Greetings from the NRC

December 2020

So many of us are plenty pleased to see 2020 come to a close. Between the pandemic and social, racial, political, and economic tumult, we are more than ready for a new year. The promise of vaccines and a return to in-person lifelong learning brings us needed hope. But in the meantime, this newsletter features how Osher Institutes continue to adjust to change and find the joys in our virtual communities.

In Jacksonville, OLLI at University of North Florida offers their instructors’ reactions and tips on how they made their pivot to online learning. In Nashville, OLLI at Vanderbilt University members compare their own experiences through an ambitious course on the cultural history of pandemics from antiquity to the current impact of COVID-19. And on a light note, we offer observations on the unexpected delights of meeting our colleagues’ and friends’ pets in their home environments.

As you reflect on the sorrows and unexpected pleasures of the past year, consider the value your Osher Institute community had on your life during the chaos of 2020. Did it bring you the ability to engage with friends? Did it help you continue intellectual exploration despite social
isolation? Did it bring you some appreciated small delight? Consider your support of OLLI with a personal pledge to help in the rebuilding your Institute will likely need in 2021. Show how you value your Institute with a prompt membership renewal, a gift to the fundraising campaign, and perhaps taking on some additional or new volunteer work. Your fellow members and hard-working staff will certainly appreciate that show of encouragement.

With all the best holiday wishes from the Osher NRC Team,

Steve Thaxton, Executive Director

Osher NRC
National Resource Center
for Osher Institutes

Karen Coghlan, OLLI at UNF’s volunteer newsletter editor, solicited insights from several instructors who elected to transition their programs to remote delivery in Fall 2020. Each
contributor recognized a silver lining and several cited modest revisions they made to their instructional design.

Jac (Jacinthe) Littlefield, instructor for “The Golden Age of TV”
“In January, OLLI at UNF began looking at distance learning as a future thing. We were exploring future technologies and related opportunities. Then, out of the blue, we all got hit by COVID. So we were, unexpectedly and fortunately, one step ahead of the curve. Zoom keeps members engaged. With Zoom, there’s no sitting in the back of the room. Everybody has an upfront seat. Plus, there are no COVID masks on either the students or instructors with Zoom!”

Bryan McKersie, instructor for “CRISPR and the Gene Editing Controversy”
“Necessity may have required that we move in this new direction, but it has opened up opportunities as well. I use a lot of animation in my classes so the transition was relatively easy for me. And with the use of the [class] website [I created], students have more choices, and they can proceed at their own pace. The response from students has been good.” While Bryan misses the camaraderie in the classroom, teaching on Zoom is “as much fun as in-person teaching.”

Ken Bording, instructor for “Charles A. Lindbergh: Aviator, Villain, Spy, Nazi, Pacifist or Warrior?”
“My classes are very visual, which are especially good for online presentations. I get fewer questions when I’m doing an on-line presentation, so I ask more questions than usual. As an instructor you miss looking around a classroom, seeing students’ expressions and sensing their reactions. So, I’ve had to make changes, just like my students have had to adjust.”

Submitted by: Jeanette M. Toohey, Director, OLLI at University of North Florida
(Graphics provided by the instructors.)
The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Vanderbilt University was excited to offer a unique online course in partnership with the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities this past summer. The class, “Rethinking Pandemics: A Cultural History from Antiquity to Now” was taught by Professor Holly Tucker, director of the Robert Penn Warren Center for the Humanities, Mellon Foundation Chair in the Humanities, and Professor in French at Vanderbilt University. Tucker’s research and teaching focus on the history of medicine in its cultural contexts. In this class, connections were made between past and current experiences to understand in deeper ways individual’s own experiences in the COVID-19 era. As part of the course, members created their own first-hand accounts and artistic works to document what life looks like now, during their own moment of pandemic. OLLI at Vanderbilt mailed out notebooks for participants to complete with the hope that they would return them to the Vanderbilt University Archives. Many of them did.

The journals were unique, introspective, and insightful. For example, OLLI member Steve Rubenfeld’s journal contained a diverse set of sections, “Grocery Shopping; The Passage of Time; Masks; the Work and Learn from Home Revolution; Love, Sex, and Pandemics; Will College Ever be The Same?; Covid Humor; My Neighborhood; and, a dozen or so additional topics.”

As OLLI member Deana Byrnes stated, “We learned of the origins of modern medicine, historical and scientific details of the plague, and much about Medieval life. We learned of the challenge to uncover factual contemporary accounts from those who suffered, and about the evolution of stories when those facts are few. Through it all we gained a new perspective of the world-wide struggle to unravel the understanding of COVID-19. We found parallels between our pandemic lives and those of long-ago societies.”
Pets Partner in Lifelong Learning

Interesting surprises emerge from our colleagues’ and peers’ pets through online classes and remote work videoconferencing. While they have the potential to annoy and disrupt, they also have benefits in helping us build friendships and have fun.

OLLI at Granite State College (GSC) recently created a special Zoom meeting that featured all those benefits, dubbed “Pet Tales.” This social event not only recognized the special place pets have in our hearts, but also celebrated them with stories and live appearances by these family members. OLLI at GSC member Jacki Fogerty recounted the event in an article in the local Concord (NH) Monitor, explaining that the event “…attracted innumerable stories and pictures and an uncountable number of ‘awwwws.’ As always, when OLLI members get together to share stories, there are great laughs and ever-deepening friendships… after all, through Zoom, we are in each other’s kitchens, studies and even bedrooms, as well as meeting the furry families!”
Osher Institute staff agree. Many directors welcome them to class meetings. “They show up every week, in the same spot and listen to classes. We’ve met quite a few and they’ve become honorary class members,” mentions Robbin Davis, Director at Oklahoma State University. And for OLLI members at the University of South Dakota, Director Thea Miller Ryan’s cat Eleanor is a constant co-host on camera. “Eleanor joins me for most of my Zoom calls…funny thing is, she really isn’t a friendly cat. If we get visitors she hisses and makes a scene. But put her on camera, and she’s an ACTRESS.” Thea reports.

Even in staff meetings at Northwestern University’s School of Professional Studies, host college of the Osher Institute at Northwestern and the Osher NRC, Dean Tom Gibbons will occasionally grant a request to see his new pup, Beau (pictured above). He is another of the countless recently adopted pets who have cheered up our homes during quarantine.

Read the article about OLLI at GSU’s “Pet Tales” event here and consider creating a social or discussion event to engage fellow members and their pets in the coming months.

Submitted by: Steve Thaxton, Executive Director, Osher NRC

THE OLLI INSIDER

AN ADVICE COLUMN FOR OSHER INSTITUTE STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

Dear Olli

Dear Olli,

We are looking for some holiday social ideas during these times of social distancing. Do you have any suggestions for fun social gatherings in online formats?

~OLLI Staff

Dear OLLI Staff,

As the holidays approach, so does the opportunity to meaningfully connect with your members. Many OLLI’s are bringing their members together in online formats, from basic Zoom trainings disguised as holiday hangouts to full-fledged e-parties. OLLI at Bradley University is hosting Zoom training with the tag line of, “With the holidays coming up, wouldn’t it be wonderful to learn how to schedule a Zoom with your family, grandchildren, and friends so all they have to do is click on a link to “Join a Meeting?” OLLI at George Mason University is presenting a holiday game and music night, “‘Tis the season to celebrate! Join us as we explore Christmas, Hanukkah and Kwanzaa traditions around the world. Test your trivia skills and enjoy musical presentations. Come dressed in your holiday finest, as we will all greet each
other through a virtual meeting format.” Or, a simple holiday party, as OLLI at Louisiana State University demonstrates, “There’s a hOLLiday Party! For 2020, it’s a virtual exchange of season’s greetings!” I hope these ideas motivate you to plan your own events! Good luck with your planning and happy OLLIdays!

~Olli

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

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**QUICK TIPS FOR HELPING OPERATE AN OSHER INSTITUTE**

**Quick Tip - Call for Course Assistants**

While the job description for an OLLI Course Assistant may look a bit different these days, it is still a vital way for volunteers to assist their Osher Institute. The responsibilities will vary at each Institute, but if you are comfortable with your OLLI’s online learning platform, consider volunteering to assist or even teach a course online. This example of a call for assistants from the OLLI at University of Minnesota also highlights the importance of training new volunteer leaders in these roles so everyone is set up for success.

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**CAREER OPENINGS IN THE OLLI NETWORK**

**Job Board**

Associate Director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

**William & Mary**

Program Manager, OLLI

**Widener University**

Is there a staff opening at your Osher Institute? Please send it to us at oshernrc@northwestern.edu