

“There is nothing more notable in Socrates than that he found time, when he was an old man, to learn music and dancing, and thought it time well spent.”

—Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute



Check out these course titles: *Chicagoland through Photography; Monday at the Movies; In Remembrance of Mike Nichols; Dickens on Poverty and Riches; Monsoon Asia and the Balance of World Power; Exploration of Modern Theories of the Physical Universe.* Sound appealing? Oh, and are you 50 or older? If you’ve answered yes to both of these questions, have I got a deal for you.

These courses are from the fall catalogue of The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (acronym: OLLI) at Northwestern, part of a national network of continuing education programs for mature students. They are the brainchild of the Bernard Osher Foundation, an educational granting agency headquartered in San Francisco, itself the creation of Bernard Osher, a businessman who founded World Savings, later the second largest savings institution in the United States. Osher, to whom various magazines have given the epithet “the quiet philanthropist,” set up his foundation in 1977.

BY JULIE WEST JOHNSON

In the fall of 2000, the Osher Foundation began the study of educational outlets for mature students. Their researchers noticed that standard continuing education programs often put off older people, who wanted enrichment without having to worry about grades, exams, and credit. The Foundation took two existing programs as models: the Fromm Institute of Lifelong Learning at the University of San Francisco and the Senior College at the University of Southern

Maine in Portland. In 2001, Osher gave the latter an endowment grant to improve, changing its name to the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Soon afterwards, Sonoma State in California became a grantee. When both programs thrived, the Foundation issued additional grants (www.osherfoundation.org).

At present, 119 branches of OLLI exist on campuses across the country, with at least one grantee in each of the fifty states, and one in Washington, D.C. Illinois is home to three: besides the Northwestern OLLI, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Bradley University in Peoria house branches. The OLLI at Northwestern is part of the School of Professional Studies, and it offers classes on both the Evanston and Chicago campuses (www.sps.northwestern.edu).

Although the various branches of OLLI around the country differ from one another – the Foundation has not been highly prescriptive – they all share six common features:

- 1) non-credit programs for adults aged 50 and above
- 2) strong support from a host university
- 3) varied course offerings
- 4) volunteer leadership and teaching
- 5) opinion surveys for determining participant satisfaction, and
- 6) efficient administrative structure (www.osherfoundation.org).

The volunteer leadership is especially key, because there are no outside instructors in OLLI; members propose and run the courses, in which participants learn from each other.

Involvement in OLLI is a relaxed affair. The stipulation that members be 50 or older is really the only formal requirement. Participation does not require a degree. John Lucadamo, former



Osher Lifelong Learning Institute



discovery • vitality • enjoyment • camaraderie • fulfillment



Flexible membership options

New friends with similar interests

Intellectually stimulating peer-led study groups

Call 312-503-7881 or 847-492-8204 or visit sps.northwestern.edu/olli for details.

rethink learning

Northwestern
SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Summer 2016 registration opens May 27th
Fall 2016 registration opens July 8th

Chicago journalist and English teacher, says this about his involvement: “I joined OLLI shortly after I retired five years ago, and I knew I had found a home. My fellow students, I soon discovered, were interesting, curious, and friendly. The three classes I joined welcomed me, and today I am a coordinator of two classes. I have recommended OLLI to several friends, and they have found the classes rewarding and engaging. OLLI is a place to keep your mind active and to make friends (email response, 12/23/15).

Enrollment costs are quite modest. At Northwestern, a trial membership, which allows a person to register for one course each in two consecutive terms, is only \$150. The fee for multiple courses in a single semester is \$360, while an all-inclusive membership, permitting up to three courses in each term, is \$550. The fees include Northwestern Wildcards for members, full access to campus libraries, and free use of inter-campus shuttles. For those in straightened circumstances, OLLI does have some scholarship money available.

OLLI at Northwestern offered over 71 broad-ranging courses during this past fall semester. According to Kirsty Montgomery, who has just completed her first year as head of the program, Northwestern’s OLLI currently has over 1,000 members. The program is actively looking for more diversity in its membership, economic and social, racial and ethnic; at present, the bulk of its participants are retired upper-middle-class professionals, many with some Northwestern connection. About 350 members take courses in Evanston, either on campus or in the 1840 Oak St. headquarters, and approximately 650 study in Weiboldt Hall on the Chicago campus, 339 E. Chicago Ave. (OLLI in Evanston will move in the late spring to a larger and newly rehabbed facility at 500 Davis St.) Also housed in Weiboldt Hall on the Chicago campus is a National Resource Center for all 119 OLLI chapters around the country. Headed by Steve Thaxton and staffed by two others, it is an administrative center and important electronic resource for all the various branches of OLLI.

You may wonder how a university benefits from hosting an OLLI chapter. According to Kirsty Montgomery, “The benefits for a university are three-fold.” First, having an



BELMONT *Village*

SENIOR LIVING

Distinctive Residential Settings | Chef-Prepared Dining and Bistro
Premier Health and Wellness Programs | Award-Winning Memory Care
Professionally Supervised Therapy and Rehabilitation Services

Winner of the George Mason University Healthcare Award for the Circle of Friends[®] memory program for Mild Cognitive Impairment.

BUFFALO GROVE | GLENVIEW
GENEVA ROAD | OAK PARK

The Community Built for Life.®
belmontvillage.com

© 2015 BELMONT VILLAGE SENIOR LIVING, L.P. 30012127-01 228318WVIVillage, L.P.

OLLI is good community relations, publicizing the quality of the host institution. Second, the presence of OLLI signals the university's support for lifelong learning. Montgomery points out that Northwestern also sponsors the Center for Talent Development, which offers classes for children and young people preK-12, to underscore this commitment. Finally, many OLLI participants are alumni of the host universities, and supporting this kind of continuing education is therefore an important piece of alumni relations (face-to-face interview, 12/16/15). In fact, Northwestern began operating an "Institute of Learning in Retirement" as early as 1987. When the Osher Foundation offered an endowment grant in 2007, the existing program became the OLLI at Northwestern.

Besides the panoply of stimulating study groups and the access to many Northwestern facilities, members of OLLI may also participate in various social activities, if they so choose. Options this past fall included a mixer and orientation session for new members; a monthly discussion series on the Evanston campus, featuring topics and readings recommended by the Chicago Humanities Society; a trip to a theatrical performance, followed by interactive workshops; a noon-time lecture series on both campuses, which this year featured polar explorer John Huston and Nobel Prize-winning economist Roger Myerson, among others; a monthly open-ended book group; a series of Friday field trips and special events; a Thanksgiving dinner and a December holiday dinner.

Connie Karduck, a retired human resources manager who has been active in OLLI for five years, sums up OLLI's attractions for her in this way: "Participating in peer-led OLLI classes has deeply enriched my life. I can choose a topic that is entirely new to me and requires intense study and research. Or I can choose a class that is lighter – easy and entertaining. My classmates are friendly. They readily share their thoughts and listen carefully to others' opinions. They are inquisitive and good-humored. I have made many new friends through OLLI (email response, 12/19/15)."

OLLI has fourteen-week sessions in the spring and fall, four-week sessions in the summer and winter. Check it out. □

CHICAGO CITY DAY SCHOOL

541 West Hawthorne Place • Chicago
773.327.0900 • chicagocitydayschool.org

... where science and fun go hand in hand.

Inquiry-based experiences help students become proficient with using the scientific method • Daylong and overnight field excursions take learning beyond the laboratory • A Service Learning Program focused on conservation features water and habitat assessment and restoration •