Greetings from the NRC

June 2021

The recent and repeated use of the word pivot implies fast movement. In higher education, it is used to describe the fast move to online learning modalities. For me, pivot conjures an image of the old toy favorite – the Slinky. TV commercials in the ‘60s pictured the twisting, fast-turning toy effortlessly jumping down stairs and off furniture. Why didn’t mine work that way? And when the Slinky got even slightly bent out of shape, well you know where it ended up. Having witnessed the move to online delivery at so many Osher Institutes over the past 16 months, I know our Slinky pivots to online learning have rarely been fast and never without extraordinary efforts by OLLI staff and volunteer leaders. Yes, there have been quite a few bent wires along the way, but our Slinky skills have steadily improved!

We now realize distance learning modalities are not some stopgap measures but are here to stay as beneficial tools of education on all levels, including in OLLIs. It is
becoming our collective job to ensure this modality is used productively and in balance with “on-ground” courses. We’re discovering ways to blend and merge the technology and instruction to enhance quality, increase access, and improve service to Osher members.

This month’s Newsletter presents examples of online technology and teaching that unite us and improve the Osher experience. From University of North Florida, Southern Oregon University, and USMs (both in Maine and Mississippi) we see the amazing power of local OLLI creativity. Enjoy their stories and allow yourself to be inspired.

May your Slinky remain un-bent, and your pivots be successful,

Steve Thaxton, Executive Director

Osher NRC
National Resource Center
for Osher Institutes
Collaboration Through Film

As the COVID-19 Pandemic stopped in-person activity in March 2020, the foundations of collaboration proved invaluable to OLLI at Southern Oregon University and their long-term programming partners at the Ashland Independent Film Festival (AIFF).

In 2014, Lorraine Vail, an OLLI instructor and former OLLI Council president, forged the partnership between these two groups with a course titled, “OLLI Goes to the Ashland Independent Film Festival.” Vail and Richard Herskowitz, artistic director of AIFF, selected the films for the OLLI class, which became an annual offering to the delight of the members involved. However, the format of the course, which consisted of attending festival film screenings and lively discussion sections, seemed to be ill-equipped to adapt to distancing guidelines established in March 2020.

When it became apparent that the film festival and corresponding OLLI course would not be able to move forward as planned, Vail and Herskowitz sprang into action under one operative word: fast. In a matter of weeks, AIFF was ready with more than 100 feature-length films, many short films, and nine curated programs with flexible viewing times. Under this new all-online format, OLLI members gained access to the new AIFF streaming channel, purchased their own tickets, and streamed the films on their computer or TV. Vail says, “This was where our partnership mattered most. AIFF staff trained me, and I helped the students. When problems arose, AIFF tech support staff came to our rescue.” Post-film discussions were held via Zoom, a format to which the members quickly adapted.

The success of the 2020 virtual festival partnership laid the groundwork for incredible offerings in 2021. OLLI’s spring 2021 term began March 29 with over 80 diverse offerings, and the Ashland Independent Film Festival launched April 15 with its traditional emphases on the subjects of activism and the arts. Herskowitz explained that, “We’re also excited about our yearlong series of events culminating in our 20th anniversary hybrid ‘Double Feature’ festival in June. We fervently hope that past, current, and prospective AIFF members will join us in this amazing line-up of films, conversations, and connections.” As Vail and Herskowitz continue to work together, they now can depend upon essential skills gained during this trying time. Vail remarks, “These new skills join a long line of lifelong learning experiences of the past year.”

Read more from Anne Bellegia, OLLI at SOU Volunteer via Ashland Daily Tidings here.

Submitted by: Rob Casserly, Assistant Director, OLLI at Southern Oregon University
Many of us have experienced strained relationships because of political differences. Right now, so much public dialogue is harsh, extreme, and intolerant. OLLI at the University of Southern Maine instructor Mike Berkowitz developed an experiment in trying to bridge this divide; he created a course called “Conservatives and Liberals, Not Conservatives vs. Liberals.” He advocated for a Spring 2021 course that would bring together a dozen self-identified Maine left-leaning participants and a dozen Mississippi right-leaning members (who share the acronym OLLI at USM!). Both OLLIs have members with diverse political views, and Paula Mathis, director of OLLI at University of Southern Mississippi, encouraged conservative-leaning members to enroll in the Zoom-based class. It drew together OLLI members from across the political spectrum interested in exploring not just differences, but also commonalities.

Mike Berkowitz has a background in teaching on all levels, from daycare to college. He also weaved psychology concepts into the course. The course description reads: “Our country is divided. There are two camps, each with its own valid framework for viewing what’s best for the country. Our purpose is to better understand others, not to persuade them. We’ll do this by sharing perspectives, not debating them. Mini lectures from psychology and politics will help frame our discussions on parenting, political parties, our government, our schools, the media, religion, capitalism, socialism, taxes, SCOTUS, etc. Let’s learn to listen and listen to learn.”
Connecting OLLIs across the nation is possible through Zoom, making the physical distance between participants irrelevant. Mike carefully stages conversation to present perspectives that inform the discussion that follows. Feedback from the class is positive, with some participants considering their own experiences and what shaped their attitudes while listening more thoughtfully to different views. The impact on the participants is both inward-looking and inviting family and community conversations with greater openness to difference and healing in various relationships.

Mike hopes to offer the course to other OLLIs across the U.S. who have members interested in participating. Geographic location does not determine political affiliation or identity, so collaborations will not be limited to any specific region. Any OLLI interested in discussing this potential partnership is invited to reach out to Donna Anderson by September 1.

Submitted by: Donna Anderson, Director, OLLI at University of Southern Maine
donna.anderson@maine.edu

OLLI AT UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA
They Met in a Travel Class - Now They Teach One!

Pamm Eutsler and Nancy Sticht met in Winter 2016 in OLLI at University of North Florida’s “Passport to Travel,” a class featuring professional-quality DVDs produced by instructor Ginny Roemhild and students sharing their own adventures and experiences. Over the course of six weeks, the two discovered a mutual passion for all things Disney.

On their first road trip to Orlando, Pamm and Nancy expanded their inventory of shared Disney interests. By Winter 2021, these interests evolved as the two developed “More than the Mouse: Secrets of Walt Disney World.” While the course encompassed Disney trademarks of nostalgia and pixie dust, it focused on unique and memorable experiences specifically for adults.
The two-session class began with an overview of Walt Disney’s dream, his inspiration and early influences as well as his Florida site choice and stealthy land acquisition. Pamm drew on her experience as a Disney cast member, and Nancy then invited the class to join them on a deep dive into Disney Springs, the recently rebranded and renovated outdoor shopping, dining and entertainment complex. The second session featured a close examination of the resorts.

Members were fascinated by the variety and volume of historic elements, including architecture, rare memorabilia, that are woven throughout the contemporary venues. Insider tips and tricks focused on selecting accommodations, special tours and events, signature dining, securing prime restaurant reservations, transportation options, crowd evasion, unusual discounts and a myriad of other choices available to visitors who know about them.

With the wealth of knowledge the two instructors have, Pamm and Nancy were unsurprised when they ran out of time before they could present their material about celebrating holidays at the resorts. Informal canvassing revealed that members are enthusiastic about the possibility of future classes on that and other Disney topics. Naturally, the class wrapped up with a sing along of The Mickey Mouse Club theme, exclamations of “see you real soon” and fireworks at the Magic Kingdom!

Submitted by: Jeanette Toohey, Director, OLLI at University of North Florida
Dear Olli,

I am a volunteer in charge of our special events committee. This summer, we are hoping to hold an in-person fundraising event off-campus. We know that this could be difficult given safety protocols. Any suggestions?

~OLLI Volunteer

Dear OLLI Volunteer,

The road back to “in-person” is one that we should tread but embark upon with caution. As we return to meeting in-person, we need to consider the safety of the staff and members alike. Although many are vaccinated, there are still health and regulation concerns. First, check with your host college/university. If they are allowing in-person events, they will have a set of protocols to follow. Even though your Institute is planning an off-campus event, the Institute may still be required to follow university guidelines. Second, check with the event hosting venue: what do they provide for health, safety, and what do they require of guests (i.e. – masks?). Finally, check-in with the potential attendees and OLLI staff attending. What are they comfortable with? What safety protocols will they expect? Knowing what is already required or will be provided will help you detect any disconnections prior to the event and plan accordingly. Overall, it may seem like a lot, but all stakeholders (university, OLLI members, venue) need to be considered to create a comfortable and successful event.

Best of luck,

~Olli

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

CAREER OPENINGS IN THE OLLI NETWORK

Job Board

Director - Osher Lifelong Learning Institute
California State University, San Bernadino

Administrative Support Specialist
Oklahoma State University

Unit Administrator/Specialist
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

OLLI West Site Manager
University of Denver

OLLI Business Coordinator
University of North Carolina Asheville

OLLI Assistant Director
University of North Carolina Wilmington

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