
B	= 3.00 grade points

B-	= 2.67 grade points
C	= 2.00 grade points
F	= 0.00 grade points

**Recording equipment and supplies:**

Digital voice recorders or digital video recorders

\*\*Purchase at a store of your choice or borrow from La Salle University Media Services (Olney Room 200 – reserve through the mylasalle portal)

Digital voice recorders should come with a USB cable and record in WAV or MP3

Blank CDs, DVDS, and/or flash drives

For storage of interview materials and submission of materials to the instructor (see below).

Acid-free unlined white paper

Print log, field notes, legal releases, and other necessary forms for submission to instructor. Print on one side only. Do not staple, fold, spindle, or mutilate.

Playback software

Free download from <http://www.nch.com.au/scribe/>. This software slows down the audio recording to allow you to transcribe more easily.

Foot pedal (optional)

Use to manipulate the speed of the recording while playing it back for transcription. The History Department possesses one foot pedal for loan; see Lauren De Angelis, the department secretary.

**Oral history websites with technical information and resources:**

Oral History Association: <http://www.oralhistory.org/>

H-Oralhist: <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~oralhist/>

Library of Congress Veterans History Project: <http://www.loc.gov/vets/>

Baylor Institute for Oral History: <http://www.baylor.edu/oralhistory/index.php?id=23560>

National Oral History Association of New Zealand: <http://www.oralhistory.org.nz/>

Vermont Folklife Center: <http://www.vermontfolklifecenter.org/index.htm>

Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling Concordia University:  
<http://storytelling.concordia.ca/oralhistory/>

**Schedule of classes, readings, and assignments:**

\*\*Explanations of assignments are after the schedule

**January 14**

Discuss Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*. Students should have read *Doing Oral History* and Paul Thompson's "Life story interview guide" (Canvas) prior to class and should have submitted readings journal entries on Canvas. We will view "Oral history: a century of living" (HBO documentary) in class.

**January 21**

Discuss Terkel's *Hard Times*. Students should have read about 250 self-selected pages of entries from *Hard Times* before class (attempt a representative range of selections) and should have submitted readings journal entries on Canvas. We will view "Uprising of '34" in class.

**January 28**

Report on and discuss internet-based oral history interviews and submit written critiques of the same (see explanation below). Use interviews from one of the following sites:

1. Oral Histories of the American South (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/>)
2. Miller Center of Public Affairs (UVA) Presidential Oral History Program (<http://millercenter.org/academic/oralhistory/index>)
3. La Salle University Oral Histories (<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptoh/>)
4. Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project (<http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/index.html>); for interviews by previous H650 students, see <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/search?query=la+salle+university&field=all&digitalCollection=yes>)
5. Voices of the Manhattan Project (<http://manhattanprojectvoices.org>)

**February 4**

Discuss *A Revolution of Their Own*. Students should have read *A Revolution of Their Own* prior to class and should have submitted readings journal entries on Canvas. Students will practice interviewing one another in class

**February 11**

Report on and discuss practice interviews (see explanation below). Submit digital audio or video recording of practice interview on disk or flash drive, a typed twenty-minute transcript (paper), typed field notes (paper), and a typed self-assessment (3-4 pages). Submit all materials in a large envelope; place disks or flash drives within small envelopes inside the larger one. Label the large envelope with your name.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> If problems with storage media arise, send the file(s) to allenb@lasalle.edu via the website [www.wetransfer.com](http://www.wetransfer.com).

**February 18**

Discuss *A Guide to Oral History and the Law*. Students should have read *A Guide to Oral History and the Law* prior to class and should have submitted readings journal entries on Canvas. Student must have selected and contacted formal field interviewee by this date; bring to the instructor a typed paragraph (half a page or so) indicating the full name of the interviewee and providing brief biographical information explaining why this interviewee is appropriate for the project.

**February 25**

Discuss *Chinese Comfort Women*. Students should have read *Chinese Comfort Women* prior to class and should have submitted readings journal entries on Canvas. If individual students do not wish to read this book due to its content, they may make a prior individual arrangement with the instructor to read a different book.

**March 4 – no class (Spring Break)**

Prepare for field interviews (ex. background research; informational interviews; first stage of formal field interview)

**March 11**

Discuss *Russia's Sputnik Generation*. Students should have read *Russia's Sputnik Generation* prior to class and should have submitted readings journal entries on Canvas. View "My Perestroika"

**March 18**

Discuss *After the Fall: New Yorkers Remember* Students should have read *After the Fall* prior to class and should have submitted readings journal entries on Canvas.

**March 25**

Students will read individually assigned scholarly journal articles about oral history, will write readings journal articles summarizing and reacting to them and submit these to Canvas, and will report upon them in class.

**April 1**

- no class (work on field interview projects)

**April 8, 15, and 22**

Oral Presentations

**April 29**

Before coming to class, those who have interviewed La Sallians should submit digital recordings and digital copies of logs and field notes to Digital Commons, per Rebecca Goldman's instructions (handout and on Canvas). You may also submit digital presentation files, questionnaires, and photographs, if desired. You must bring to class paper copies of logs, field notes, and legal releases and audio or video recordings on digital storage media. Those who

have interviewed U.S. war veterans should bring the additional forms required by the LOC. Submit all materials in a large envelope; within the large envelope, place disks or flash drives in small envelopes. Do not staple logs or field notes; use clips instead. Label the envelope with your name and the interviewee's name.

**Participation (10%):**

Students must complete all assigned readings and be prepared to discuss them in depth in class, according to the schedule in the syllabus. At the graduate level, students should take the initiative in posing questions for discussion and in contributing analysis and observations to discussion. Students are expected to critique readings and to respond to other students' contributions to discussion. Students are expected to trade experiences and offer advice about interviewing to one another. If students do not volunteer comments, I will call on them to speak. Students who consistently have little or nothing to contribute to discussion might receive F's for their participation grades.

**Readings journal (15%):**

For each week's required reading, you will be required to submit through Canvas a 1000-word journal entry analyzing the reading and demonstrating that you have read closely. Your analysis should focus on study questions posted on Canvas; answer several questions of your choice. Cite page numbers in parentheses within the text (#) to reflect that you have read the material deeply. Each entry is due before class meets to discuss the corresponding reading.

**Critical analysis of online oral history interview (15%) (due January 28):**

Write a 2000-word critique of an oral history interview from one of the following collections:

1. Oral Histories of the American South (<http://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/>)
2. Miller Center of Public Affairs (UVA) Presidential Oral History Program (<http://millercenter.org/academic/oralhistory/index>)
3. La Salle University Oral Histories (<http://digitalcommons.lasalle.edu/histdeptoh/>)
4. Experiencing War: Stories from the Veterans History Project (<http://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/index.html>)
5. Voices of the Manhattan Project (<http://manhattanprojectvoices.org>)

Choose an interview that is at least one hour long or compare and contrast two shorter interviews. Be prepared to present the critique in class. Evaluate the interviewer's technique using criteria based on Ritchie's *Doing Oral History*, Valerie Yow's checklist (Canvas), and your own standards. In addition, assess the organization and accessibility of the web site you used. Use size 12 font; double-space the text. Cite interviews using *Chicago Manual of Style* format and time stamps.

**Practice Interview (15%) (due February 11):**

Despite the designation "practice," a high level of professionalism is expected. Interview an adult family member, friend, or work colleague (the older, the better). Interview the narrator

for at least thirty minutes, record the interview and store it to flash drive, CD or DVD.<sup>2</sup> Choose a topic or topics from the Paul Thompson questions. Transcribe the first ten minutes. Follow the transcription guidelines in the Baylor University Style Guide (Canvas). Put a time stamp on each page of the interview transcript (see examples on Canvas). Write field notes (see examples on Canvas) and a 3-4 page evaluation of the interview experience, critiquing your strengths and weaknesses as an interviewer and discussing how you might improve your technique and preparation in future interviews.

You must submit to me by the date indicated in the syllabus, an audio or video recording of the interview on CD, DVD, or flash drive in WAV, MP3, or MPEG format, a typed transcript of twenty minutes from the interview (the first ten and last ten minutes), typed field notes, and a typed evaluation. Submit all materials in a large envelope labeled with your name; enclose disks in small envelopes; staple papers. In class, each student will spend about ten minutes discussing what he or she learned from the practice interviews, in terms of content and technique. It is not necessary to obtain a legal release from practice interviewees, unless the practice interview will be part of the formal field interview project.

Practice interviews may be conducted in person or by telephone or Skype.

**Formal Field Interview (40%) (due April 29):**

Select an interviewee in consultation with the instructor. Interviewees must be one of the following: 1) Christian Brother, 2) a La Salle University faculty or staff member (including retirees) or alumnus/alumna, 3) a longtime resident of a neighborhood near La Salle (Olney, Germantown, Logan, Hunting Park), or 4) a U.S. war veteran. The product of the fieldwork will be a primary historical source in the forms of an audio recording and a complete log with abstract, accompanied by an approved legal release and field notes. The source will be made available to other historians for research by posting it to La Salle's space on Digital Commons and depositing it in the La Salle University Library and Archives (or to the Library of Congress for veteran interviews). Students must take responsibility for fully informing interviewees of the interview's purpose and of how the interview will be used and made available.

The instructor must approve interviewees in advance and will provide a list of Christian Brothers and La Salle faculty, staff, and alumni who are a priority to interview. Students may propose alternatives to those on the list, as long as they suit the categories. Students are responsible for setting up the interviews and designing the questionnaires. Interviewees should be older people (over sixty), preferably at or near the end of their careers and possessing an appropriate frame of mind in which to reflect upon their lives. Exceptions to the age requirement may be made for veterans of wars in Iraq or Afghanistan. If you choose to interview a veteran, check his or her name in the LOC database. You should not interview someone who has already been interviewed at length.

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<sup>2</sup> If problems with storage media arise, send the file(s) to allenb@lasalle.edu via the website [www.wetransfer.com](http://www.wetransfer.com).

The interview should take the form of a life history, but should include at least thirty minutes about the interviewee's experiences as a veteran or at La Salle, as a Christian Brother, or developments in the neighborhood(s) near La Salle (as appropriate). The purpose of the interview is to collect information that would be useful to historians conducting research. Your approach and questions must reflect familiarity with techniques and approaches discussed in the required readings for the course.

The student should conduct background research into the narrator's work and life in order to compose interview questions. For veteran interviews, read books and newspaper articles about the context of their military service. For La Salle interviews, read relevant sections of John Rossi's history of La Salle, *Living the Promise* (on reserve at Connelly Library) and conduct research in the digitized yearbooks, newsletters, etc. on La Salle's Digital Commons. Make contact with Bro. Joseph Grabenstein, the university archivist (College Hall, Room 101; email: [grabenst@lasalle.edu](mailto:grabenst@lasalle.edu); telephone: (215) 951-1294. Ask him for research assistance only after you have conducted research online and read the Rossi history. Remember at all times that you are **not** conducting a publicity project for the university.

Questions for interviews of military veterans can be selected from the questionnaires on the LOC website. Those interviewing La Sallians may seek assistance from Dr. Allen, University Archivist, Bro. Joe Grabenstein, and relevant faculty and staff in composing questions. Questions on early life and family life may be modified from the comprehensive questionnaire designed by Paul Thompson (see Canvas). You are encouraged to submit interview questions to the instructor for feedback, before you begin interviewing. Submit the questions well in advance of the interview (at least 72 hours in advance).

You should have a preliminary conversation with the interviewee to explain the project, what will be done with the interview, and to establish a rapport with the interviewee. You may submit questions to the interviewee in advance of the interview, but make clear that you want to record an oral interview, not receive answers in writing.

Conduct at least two hours of recorded interviewing time. You must obtain a signed legal release from the interviewee for each interview session. Formal field interviews should be conducted face-to-face. Choose a quiet location where the interviewee feels comfortable. Do not speak excessively about yourself during the interview, even if the interviewee seems interested. Do show sympathy if the interviewee discusses traumatic memories. Stop the recording if the interviewee loses composure and resume recording after the interviewee has regained composure. After each interview session, students should make a copy of the original digital recording.

The interview will be graded on the basis of the following:

1. historical value of the interview
2. interviewer's skill in posing questions
3. avoidance of errors such as interrupting the interviewee or failing to pursue potentially productive new avenues of inquiry

4. audio quality of the recording
5. interviewer's professionalism in conducting the interview
6. accuracy and comprehensiveness of the log (abstract)

Original, signed legal releases (in excellent condition) must be obtained for archival deposit. Recorded interview sessions, logs (abstracts), field notes, legal releases and logs must be submitted to Digital Commons and to the instructor. The recorded interview sessions must be submitted on CDs, DVDs, or flash drives in WAV or MP3 format. Logs and field notes should be saved in PDF, DOC or DOCX file format. Include txt files for LOC projects. In addition to electronic copies of documents, you must also submit high-quality printed copies of documents to the instructor. Legal releases should be submitted on acid free, white, unlined paper and in excellent condition (do not fold, spindle, or mutilate).

Veteran Interviews: All LOC forms must be completed and submitted with the interview materials (see <http://www.loc.gov/vets/> for forms). **You must register the interview online with LOC and obtain a registration number** to place with your interview materials for mailing. Obtain a registration number before submitting materials to the instructor and **give the instructor a printout of the page with the registration number**. You should not submit the interview materials to Digital Commons, unless the veteran had some connection to La Salle. The instructor will deposit the interviews with the LOC. Questions for interviews of military veterans can be selected from the questionnaires on the LOC website.

**Oral reports (5%) (April 8, 15, or 22):**

Students will report in class about their formal field interviews. Discuss the interview design, preparation for it, significance of information gleaned during the interview, and strengths and weaknesses of your approach. You should use visual aids (either PowerPoint or handouts incorporating photographs), outlines, and any other helpful accompanying materials. Play a short excerpt (1-2 mins.) from your interview. Reports should last from 15 to 20 minutes; we should allow 5-10 minutes after each report for questions and answers. Reports that fall considerably below 15 minutes will receive reduced grades. If you talk for much longer than twenty minutes, I will have to interrupt you, in order to give other students time to deliver their presentations. Your presentation will be graded on the content delivered before I interrupt you.

**Field notes (due April 29):**

Your field notes must identify the interviewee and yourself, describe preparatory work you did for the interview and preliminary contacts with the interviewee, and describe the setting of the interview and demeanor of the interviewee. Note the mood and mannerisms of the interviewee, and any other information that might be of interest to an historian listening to the recording and attempting to interpret it. Follow the examples given by the sample field notes on Canvas. Your choice of information to convey may be adapted to your personality, but the more detail you can provide, the better. Field notes should be 3-5 pages in length.

**Interview Log (Abstract): (due April 29)**

The log should consist of detailed narrative summary that would be helpful to a historian conducting research on any of the usual topics of historical inquiry: gender, labor, politics, institutional history, social history, ethnicity, culture, religion, etc. Include in the log your questions and comments that were voiced in the interview. Use direct quotes to render especially illustrative statements by the interviewee. The log should correctly spell all names of people, institutions, and places mentioned in the interview. Instructions for creating a brief abstract are at [www.oralhistory.org.nz/documents/duddingabstractingguide2008.pdf](http://www.oralhistory.org.nz/documents/duddingabstractingguide2008.pdf) . For the types of log entries I find most useful, see examples created by previous H650 students on Digital Commons (ex. Finley, Galante, Grover interviews). If you are unsure of the correct spelling of some words and names, please contact the interviewee for confirmation. Do not correct an interviewee's grammar, colloquialisms, or regional dialect. Do not attempt to render foreign accents or nonstandard pronunciations in the transcription.

Insert a time stamp at the left-hand margin next to each of your questions (indicating how much time has passed since the beginning of the interview session). Use a standard font in size 12. Print on one side only of white paper. Save the transcript to disk in DOC, DOCX or PDF (txt for LOC). Students might be asked to upload their interview materials to Digital Commons. More information will be provided in class.

**Legal Release (due April 29):**

You **must** obtain an original signed legal release from the interviewee(s) in the formal field interview. You must explain the legal release to the interviewee before the interview begins. Obtain the interviewee's signature at the end of the session. Obtain a signature for each session of the interview. In addition to the signed legal release, you must ask the interviewee at the beginning of the recorded interview for oral permission to record. Students must also sign legal release forms for interviewers.

**La Salle interviews:**

Use the legal release forms provided by the instructor. The interviewee has the right to make changes to the La Salle legal release. If the interviewee balks at signing the legal release, contact the instructor as soon as possible. Interviewees may choose to restrict access to their interviews (for example, for ten years after the interview or until the death of the interviewee). Interviewees may **not** restrict access until the death of everyone mentioned in the interview. This places an undue burden on the archive. Students must inform interviewees that sealed interviews can be opened by court order.

**U.S. Veteran interviews:**

For veterans, you must use the LOC legal release forms. The Library of Congress does not accept any changes to the legal release forms.

For veterans who are also La Salle faculty, staff, administrators, or alumni, please complete both sets of forms.

Required Supplements to the Syllabus:

### **Course Policies**

The Instructor reserves the right to modify the schedule and assignments.

Please silence phone ringers and refrain from texting in class so as not to distract instructor and other students.

Laptops may be used only if necessary, with consent of instructor.

Audio/Video recording only with consent of instructor; no reproduction or distribution of recordings.

### **Academic Integrity**

As members of the La Salle University, we are committed to academic integrity. Academic integrity entails a commitment to 1) respectful and open discussion and 2) avoiding plagiarism. What is plagiarism? According to our Provost: "Plagiarism is the unacknowledged use of other people's ideas, both written and unwritten.<sup>3</sup> . . . Whenever one draws on another's work, one must specify what has been borrowed – whether facts, opinions, or quotations – and its source. Using another person's ideas or expressions in writing without acknowledging the source constitutes plagiarism." I will discuss this serious issue further in class. For essential information regarding academic integrity at La Salle, please see: <http://www.lasalle.edu/portal/provost/intprop/AIP.swf>

### **Connelly Library**

Connelly Library has many excellent resources to facilitate the study of history:

<http://www.lasalle.edu/library/>

You can use the new "Summon" search to locate many different kinds/formats of historical texts and materials. Also, the LIBGUIDE for history is a great place to explore library's historical resources:

<http://guides.lasalle.edu/history>

### **Writing Center**

All writers benefit from working with an objective reader who offers feedback. At the Sheekey Writing Center, in Olney 203, tutors give feedback and assist students in expanding and sharpening their writing skills and strengths. Tutors deal with work from all disciplines and across all college levels, including graduate. Papers may be in any stage of development, including idea development. Besides focusing on organization and clarity issues, tutors also provide research and documentation information.

Tutors assist students in learning to identify and correct grammar as well as enhance the editing and proofreading process to help build these important skills. When available, tutors will work with students on a drop-in basis but appointments are highly recommended (in GradesFirst—under Tools in the portal—schedule an appointment for WRT 101). For more information, contact Mary Robertson at 215.951.1299 or [robertso@lasalle.edu](mailto:robertso@lasalle.edu)

### **Academic Coaching, Academic Skills Workshops, and Online Student Resources**

Individual appointments are available that focus on time management, study strategies, reading strategies, note-taking, test-taking, and workload organization. Students should contact Melissa Hediger Gallagher to schedule an appointment. Academic Skills Workshops are offered face to face and online on a variety of topics such as study strategies, documentation styles, test taking, decoding

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Style Manual and Guide to Scholarly Publishing* (New York: MLA, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, 1998), 151.

assignments, group study, and time management. A number of workshops are also archived online. Students are advised to go to [www.lasalle.edu/portal/learningsupport](http://www.lasalle.edu/portal/learningsupport) for current workshop descriptions, dates, and times as well as information about those recordings. Additional academic resources are also available on the site and include helpful handouts and web links. For more information, contact Melissa Hediger Gallagher at 215.951.5115 or [hediger@lasalle.edu](mailto:hediger@lasalle.edu).

***An important note: GradesFirst, located on the Academics page of the mylasalle portal under Learning Resources, is the mechanism through which students can make appointments for writing (WRT 101) or subject tutoring. Generally, this is also the way students can schedule an individual session with Melissa Hediger Gallagher, the Learning Instructor/Academic Coach.***