

# ePistle

**Working for Excellence the Teacher Resource Initiative(WE-TRI)**

**Volume 2, Issue 4**

**July 2019**

## Where's the Teaching Stuff?



As some of you know, I started my Army career in Field Artillery, but soon found that combat arms was not for a true gentleman like myself, so I transferred to the Adjutant Generals Corps, the Army's administrative arm.

So, it goes without saying while teaching is near to my heart, paperwork and process is deep in my soul. As with every organization, OLLI has a series of procedures and specific paperwork to manage the process. In looking over this ePistle, I realize it is more process driven than pedagogical. But I think it is important for teachers to understand not only the what but also the why of the processes. I speak with Alice and Shannon on a regular basis, and through that understand why things are done the way they are – not to say that there may not be other ways just as good. So read the now, think about the should be, and let me know your thoughts.

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## Editor's Comments



As I am writing this from my air conditioned, ceiling fan cooled room, the outside temp is soaring into the triple digits. Good time to sit inside and think about teaching at OLLI!

I wanted first to call your attention to the regular Calendar of Events section of the ePistle. First, save the date for the Tallwood Teacher Event on Thursday, September 12. More details later in this issue. Second, we have listed the dates proposals are due. Staff has noted that these are the absolute last days they can accept proposals, so **GET THEM IN WELL IN ADVANCE OF THESE DATES!** (Am I shouting loud enough?)

As always, this ePistle has a mix of instructor news, thoughts and tips, and ideas for making teaching better. Consider everything with a grain of salt, and as the Bard says, the most important thing is to thine own self be true.

In addition to emails from instructors (which I love) I sometimes get stopped when I am wandering around Tallwood or one of the other OLLI sites and asked something. Most recently, I was asked about the initiative to try and provide instructors for power point presentations. Besides the fact that I had to build a new closet in my house for all my OLLI hats, I don't have the technical expertise to provide such services. But I am sure there are folks out there that do. As with other suggestions please let me know – contact information is later in the ePistle.

## Alice and Shannon's Corner

Do you know why there are two program associates who coordinate and schedule OLLI courses and events? Do you know what each of us does? Even seasoned OLLI instructors forget! It all begins when we receive your course proposal.

Alice Slayton Clark is not only our resident writer extraordinaire, but she is the program associate responsible for organizing one session classes, special events, trips, and clubs. So, if you have an idea for a lecture that will only take up one 85-minute class; or if you're thinking of coordinating a social event such as a coffee klatch; or if you wish to plan a field trip somewhere, then Alice is the person for you. She organizes the program by getting together regularly with her special events committee.

If on the other hand, you want to offer a multi-session course of two or more classes, I am your "go to" gal. OLLI being a volunteer, member-driven organization, I coordinate with each of the program planning group chairs so that we're all in sync with what is being offered each term.

Together we discuss offers to accept and where/when that course could best be given.

These planning groups cover all the topics you see listed in the catalog each term.

Alice and I also coordinate with the program planning chairs in Reston and in Loudoun regarding courses at those locations. I set up meetings at each for anyone interested in program planning to attend. We likewise meet with the Fairfax program planning chairs in order to keep each other informed about what is happening in Fairfax.

Now you know who to contact when you have an idea for a course or special event!

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### Division of Labor

In an email conversation, an instructor asked me about whether Alice and Shannon could provide, for lack of a better term, "office hours."

I spoke to the two hardest working women in show business about this, and they both indicated that they would be happy to talk to OLLI instructors at any time (but like CPA's at tax time, may have other things on their plate during the catalogue crunch time). What they wanted to make sure was that instructors understand the division of labor so they can have their question

and concerns answered by the appropriate person.

Here is the Readers Digest version. Alice and Shannon are essentially the schedulers. They would have knowledge of what slots are available at what location. Keep in mind their schedule – don't send them an email in July about the fall term since that ship has long since passed. But if you plan to do a 4-session course in the Spring in Loudoun and want to know if space is available, drop them a line.

Next, if you have questions about facilities or AV, those should be directed to Susan Todenhoft (or Susan T, since OLLI has Susan Job as Registrar) or Leigh Knox for Loudoun. They can let you know what is available, and if you have a specific or unique AV need, the more time you give the better.

Finally, the Program Chairs, who are identified at the beginning of each course cluster in the catalog, are your resource for what classes should be taught. They can let you know if such a subject has been taught recently, and make suggestions as to how to make the class more attractive.

All three groups, as note, welcome input from instructors, but to avoid frustration on both ends, make sure you direct queries to the right source.

### Timing

When we think about OLLI students, we should realize two things – first, they are busy folks, and second, they are smart enough to know when the class ends. So it is not surprising when teaching a 940 class to see students start to pack up to leave at 1100 in anticipation of the 1105 end of class.

Nothing is more frustrating to teachers (or students) to come to the end of your time with half of the class to still present. So, what are some ways to prevent that?

First, give some consideration to rehearsing the class. Realizing this may not be possible, consider dividing the class into parts, and then trying to determine if the time for each part will work in the overall timeframe.

Perhaps the easiest way is, if you are using power point, is to number the slides, and then note how many slides you have. So if you are on slide 60 of 90 with 30 minutes to go, you are in good shape – slide 50 you need to slow down, and slide 70 speed up.

This will not only make the students happy, but also the instructor following you if you don't cut into her prep time!

## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

### **SPECIAL EVENT**

PLACE TALLWOOD  
TIME SEPTEMBER 12  
FALL TEACHER EVENT

### **SPECIAL EVENT**

PLACE OLLI CAMPUSES  
TIME SEPTEMBER 23  
FALL 2019 TERM BEGINS

### **SPECIAL EVENT**

PLACE OLLI  
TIME OCTOBER 13  
SPRING 2020 PROPOSALS DUE (GET THEM IN NOW!)

### **SPECIAL EVENT**

PLACE OLLI CAMPUSES  
TIME JANUARY 27  
WINTER 2020 TERM BEGINS

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### **SAVE THE DATE**

Particularly for the instructors based at Tallwood (but all are invited!) save the date of Thursday, September 12 at TA1. This will be the Fall Teacher Event. As in the past, we will hear from OLLI Leadership and OLLI Staff, along with updates on the WE-TRI and the usual spirited discussion about teaching and all things OLLI.

A special addition to this event will be a guest speaker from Mason, Joyce Johnston, Adjunct Professor of English. A number of questions have come up with relation to copyright, and what OLLI instructors can do and what they should avoid doing. She will discuss the Mason policy on such issues for instructors, and indicate how that applies to OLLI instructors.

And of course, free pizza will be provided. This will be the third in a series of such events, and the first two have been well attended and led to freewheeling discussions.

We will be sending out a reminder in late August and would appreciate you RSVPing so we know the pizza count. Hope to see many of you at Tallwood on September 12!

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### **The OLLI Website**

With the emphasis on brevity required to keep catalog costs manageable, one of the issues is with regard to instructor bios. The thought is to keep the bios short and generic in the catalog, but then have extended bios available on the website. As noted below, the website is in currently in a state of flux, and thus we plan to hold off any final guidance until the September 12th teacher event (did you remember to save the date?) and the September ePistle. Suffice it to say that while you will be limited in the catalog bio, your profile bio is only limited by your imagination and your hope that members will be willing to read a 10,000-word document.

As noted in an earlier edition (which I am sure you all save as collector's items!) we discussed the differences in the two OLLI websites, and the confusion that this sometimes generates. Well, I am pleased to report that there appears to be some progress on this front.

Mike Sargent, who replaced Bill Walsh at the Tallwood office, lately reported on the move to a new website. He noted that a new website, [olli.gmu.org](http://olli.gmu.org) is in the construction stage, and that he is working with Mason engineers to move the process along. Without getting all Tom Swift Club ish (and this is a great simplification), this involves both replacing the webpage and the Tallwood server. As more information becomes available, will pass it along to the OLLI instructor cadre, and I am sure that when the new webpage is rolled out, there will be ample notice and instructions.

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### **Teacher to teacher assistance**

In my intro, I noted that we have tried to put together a teacher to teacher assistance program. Most obviously, we have teachers who may not feel comfortable with power point, but there are many other areas in which teachers may have a particular area of expertise that might be able to answer other teachers' issues.

I of course am willing to share what lessons I have learned in almost 40 years of direct and indirect teaching, but am sure that there are many out there far exceed my experience and skills. What I would like to do is to create a bank of people willing to share their expertise with other teachers, so if I get a question from someone, I have a cadre to refer them to. Any volunteers/thoughts?

## Teachable Moment of the Day

### Tip of the Day

For many of us, teaching another class in an upcoming term is not the first time we have been at the rodeo. So, there is certainly a temptation to just send OLLI staff (meaning Alice and Shannon) and email saying I would like to do this course in that term and here is a course description, and not using the course proposal form. BAD IDEA!

First, the system is set up so that when a course proposal form comes in, it is immediately and automatically directed to a specific file. This is not the case with an email – just in their inboxes, and if you have ever had an email disappear in the background, imagine get tens to hundreds a day.

Second, and most importantly, you can designate in the course proposal form when you would like to teach the class and more importantly, when you cannot. Putting together the schedule is likened to a jigsaw puzzle – what happens to one piece affects the others. So if you don't say anything, and they slot you on Tuesday the 1<sup>st</sup> at Tallwood at 1150, and then you say you are not available for that date, but are OK on Tuesday the 8<sup>th</sup>, they will have to move the person slotted for the 8<sup>th</sup>, and so on and so on.

The tip of the day: Make life easier for everyone and use the course proposal form!

I recently taught a class on Jack the Ripper – in of all places, at the Sanctuary at Lord of Life Church – nothing like a class on a vicious serial killer in a church setting. (and BTW, was glad to have retired nurse Rita Way in the class – while she later admitted she had to brush up on CPR skills if someone fainted in the class, still better than mine dating back to Boy Scout days!)

In any event, I usually do not use feedback forms – a personal preference, since I usually end up fixating on the few negative instead of the many positive (there have been -and will continue to be – ePistle articles about more formal feedback) In any event (and there is a point to this story) one of the students came up after class and told me that in the 5 years of attending classes at OLLI, this was the first time she ever was able to read the power point slides. After thanking her for her feedback, I thought this is exactly what I have been preaching – make sure if you use power point, that the slides are not overly “busy.” Imagine you are sitting in the back of TA1 (or even better in the back of the sanctuary at LOL) and think as to whether they could be read from that distance. If not, split them into two – or in some cases in classes I have attended, probably three or four or more.

The students will thank you for it – and after all, isn't that what we get paid the big bucks for?

### **RANDOM THOUGHT OF THE DAY**

**RECENTLY, I HAVE BEEN CONSIDERING THE SYNERGY BETWEEN CLASSES AND TRIPS.**

**FOR EXAMPLE, I AM DOING A CLASS ON WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE NEXT SUMMER AND PLAN TO COMBINE THAT WITH A TRIP TO A NEW MUSEUM AT THE OLD LORTON PRISON WHERE THE SUFFRAGISTS WERE JAILED.**

**CONSIDER IF A TRIP WOULD BE ENHANCED BY A CLASS PROVIDING BACKGROUND, OR VICE VERSA. THEN WORK WITH THE PROGRAM PLANNING GROUP AND ALICE/SHANNON TO DETERMINE WHETHER THEY SHOULD BE TWO SEPARATE EVENTS OR ALL PART OF ONE.**

**SEND ANY OTHER RANDOM THOUGHTS TO THE EDITOR AT [DUNPHYJJ@AOL.COM](mailto:DUNPHYJJ@AOL.COM) AND WE WILL MAKE SURE TO SHARE IT WITH OTHER INSTRUCTORS.**

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