Taking Stock of OLLI on Our 25th Anniversary

With OLLI’s 25th anniversary fast approaching, it’s a good time to take stock and reflect on our origins and present-day status.

When Henrietta Freedman first heard about lifelong learning institutes in other cities, she made up her mind that her hometown, St. Louis, and her alma mater, Washington University, would soon boast one too. She spread the idea through her broad social network, worked out a plan with allies at the university, lobbied key officials repeatedly and set up a committee of education-minded seniors. By the time Washington University’s Lifelong Learning Institute opened its door in 1995, the project had become a group effort. But without Freedman’s persistent leadership, the idea of a non-credit academic institute for seniors might never have become a St. Louis reality.

Strong leadership and group effort are still much in force at OLLI, with the first quality manifest in the insightful guidance of Executive Director Katie Compton. As for group effort, volunteers remain an indispensable part of our program. A prime example is our fluid coterie of volunteer facilitators who devise, plan and lead our classes, session after session. Management support comes by way of our Executive Committee and its sub-committees, all made up of members who donate their time. Meanwhile, volunteers arrive at crucial times to help Denise Zona, assistant to the director, with mailings, special events and other duties.

In the recent past, a couple of major changes have enhanced OLLI’s operation. The first involved a switch from paper to online registration. Since our needs and pricing system differ from those of the university, the process proved complicated and subject to delays. With the kinks now worked out, electronic registration has greatly simplified our data processing, and most students appreciate its convenience.

A second important shift occurred when we joined the national network of Osher Institutes. This affiliation brought monetary support that allowed the refurbishment of two new and much-needed classrooms, with additional funding possibly to come. For the first time, our staff enjoys links with similar institutes across the country. The resource center at the Osher Foundation has proved invaluable, Katie says. “Before, it was just us, trying to figure out how to do something new. Now we can consult others who have experience in that area.”

But, even more important, while our 25 years have brought changes, the mission that Henrietta Freedman envisioned and worked tirelessly to bring about is still very much in place.
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Steve Radinsky, Vice Chair
Don Cohn, Past Chair
David Brown, Curriculum Chair
Julien Worland, Secretary
Bettye Dew, Communications
Heather Corcoran, University College Interim Dean
Katie Compton, Director

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Contemporary Issues: Gene McNary
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Entertainment Arts: Sol Guber
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Math/Science/Technology/Engineering/Medicine: Charles Kuhn
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Social Studies: Michael E. Nolan
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Editor: Bettye Dew
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Message from the Chair

Spring returns, as do robins, daffodils and baseball. . .and, of course, exciting new courses at OLLI. We welcome them all. The winter term offered many well-received new classes and a sprinkling of old favorites, and thanks to the outstanding work of David Brown’s Curriculum Committee, the spring term looks equally as wide-ranging and interesting. Also coming up this spring are the Jasper Lecture (on March 23), a Show-Me OLLI event, the launch of Potpourri, OLLI’s literary booklet, and the annual meeting.

My term as chair of the Executive Committee comes to a close at the May 27 annual meeting, when Steve Radinsky, who currently serves as vice chair, becomes chair. The past two years have been years of significant change. In 2018, we survived the Great Parking Crisis and the On-line Registration Scare; in 2019, LLI became OLLI, and with strong recruiting efforts, both on an individual basis and through our Show-Me OLLI events, our goal of reaching a membership of 1000 became a reality. In addition to new members, we welcomed new facilitators, new classes, and new ideas. With all this change, however, we have happily remained the same – learning from and sharing ideas with our classmates.

The year 2020 will be a significant one for OLLI. As you know, our Silver Anniversary will be celebrated at the May 27 annual meeting and, in conjunction with this historic occasion, a special edition of Potpourri, a booklet of literary and photographic works by OLLI members, will be available for purchase. The official book launch will take place on May 18; you will hear more about that at a later date. The Potpourri Committee, headed by Ellen Boone, is doing an outstanding job of pulling this project together; they all deserve a big round of applause.

As I take my leave, I would like to say that it has been an honor to serve as chair and to have had the opportunity to work closely with Katie Compton and Denise Zona, and with all of the various committees and volunteers here at OLLI. Thank you all for making my term such a pleasant experience.

--Joan McDonald
One of the great things about being a part of the Osher network of LLIs is that we benefit from all the research done at the Osher National Research Center for Osher Institutes, based at Northwestern University. The center further connects us to outside resources within higher education, lifelong learning and purposeful aging. But, just as our St. Louis institute stresses peer learning, the Osher organization encourages collaboration within its 124-member network. One important forum for interaction between members is the biennial national conference, where we can meet and learn from other OLLI leaders. This April, Joan McDonald, chair of the Executive Committee, and I will attend the 2020 Osher Institute National Conference in Tampa, Florida. Topics we will explore are: diversity, recruitment of facilitators, distance learning, growing membership, dealing with change.

As I write this, we are off to a great start in the winter term, with 620 students enrolled in 38 courses. That represents a four percent improvement over last year and 12 percent over 2018. Fifty-one facilitators put together these 38 courses—we thank them heartily! Meanwhile, we have been busy preparing for our spring term. We will offer 39 courses, seven of which are 4-week courses. Fifty volunteer facilitators have worked hard to prepare these courses. Please read through the course brochure carefully. If there is a course you would like to take, but do not see listed, perhaps you will consider facilitating it yourself. Most facilitators agree that the best way to learn something is to facilitate a course on that subject! That is what peer learning is all about.

We will have a facilitator workshop and luncheon on March 26, 2020, to which all OLLI facilitators are invited. If you are thinking about facilitating, we would love for you to attend as well. Just let me know if you are interested.

Please note that we have several big events coming up. One, of course, is the annual Lawrence Jasper Lecture on Monday, March 23, at 1:30 p.m. Another exciting event is the book launch party for the third edition of Potpourri, which is scheduled for May 18. The other is our 25th Anniversary Luncheon on May 27. The invitation will be mailed around April 15, so keep an eye open for it and send in your reservation right away!

A reminder to everyone that acquiring the books and materials for classes is the student’s responsibility. Books and materials are listed in each course description. Unless noted as suggested, they are required (many classes—i.e., literature courses—cannot function without the book). If no books or materials are listed in a course description, none are needed.

We have new carpeting in room 195 (formerly 194) so please be careful with your coffee!

Congratulations to Mike Montague whose book *The Science of Music and the Music of Science* was recently published. The book is the direct product of the course he facilitated three years ago, “The Science of Music and the Music of Science.” “The book would not exist were it not for the input and enthusiasm of my OLLI compatriots,” says Mike.

Thank you to Anna Amelung and Dan Ellis, who spoke to the Society Professor Emeriti luncheon on January 13, 2020, about OLLI and peer learning. I can’t think of better ambassadors for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute!

Thank you to all those who have contributed books, calendars, DVDs and tapes to the OLLI library and to the “Take One” basket on the table in the front hall. If you are downsizing your book collection, please think of your friends at OLLI and bring your books in to share.

A big thank-you to all who have given to the General, Endowment and Scholarship funds. Please continue to give generously! Consider giving a tribute gift in memory of the wonderful OLLIers we have lost recently.
IN MEMORIAM

Michael Asbury
Betty White
John Eisenbeis
Ruby Quarterman
John Redington
Lilli Kautsky
Tom Treeger
Art Morey
Marvin Goldman

IN MEMORY OF:

Anabel Hudgins
Ruby Quarterman
Ruth McBrayer
Michael Asbury
The Ernest Hemingway Class

David A Gee
Kim Gee

Betty & Jed White
Laurence & Silvia Madeo

Ruby Quarterman
Bob Streett

Tom Treeger
Phyllis Weber
Ben & Radine Borowsky
Anne Hetlage
Beverly Friedman
Avery Seidel
Jerry & Gerry Friedman
Rae Ellen Tash
Lydia Ann Long
Karen Levin Coburn
John & Susan Rave
Keith & Sarah Fischer

Sam T. Crews
Lydia Ann Long

Marvin Goldman
Suzy Seldin

IN HONOR OF:

Katie Compton
Fran Gould
Ken Streett

Printing Potpourri
Anonymous
Kathy Peterson
James Wiant

Denise Zona
Tom & Cynthia Mitchell

Lawrence Jasper Fund
Richard & Margaret Diemer

END-OF-YEAR GIFTS:

Endowment Fund
Ed Fullerton
Nancy Schapiro
Leslie Block
Rita Warren

General Fund
Judith Ugalde
Susan Tilton
Barbara Levin
Steve Hanlon
Marilyn Alton
Stephanie & Linda Glickman
Franklin & Rachel Haspiel
Jamieson Spencer
Dan & Sondra Ellis
Howard Hearsh
Marilyn Fries
Gary Sacks
Nicki Gillis
Francis Oates
Essman Family Charitable Foundation
Neighbor Jay’s Be Kind Fund
Marlita Weiss
Charlotte Balette
Patricia McHugh
John & Susan Rava
Sam Bertolet
Anonymous

Scholarship Fund
Esther Smoller
Anna Amelung
Susan Tilton
Jamieson Spencer
Pat Keating
Michael E. Nolan
Allen Sherman
Thomas Hahs
Robert & Martha Senior
Ben & Radine Borowsky
Anne Hetlage
Marlene Hunter
Beverly Plocher
Katherine Maxson
Ann Robison
Rita Warren

Ruby Quarterman, Olli Longtime Member

Ruby Quarterman enjoyed a long tenure as an admired and gifted art teacher at Francis Howell High School in St. Charles. But at OLLI, striving to expand her knowledge, she opted for subjects in which she felt deficient. She was, for instance, an avid member of Bob Cortinovis’s science classes and Harry Estill’s economics classes. As an annual member, she took classes every fall, winter and spring, slipping away early in May to head to Wyoming for the summer. There, in 2003, she personally built, from her own design, a small cabin on the North Fork River, where she took walks and generally relished being outdoors, watching birds and other wildlife. It was a passion she had passed on to others. As a former art student commented online, “She taught us to look for the beauty in the world around us.”

Ruby died December 17 at her home in St. Charles. In the words of an OLLI friend, “She was a beautiful person, inside and out.”

OLLI student Bob Streett shared items from his extensive Native American collection with Lou Lucas’s “Artifacts: Doorways to History and Culture” class.
Tom Treeger, OLLI Facilitator

Tom Treeger was known at OLLI as the popular, longtime facilitator of the American Politics class, its 55 seats always “sold out.” A native of New York City, he spent two years in Korea as an army artillery officer. After 25 years as an executive in the corporate world, he forged a second career as a financial advisor. Those who knew him at OLLI will surely agree with his family’s description of how he lived his life—“with courage, curiosity, an impish sense of humor and thoughtfulness.” Tom died December 25 at his home in St. Louis.

Tom’s co-facilitator Joan Kelly Horn remembers their time together as leaders of the Politics class:

“I met Tom when I signed up for his Politics class in the fall of 2006. He immediately asked me to help him out with the class. Tom was a complete gentleman and made all feel welcome. He was always prepared with the latest political update. Between us we identified and signed up several new speakers for the class, some of whom are still visiting the Politics class every session. Tom’s classes always got rave reviews. I certainly enjoyed working with him.”

On a day when no guest speaker is scheduled, a facilitator steps in for the opening lecture. For instance, in January, with the Iranian situation dominating headlines, that role fell to Larry May, now serving his third year as co-facilitator. He spoke on “The Rules and Law of War,” which is also the subject of three of his 30 books. Tailoring his talk to fit the details of the week’s events, he stressed the importance of the word “imminent,” as in “imminent threat.” After outlining the Constitutional and statutory specifications on war, he discussed the legal factors necessary to differentiate targeted killings from assassinations.

But don’t think students just sit passively listening to speakers. Hands pop up during lectures and comments are considered. Then, after the break, class participation revs up. The facilitators write several current topics on the whiteboard, allowing students to decide which ones to tackle. The class operates under the maxim that everyone’s opinion is valid and that students should not be afraid of stating theirs. While the class may skew progressive, conflicting viewpoints are heard during every class period. “It’s always good to hear verbal opposition,” Dave said.

The American Politics class has been running since OLLI’s early years, with many of the facilitators (including Dave and Larry) having started as students in the class. Dave taught history and American politics at Ladue High School for 41 years. Larry is a professor emeritus of philosophy and law at Vanderbilt University, as well as a professor emeritus of philosophy at Washington University, specializing in the ethics and philosophy of war.
Who Can It Be?

We all know that OLLI is packed with interesting people with fascinating stories. But our current subject’s story makes me proud to know her. She has truly made an impact, not only on an individual level but also on a community and national scale.

Not too long ago, our classmate was walking down the hall at her gym when a young man caught her eye, stopped, and put his palms together in a gesture of gratitude, bowing to her. Shocked, she listened as he told her that he was her former student and that she had changed his life. He once thought he was bad at math and hated it, but then he took her class at St. Louis Community College. Not only did she change his mind and inspire him to “fall in love with math,” he went on to become a middle school math teacher—and so her impact continues to be felt.

She had paid forward the influence a teacher can have. Similarly, her own story was changed by two college teachers: one who discouraged her from continuing as an English major and one who urged her to pursue a career in mathematics. That student at the gym, and countless others, benefited greatly.

Our classmate grew up, along with her brothers, in Des Moines, Iowa, where her father was in the military. It was her mom, however, whose support helped her to be true to who she was. She remembers fondly being allowed to “run with a gang of boys” who roamed the neighborhood, occasionally getting into mischief. Some of her leadership skills were no doubt honed there, as well as through her longtime involvement in the Girl Scouts. Sadly, our friend lost her mother as a young teen. Her father’s remarriage the next year brought her to Missouri.

When I asked our classmate what she would like her legacy to be, she replied, “I always want to help people be content in who they are and to fulfill their own dreams.” She did that throughout her many years as an educator, reaching the pinnacle of her profession. After being elected president of the faculty of her branch of the community college, she worked to organize the three campus faculties into an American Federation of Teachers affiliate, of which she was also elected president. Even more remarkable, though, are her long years of dedication to activism. After enduring private battles with discrimination, she went on to direct public actions to fight for women’s rights, as well as LGBTQ rights.

A complete recounting of her roles as an activist would amaze and inspire us all. It would also fill a book. Examples, however, include being instrumental in forming a Women Rising in Resistance group in the St. Louis area and organizing and participating in nonviolent disobedience training and events. For one indelible event, she delivered the opening remarks, then joined the waves of people who approached the Supreme Court building, protesting the Hardwick Decision of 1986. All 687 protestors were arrested. It was the largest act of civil disobedience since the Vietnam War.

On a local level, our classmate has worked with several groups, including participating in “sipins” at area restaurants with St. Louis Queer Nation and leading St. Louis’s Take Back the Night efforts. She has also been a liaison to the police department.

In her career as a professor, our friend fought discrimination against herself as well as others. Inevitably, some of those struggles ended in disillusion. And so, once she became a full professor, she decided to take some time off to travel around the country in an old purple van. The series of adventures she had during that time brought her contacts all over America (in the pre-Internet days) and helped define and cement her identity as an activist. Along the way, she grew in her knowledge of leadership by consensus. This period of her life would make a great movie, complete with some mysterious and even bizarre experiences. But most of all, she said, those travels advanced her quest “to be content . . . and fulfill my own dreams.”

—Rita Hulbert

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Potpourri III To Be Launched May 18th

Our upcoming 25th anniversary has afflicted OLLI writers and artists with publication fever. And in May, you’ll see the antidote for this condition: a printed work. Titled “Potpourri III,” it is designed as a compilation of writings (poetry, fiction and nonfiction), along with photographs and art. Its publication will be part of the celebration of OLLI’s impressive milestone.

A launching party, featuring the book and some 100 contributors, is set for Monday, May 18th, at 3 p.m. Plan now to be present for cake and festivities. Books will be available for purchase, with authors standing by, autographing pens at the ready. The book will also be available at the 25th Anniversary Luncheon at the Knight Center, on May 27th.

In the meantime, we’ll treat you to two brief contributions, one of which was inspired by an OLLI class.

As Precise as Geometry

Poetry is a subject as precise as geometry.

—Julian Barnes

I come from a family in which I have no recollections of either parent ever reading a book. Reading wasn’t encouraged. When it was time to apply to a university, I applied to only one—State University of New York-Albany. The university was experimenting with a new philosophy: a student would need only 120 credits with no core requirements for graduation. Yay, I thought. No English, no history and I could focus on sciences, technology, and math. I wouldn’t have to read.

Fast forward to the present—many years later—and I am trying to play catch-up. I’m in three book clubs. In addition, at OLLI, I am in three classes: The Economist, Salon of Ideas, and the New Yorker. Each week for the New Yorker class, I struggle to understand the short stories and poetry. Most recently, I was struggling through “Poem of Names” by former United States Poet Laureate Robert Pinsky. Not understanding a certain line, I Googled him, found his email address, and wrote him a note:

Dear Professor Pinsky,

I’ve just finished reading, rereading, and researching information in your “Poem of Names.” Often, the poetry in The New Yorker has me confused, but upon the fifth reading, your poem became meaningful, perhaps not in the way you intended, but I found myself lost in the story. What has me stumped is that [in Hebrew Scriptures] Salma begat Boaz and Boaz begat Obed. In the poem, however, you’ve switched it around. I couldn’t find any references to your order, and I’m not sure if it has some special meaning. Please help me make sense of that line.

Thank you.
Diane Greble

I was surprised to hear back from him less than two hours later. In his response, Professor Pinsky said I was an “unusual, attentive reader.” He sounded genuinely grateful to me for finding an error that hadn’t been detected by anyone else, including his writer friends and editors at the New Yorker. After apologizing for causing me “bewilderment and extra work,” he said he would correct the mistake in further printings. He ended with the hope that I would not give up on the poem.

Thank you to the facilitators and others who have opened my mind to so many possibilities here at OLLI.

—Diane Greble
Carl Carlie opened his home to OLLI members who attended Anna Amelung’s “American Painters in Paris” course in the fall term so that they could enjoy his collection of American art.

Members of the “Salon of Ideas” class discuss the “Delmar Divide.”

Lawrence Jasper Lecture
Dr. Kater Murch, Associate Professor of Physics at Washington University in St. Louis
“Harnessing Quantum Complexity”
March 23 - 1:30—3:30 p.m.

May 18 - 3:00 pm

OLLI 25th Anniversary Luncheon and Annual Meeting
May 27 - 10:30 a.m.

The New Yorker Players entertained the “Reading the New Yorker” class with another hilarious interpretation of a cartoon from the magazine.