

Some Suggestions for New OLLI Instructors

Teaching an OLLI course is a complex but fun undertaking. Differences in subjects, student ages and life experiences, venues and instructor personalities rule out a simple prescription for success. Yet, such qualities as courtesy, friendliness, honesty, fairness, consideration, reliability, structure, audibility and well-planned class meetings must be part of every course offering. OLLI has two staff coordinators, Jeanne Dyer (813-974-8037) for computer lab classes and Joseph McAuliffe (813-974-5166) for liberal arts and elective courses. They will assist and support you in every way to ensure the success of your course. Stay in touch with them.

This short guide is intended to serve as a reminder of some “essentials” that can propel you to have a good course:

Preparing for your Course:

1. **Consider signing up for our tuition-free course on teaching for OLLI.** The course, “A Course is Born”, is offered during the spring term and provides you with the opportunity to think through the course you want to offer, learn more about OLLI students and practice some teaching strategies while getting feedback from course participants.
2. If you choose not to take the class, **follow established procedures for course approval.** The OLLI Curriculum Committee works with Joseph and Jeanne to review all new course proposals. The course proposal form can be found on-line at www.USFseniors.org (lower right, “Submit your course proposal”)
3. **Consider asking for a mentor.** Experienced OLLI instructors and members of the Faculty Support Subcommittee are available to talk with you about their experiences preparing and teaching for OLLI. You will be paired with someone who has successfully taught a course similar to the one you are planning. For example, if you proposed a course on writing a blog, you might benefit from someone who has taught life story writing. Contact a member of the Faculty Support Subcommittee if you would like to take advantage of this kind of support.
4. **Visit the site where you will be teaching.** Once your class is approved you will be assigned to a location for your class and a day and time for teaching in consultation with Joseph McAuliffe (813-974-5166) or Jeanne Dyer (813-974-8037). Each teaching site has its own character. Some provide technology support and some do not. Some have movable tables and chairs; some do not. Knowing your teaching environment and what is possible will help you get your course off to a good start.

5. **Prepare a class schedule or syllabus to be distributed at your first class meeting.** Let students know what you will cover on each class day and, if your class will meet in different sites, tell them where each class will be held. Communicate any assignments for outside reading, and any projects that will be undertaken. If you choose to communicate with your students outside of class, tell your participants how and when they may contact you by e-mail or by phone. Try to be as accessible as you reasonably can.
6. **Plan for teaching materials and teaching aids.** If you want to use slides, Power Point prompts, video clips, handouts or manuals to supplement and reinforce your teaching, be sure to have everything prepared and in working order before class. This may mean getting to your classroom early to set up and test equipment. It may mean going to the OLLI office to pick up documents from printing. Just remember to plan your time and equipment appropriately. **Computer training instructors using manuals should submit an electronic file (preferably in PDF) to Jeanne Dyer two weeks prior to the beginning of class for printing.**
7. **Get to Know Your Class Ambassador/Assistant.** The role of the class ambassador is to welcome the **first** class, acknowledge first time attenders, make a few OLLI announcements, introduce the class assistant and introduce you. The Ambassador designated for your class will contact you by email to make an introduction. You will also meet at your first class, the class assistant who will be taking attendance, providing you with a roster and making short announcements in subsequent classes. The assistant usually will make the announcements before the class begins in order to not cut into your teaching time.
8. **Feel free to contact your students prior to the first class meeting.** A good way to make your students feel welcome is to send them an e-mail as a way of introducing yourself and your course. Contact information is available via the Internet on your class roster ***use the bcc (blind copy) option when emailing a class.*** Contact Joseph or Jeanne for information about how to access Entrinsik Informer where your class roster is housed. Note: Not all students use e-mail.
9. **Make an outline for what you want to accomplish.** Each week before you meet your class, make an outline to remind yourself what two or three things you want to accomplish and how you want to involve your students in the process. Remember that adults can only concentrate for 10-15 minutes at a stretch so plan for a variety of activities and discussion points. When you finish each class, ask yourself, "Did I get done today what I had hoped?" and "What adjustments do I need to make for the next class?"

Some Considerations During Class Sessions:

1. **Attempt to learn your students' names.** In OLLI classes we use first names all around. Often in the beginning it helps all of us to have name “tents” so that we can all be reminded who we are and what we liked to be called e.g. Jack (not John or not Dr. Smith). If you are comfortable doing so, personally welcome the students as they arrive.
2. **Be sure to take a break every hour.** Assure your students they can rely on having a break. Make sure they know where refreshment and restroom facilities can be found.
3. **Take time to get to know your students.** If the classroom is available before or after your class, try to arrive early and stay a few minutes after class just to talk. Start your first class with an unpretentious self-introduction and encourage every student to do the same. You might ask each person to relate something that has a connection to the topic of your course. If your class is large, these introductions may not be possible. This kind of activity should last no more than 15 minutes so you will need to monitor time carefully. Getting to know your students is helpful in shaping your teaching and builds a community of learners in your course. If someone in your class needs assistance due to special considerations (e.g. hearing, sight, mobility) be sure to ask participants to make this known to you so accommodations can be made.
4. **It is helpful to begin the remaining sessions with a little review of what you did the week before and what you want to do this week.** This simple practice puts everyone at ease and is a way of assuring that you all are ready to begin learning again.
5. **Your students are great resources;** draw on them. OLLI students bring with them a great deal of life experience and professional expertise. They are a varied lot and have much to contribute to your class that is relevant and interesting. Your challenge will be to balance the discussions so that no one person dominates or controls student interaction. Be polite but direct when someone tries to monopolize discussions.
6. **Motivate and encourage learning throughout your course.** Get your students interested in the topic and provide resources to keep them going. Always remember the course is for learning, not for telling your participants all that you know. Use good examples to make abstract concepts clear. At those times when you do not know (or remember) everything, cheerfully admit it and always acknowledge a beneficial correction. Then be sure to follow-up in the next class session or through e-mail if the point is important to make correctly.

7. **Be sure to pace instruction appropriately for your “senior” participants.** New instructors tend to present too much information too fast. Be alert to student body language and eye contact and ask students to tell you if you are going too fast for their comfort. When a student has a question, be sure everyone can hear the question before you respond.
8. **Remind students to submit course evaluations.** Both you and OLLI want to know how your course was perceived. Encourage your participants to give you feedback during the class as well as at the end on the formal on-line form.
9. **Enjoy the experience.** Above all, enjoy your experience as an instructor. There is little more rewarding than acknowledging that learning has occurred for everyone.

Always remember that OLLI staff wants you to be successful. If you are having any sort of difficulties, feel free to communicate them to Joseph McAuliffe (813-974-5166), Jeanne Dyer (813-974-8037) or any member of the Faculty Support Subcommittee. The earlier a problem is spotted, the easier its solution.

Respectfully, Faculty Support Subcommittee

Jane Applegate, Chair
Dan Rutenberg
Marian Orlosky
Susan Northcutt
Betty Lucas