More Contributions
Doris Bloch

Wanted to thank Doris for a number of contributions to this edition of the ePistle.
First, as you may remember from last month, we discussed how to create a more effective course description for the OLLI Catalog in order to elicit interest and registrations for your classes. Doris has reviewed these suggestions and had provided some outstanding additional thoughts.
Second, also as noted in the last ePistle, Doris has updated the Teacher Handbook to provide resources and suggestions for the OLLI Teacher Cadre. There was some confusion as to the location of these instructor resources – hopefully clarified later in this ePistle, along with some elaboration on one of the facets of the handbook.
Thanks Doris!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Editor's Comments

Greeting to all OLLI instructors and would be instructors. More than a few things happened since we last got together in the March ePistle.

I took part in a multi OLLI webinar where other locations highlighted what they are doing for teacher support.   I have highlighted some of the more important points raised, and can provide any interested instructors with my full report.

In this issue we continue with the discussion of course descriptions. It's important to write something that will generate interest but still adhere to the limitations necessary to ensure the catalog is not the size of the Manhattan phone book (there's an old time reference for you!) Kudos to Doris for her thoughts.

As usual we will include the calendar of upcoming events, and a save the date for the Fall 2019 Tallwood Teacher event where we can discuss any questions dealing with copyright issues.

We are also starting a new column – Teachable Moment of the Day. When I was taking education courses at Mason, we were told we never made mistakes –just teachable moments. So something I learned and hopefully you can avoid!

As always, look forward to your thoughts, suggestions and comments. Excelsior!

Alice and Shannon's Corner

Did you ever wonder how all of the fabulous classes offered at OLLI are facilitated each term? Your site assistant makes sure your every set-up need is satisfied before and during your class. Instructors first hear from site assistants about 3 weeks before term starts with an email asking to fill out a program information form (PIF). The PIF is where you indicate set-up needs, including use of equipment (DVD/CD player, docucam, Internet access, etc.) computer connection, audiovisual and room configuration. Use this form also to indicate copying needs or any unusual requests such as use of a piano, sink or kitchen.

OLLI asks that every instructor please fill out this form immediately upon receipt. This form is critical for the smooth operation of your class and it ensures your site assistant is aware of all requirements. Please do not communicate set-up requests to the program associates as they are neither in charge nor aware of site specifics.

Site assistants are assigned to each campus and their varying locations. Starting summer term, the site assistants are Mike Emery for Fairfax (olliffx@gmu.edu), Meg Przybyliski for Church of the Good Shepherd and Fairfax Lord of Life (mprzyby@gmu.edu), Dallas Joder for Reston (ollirstn@gmu.edu) and Leigh Knox for Loudoun (ollildn@gmu.edu). If you have general site questions and/or cannot remember your specific site assistant name/contact information, please contact OLLI Administrator Susan Todenhoft (olli@gmu.edu), who oversees the OLLI site personnel.

For complete information on OLLI classroom accommodations and preparation to teach, please refer to OLLI instructor brochure: https://olli.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Instructor-information-brochure-spring-2019.pdf

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Tips for Creating Effective Course Descriptions - Doris Bloch

The last ePistle newsletter published some excellent suggestions on how to write a good course descriptions. But we can expand on a bit further, tailoring the text to requirements for the OLLI catalog (and reiterating some previous suggestions. Never hurts to repeat!)

Tip: Restrict your words to no more than 200. This includes your bio. If you don't limit your length, rest assured the catalog editor will cut it and you might prefer to do the editing yourself.

Tip: Biography: this is a short paragraph. It does not include your entire experience or schooling. It should not exceed two sentences - each should be relevant to the course. Example: "Ms. X holds an MA degree in political science from Georgetown and worked as a congressional aide for the judiciary committee. She has taught numerous previous courses for OLLI dealing with civil rights." A longer biography may be written for the on-line teacher profile section.

Tip: Craft the title to capture the reader. A less enticing title might be "Examining Science Research in Astrophysical Phenomenon", - a better one is "What Scientists Have Discovered about Extraterrestrial Objects." Or even "What's Out There in the Universe? New Discoveries" Same topic, different wordings.

Tip: be sure to specify the type of class, if not a lecture presentation. If a class involves participation by discussion, or is a workshop or a seminar, that should be clearly stated.

Tip: Don't waste your precious word limit by including text only relevant to those who register for your class, e.g. ISBN for the title of a recommended resource. Don't include the fact that you will be using PowerPoint or YouTube for illustrating your talk.

Stylistic tips:

•   Try to avoid passive tense wherever possible. Say "We will watch…", not "It is planned to watch…"

•   Use full sentences.

•   Avoid bolding or underlining; the catalog does not use those in the printed version.

•   Never use the first person singular, "I". Use "we", "you", or "the class members."

•   Try to keep your tenses consistent, e.g., future tense throughout.

•   For a multi-session class, the contents of each session do not need to be fully established in the description. For a pragmatic viewpoint, this will limit you if you decide to move your material around; it also could be awkward if you can't finish the specified topic in a single session. If you want to include each session in the description, it would be best to use a bullet format, with minimal "the", "is" words. Start each bullet with a verb, e.g., or a noun, but be consistent. Be consistent with punctuation at the end of each bullet. Bullets should preferably be one phrase, not a sentence. Example: "Best apps to improve memory."

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SPECIAL EVENT

PLACE OLLI CAMPUSES
TIME JUNE 24
SUMMER 2019 TERM BEGINS

SPECIAL EVENT

PLACE OLLI
TIME JULY 29
WINTER 2020 COURSE PROPOSALS DUE

SPECIAL EVENT

PLACE TALLWOOD
TIME SEPTEMBER 12
FALL TEACHER EVENT

SPECIAL EVENT

PLACE OLLI CAMPUSES
TIME SEPTEMBER 23
FALL 2019 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. Hope to see many of you at Tallwood on September 12!

Exploring the OLLI Website

Last issue, we talked about where the teacher resources page was. (for those of you who used the ePistle for your bird cage, go to the main menu, which is at the top 1/3 of the webpage, and then at the bottom of the "our program" list is instructor resources.)

So I got a query about this from an instructor who couldn't find the main menu dropdown. After a bit of back and forth, I realized she was on the wrong OLLI webpage. The instructor resources are on the OLLI main webpage, olli.gmu.edu. What she had done was to log on to the instructor page, through the member portal. This takes you to a different webpage, olligmu.augusoft.net, which does not have the instructor resources on it. So at least for instructor resources, use the public OLLI webpage instead of the instructor OLLI webpage. Have I totally confused you?

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Webinar

Recently, I participated in a nationwide OLLI webinar taught by OLLI volunteers in OR, AZ and FL. Below is a (very) brief summary of my four page report. (If you would like to see that, email me at dunphyjj@aol.com)

The differing perspectives and policies of these OLLIs were interesting. What struck me the most was that all mandated pre assignment training and the use of feedback. While I understand their thinking, and they went into detail with their reasoning, this differs from OLLI GMU's policy. Here, the though is to provide support for instructors in the form of feedback and resources, but not mandate their use. *Is this something we should continue doing?*

Two things that I got from the webinar which were interesting and wanted to share. The first is the concept of the reflective practitioner - this is teacher speak for looking back on your classes and thinking about what went well and not so well, and how the next class can be better. If it is something you are not doing, then you should. The second is the concept of a master teacher. One of the OLLIs recognizes teachers who have taught 25 or more classes. This not only rewards teachers who (hopefully) are great teachers who the program planners want to use again and again, but identifies successful teachers who can serve as mentors for newer teachers.

Tip of the Day

As with most of what is discussed in the ePistle (excluding such things as turning your back to read a power point slide or reading from a script without looking up) there is no right or wrong answer as to timing of questions – some points to consider and to ensure that you use the method most comfortable with you.

You can either take questions during your presentation or ask that questions be held until the end. Each have their own pluses and minuses. If you take questions during the presentation, the material the question is based on will be fresher, so students can more easily understand the context. However, the more questions you take, the less likely it will be that you can finish your presentation on time (and a future article is upcoming on how to time your classes). This is particularly true when the person asking the question decides to make a lengthy statement as a preface to the question.

If you don't allow time for questions in designing the class, and hold them off until the end, you may find yourself running out of time before you can get to the questions. What usually would happen then would be the questioner would come up after the class to discuss this with you – sometimes multiple questioners. Nothing pleases me more than having folks want to stay and discuss the topic – but watch that you don't overlap into the next instructor's set up time.

Teachable Moment of the Day

I had a class in Loudoun on John Mosby, and given that the time I had for it on both my personal calendar and on my status chart was 1150, figured I would leave my house in Fairfax at about 1030 so I would have plenty of time to get there and make sure all of the AV was working.

A little thought in the back of my mind got me to pull over at the University Mall Shopping Center to check the official OLLI calendar on my phone. Imagine my surprise when I saw that the class was not an 1150, but rather a 215. Driving home, I confirmed this in the catalog. At least it was not the other way around – thought it was a 215 class but turned out to be an 1150.

When I told the story to Leigh Knox, she thought that the 1150 was the original time, and that it was changed to 215 in the scheduling process. In fact, I got an email from OLLI staff proposing the 1150 time, but the final official one was the 215. It just happened with the scads of email I get, just didn't pop up in my brain.

So the teachable moment? The calendar and the catalog should be the final arbiter of when a class is scheduled – that's what your students will use. So while it is a good idea to note immediately when you get the info and course description from OLLI staff, Trust but Verify. As soon as the catalog comes out, make sure that whatever time you think you are teaching and the catalog match- and if they don't- contact OLLI staff ASAP. There is danger in deferring to the catalog- because sometimes the catalog staff makes mistakes!