Greetings from the NRC

May 2021

As a college undergraduate, I started running regularly but just three to four miles each run. It helped clear my mind as I enjoyed running along the river at the University of Minnesota. In March 2020, it felt like we were all beginning a frightening, figurative running race with the novel Coronavirus. Maybe it would be akin to a rainy 5K or 10K – something that would challenge us, but we’d get through it fast enough. Soon enough it was apparent this would be a much longer race. To extend the analogy, it turned into an ultra-marathon, and the longest, harshest ever run. Now, after so many of our fellow runners have been tragically lost or injured, some of those ahead of us are saying they see the finish line. As we muster an exhausted cheer, we need to inspire each other and stay the course. We’re not quite sure how much longer this race will be. But we sure need to encourage one another in the final miles.

Virtual travels have been surprising comforts during the pandemic. Many OLLIs have hosted discussions on past memorable trips, and some have presented
virtual, live tours – to famous landmarks or remarkable museums. This month, both OLLI at California State University, Channel Islands and OLLI at Arizona State University bring us articles about some amazing travels their members are cheering about. And OLLI at University of North Carolina at Asheville has well learned that guest speakers, particularly authors, can travel virtually to join their discussions and events. These inspiring features are just what we need in the final laps of our pandemic race.

Sending best wishes to all you fellow runners as you finish strong,

Steve Thaxton, Executive Director

Osher NRC
National Resource Center
for Osher Institutes
Have you been bored with no place to go and nothing to do? OLLI members at CSU Channel Islands felt this way, especially after the OLLI course “Postcards from the National Parks.” Their Events Team, headed by Ann Lewin and Al Reaves, said, “if we can’t go there, maybe they can come here.” Al found that the Everglades National Park could provide a personal virtual tour – including private Ranger guides. On January 12, 2021, over 250 OLLI members took the virtual trip to southern Florida.

Rangers Denise and Chris were fabulous guides in a live, intimate Zoom tour of the fascinating Everglades. To prepare for the live tour, members watched a Park Service video with two intrepid female photographers paddling kayaks for 10 days through the maze of waterways – visiting sites few tourists ever see. The video showed alligators, crocodiles and pythons, but the focus was on the unique 1.5-million-acre habitat with 1,100 plant species and 350 bird species – all endangered as 1.2 billion gallons of life-giving freshwater is drained each day for human use.

Chris, in his Smokey-the-Bear Ranger hat, was the star of the tour — entertaining, knowledgeable, and subtly funny. Visiting four different habitats, he showed members that only two feet in altitude transforms an area from hardwood highlands to pinelands to sawgrass marshes. Wading into the ankle-deep marsh, he plucked a sawgrass from the water and chewed the root saying “it tastes like wet celery.”
At the last stop in wetlands, Chris reached down to dig up green and yellow muck, called paraphyte from the bottom. Periphyton, which is full of microscopic animals, algae and cyanobacteria, forms the bottom of the Everglades food chain. Chris said “If you believe enough, you can smell it though the camera.” While he promised its earthy awesomeness smells really good, he didn’t convince many of the OLLI viewers.

Long-time OLLI member Millie Rathbun summed up the virtual tour of the Everglades: “The adventure yesterday was OUTSTANDING.” While Rangers Chris and Denise from the Everglades Education office are more familiar with 4th or 5th graders, they loved the opportunity to engage OLLI’s generation.

Submitted by: Daniel Banyai, Director, OLLI at California State University, Channel Islands

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OLLI AT ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

Guess Who is Launching Into Space?

When Inspiration4 announced the crew for their first private SpaceX Crew Dragon mission, OLLI at Arizona State University (ASU) instructor Dr. Sian Proctor made the cut.
The spacecraft will remain in orbit for three days, flying in an orbit that will be the highest humans have been above the Earth’s surface since the final shuttle servicing mission to the Hubble Space Telescope in 2009. The mission is scheduled to run in late 2021.

Dr. Proctor was selected for her humanitarian qualities, exemplifying the mission ideals of leadership, hope, prosperity, and generosity. These are the same qualities she always displays as an OLLI at ASU instructor.

Not only is Dr. Proctor an OLLI at ASU instructor and analog astronaut, she is also an artist. Her website Space2Inspire combines space art and poetry exploring the intersections of JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion), STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math), and the arts. Dr. Proctor, an ASU alumna, has been teaching older adults about planetary geology – both Earth’s and Mars’ – at OLLI since 2016. She holds two graduate degrees from ASU, including a Master of Science in geology and a PhD in science education.

What some of the OLLI at ASU members have to say about Dr. Proctor sums up her engaging teaching style:

"Hands down, this is the best OLLI class I have taken! Very impressive presenter. Her enthusiasm for the subject was contagious."

"Dr. Proctor has all the qualities of an excellent instructor. She is well prepared, engaging, considerate, a great storyteller, very knowledgeable, and entertaining!"

Read more about this exciting mission and Dr. Sian Proctor’s connection to OLLI at ASU.

Read more about Dr. Sian Proctor from an article that appeared in The Arizona Republic.

Want to support Dr. Proctor's work? Join her Patreon.

Submitted by: Abby Baker and Sally Underwood, OLLI at Arizona State University

OLLAT North Carolina at Asheville

Authors and OLLIs: A Match Made in Education

In the Japanese language, the character for crisis is the same as the
character for opportunity. Although the past year has been difficult, the pandemic has also created some unique prospects, including the increased ability to connect with people all over the world via technology. This increased connectivity has allowed Osher Institutes to virtually bring in a broader range of speakers that would otherwise be unable to be physically present at an OLLI. Institutes seem to be taking full advantage of this opportunity to bring in authors to discuss their writings.

The OLLI members at University of North Carolina (UNC) at Asheville are a particularly well-read group, as books and authors are common themes for classes, seminars, and special interest groups. Recently, OLLI at UNC Asheville invited author Daniel Pierce (his latest book, *Tarheel Lightnin’*) to speak about the RAIL (Railroad Incarcerated Laborer) Memorial Project. Their special interest group for meditation also hosted Dr. Fred Travis author of *World-Class Brain: The Edge That Helps Peak Performers Succeed And How You Can Develop It* to discuss the neuroscience of how meditation effects the brain and promotes higher stages of human development. Additionally, in conjunction with the Western North Carolina Historical Association, they offered a lecture series on local history. One session was presented by state legislator, Rep. John Ager, author of *We Plow God’s Fields, a biography of James G. K. McClure*. Finally, an OLLI class led by Chris Highland author of *Meditations of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Broken Bridges, A Freethinker’s Gospel* focused on *Emerson and the Fires of Freethought*.

It is best summed up by Catherine Frank, director of OLLI at UNC Asheville, “During the pandemic we have embraced the opportunities to welcome authors from our region and around the world to enliven our courses and share their unique perspectives. Reading and writing have been sources of comfort, escape, and engagement for our lifelong learners. They have benefited from hearing directly from authors who might not otherwise be able to travel to be with us in person. We hope to continue to use our new understanding of technology to bring authors from the world to OLLI when we are able to gather safely again.”

While OLLI at UNC Asheville is certainly capitalizing on the opportunity to host authors, they aren’t the only ones. All over the nation, Institutes are finding that authors are interested in and available to speak to members and classes. From OLLI at American University hosting Marie Arana to discuss her book *Silver, Sword, and Stone: Three Crucibles in the Latin American Story*, to OLLI at University of Minnesota presenting Dr. Erika Lee, author of the award-winning *America for Americans: A History of Xenophobia in the United States*, to OLLI at George Mason University offering a seminar by Martin Tolchin author of *Politics, Journalism, and the Way Things Were: My Life at The Times, The Hill, and Politico*, it seems that authors and OLLIs go
Dear Olli,

With the vaccines for COVID-19 being readily available, I have heard that some Institutes are requiring vaccinations to allow members to return to the physical campus. What is the policy on vaccinations, do you have any guidance?

~OLLI Volunteer

Dear Olli Volunteer,

The pandemic has certainly changed many aspects of the way we offer classes and content. The latest, of course, is the subject of vaccinations. The short answer to your question is that the National Resource Center is not a governing body for the Institutes. We cannot require (or not require) that Institutes have their members vaccinated before returning to campus. The guidance we can provide is to follow your university’s or college’s policy. Ultimately, your host institution will decide if vaccinations are required. Already some have announced their policies for upcoming terms. As with all things related to COVID, (masks, social distancing, vaccinations, etc.) your host institution’s policies and guidance is the first place to look when thinking about returning to campus.

~Olli

Have a question for Olli? Please send it in care of Kevin Connaughton (kevin.connaughton@northwestern.edu).

Submitted by: Catherine Frank, Director, OLLI at University of North Carolina at Asheville
QUICK TIPS FOR HELPING OPERATE AN OSHER INSTITUTE

Quick Tip - Creating Ambassador Programs

Sometimes it is difficult for members to ascertain all that a particular OLLI has to offer. At OLLI at University of Nebraska-Lincoln, leadership has tackled this head-on by creating the Ambassador Initiative. This initiative offers no-cost guidance to members who struggle to find appropriate classes, social events, and interest groups in order to ensure members are enjoying their memberships to the fullest extent! This initiative is offered to new members within their first year of membership.

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