Musings...  

"Those Lifelong Learning study groups were great!” For many of us long-time LLI attendees, it’s great to hear a newcomer make a statement like that. Even as good as that expression, is one that goes like this: “In addition to learning so much, I have really met some wonderful people. LLI is really worth the price of admission.”

And, that “price of admission” is truly a bargain, given the fact that a registrant can take as many study groups as can fit into a three-day schedule. If there’s any downside, it’s the fact that the curriculum offerings are often so attractive that picking one study group over another presents a real dilemma.

Well, folks, this spring’s schedule is chock-full of study groups that may present a few decisions as to what you’d like to take. Our conveners have worked hard to come up with topics that match their passions. Allow me to elaborate, day-by-day…

Tuesday Morning: It’s been jokingly said that Joe Gastiger could do a study group on watching concrete dry, and we’d still have an overflow registration. Well, in a few weeks, our Congregational Church pastor will lead discussions as to just how the Ten Commandments are relevant in the 21st Century. Here’s that choice thing again...running concurrent with Joe’s study group will be Dick Down’s intriguing profiles of patriots over the years.

Tuesday Afternoon: Following our Brown Bag Notables session (open to all), Dan Dillman and Jitka Hurych will convene study groups on Geography Potpourri and Human Language, respectively. Both of these fine folks are extremely qualified to present these study groups, so if you’re interested in either what makes the sky blue or where our words come from, the choice is yours! Jitka’s study group will run for four weeks, and the slot will be filled the last four weeks by Chautauqua: Taking the Long View of America’s Last 100 Years, convened by retired DeKalb educator Guy Todnem.

Wednesday Morning: Ah, yes...time to decide again. There’s a fascinating offering entitled Seven Up! Onward, based on a film series and hosted by two new conveners, Marilyn Loy and Nancy Quick. Scheduled at the same time: a four-week session on Poverty, Hunger and Charity in America. No one is better qualified to host this study group than Dan Kenney, founder and director of the DeKalb County Community Gardens.

Wednesday Afternoon: And, yes, the Spencers are back...this time, George and Elaine take this study group through the 1960s. Their historical run through the decades has become an LLI staple, for sure. And, running concurrently with this study group will be another study group on opera, convened by our man-of-many-talents, Clark Neher. Combined, these three members have convened an amazing number of LLI study groups. We owe them much gratitude.

Thursday Morning: We have two marvelous choices from two veteran conveners. One will run for six weeks, hosted by art professor emerita Judith Testa, who will give us her take on The Greatest Altarpieces Ever Painted.
Pat’s Passions

Don’t be surprised if Pat Vary is in your LLI study group this winter. She says that she has signed up for “practically everything.” If you are taking Ten Days that Unexpectedly Changed America, you can be sure she’ll be there since she is convening that study group.

So why did she decide to convene the group? She isn’t a historian; she’s a microbiologist and musician. But she was intrigued when fellow LLI member Linda Fulton shared the DVDs upon which the study group is based. And, Pat explains, “as long as I can find things that other people might find as interesting as I find them, I’ll keep convening.” Besides, she notes, “it’s fun.”

Pat’s first exposure to LLI was a brown-bag Notable talk. She found “interesting people asking interesting questions,” she recalls, and filed LLI away as something to do once she retired as a professor in the NIU biology department. After she took a few LLI study groups, she was, in her words, “hooked.” Then she began convening study groups on topics arising from some of her passions: climate change and alternate energy, bacteria, and music.

Most of Pat’s growing-up years were spent in Springfield, Missouri, in the Ozarks, where her father was a minister. But both her parents were from Texas, where she spent much time each year. Being a musician has been an important part of her life, beginning when her mother taught her piano when she was in first grade. In third grade, she began playing the violin, which she still does in the Kishwaukee Orchestra. In high school, Pat even played the bugle in an all-girls Scottish drum-and-bugle corps. She is also a talented player on the harmonica, which she takes when she travels. Travel, another passion, is one for which she has had more time since she finished ten years of service on the DeKalb County Board.

During over 30 years teaching at NIU, Pat was named a Presidential Research Professor, one of NIU’s highest honors. The recognition came, in part, from her work on a bacterial strain that Abbot Labs found is a good host for DNA, a strain that Abbot now uses to produce the antigen for many of its AIDS diagnostic tests.

So, with all these passions and all this knowledge, this winter is not likely to be the last time Pat convenes a study group. And, even when she isn’t convening, she’ll be right there in the study groups. After all, LLI is another of her passions.

Kudos to Conveners!

Conveners are the life-blood of LLI. They are what enable us to offer a diversity of intriguing study groups. So special thanks go to those who stepped up and convened their first study groups in 2015: Pat McKinley, Joe Grush, and Linda Fulton. For many, convening is such a good experience that they make come-back appearances as conveners.

LLI is always looking for new conveners. If you’re interested, contact curriculum committee chair Dick Dowen (ddowen@niu.edu) or any member of the curriculum or steering committee. You don’t even have to have a topic in mind. Dick and his committee have some easy-to-lead courses on their agenda that only need conveners to pull them together.
“We’re Buying Two Mice!”

When our external programs office liaison Mark Pietrowski said, “We’re buying two mice” at the November LLI Steering Committee meeting, the response was cheers not horror. For the mice will be computer mice, part of a technology upgrade grant from the DeKalb County Community Foundation.

Since 2001, LLI has received seven grants from DCCF. In the latest, we requested $6,050 and received $4,500. The Steering Committee voted to take the remaining needed funds, up to $2,000, from the LLI account with the NIU Foundation. By buying its own equipment, to be kept at the Holmes Student Center where we meet, LLI will greatly reduce the cost of renting equipment from the student center. In the spring 2015 term alone, these costs came to $1,746, so the savings will be significant and the payback immediate.

Our purchase will include two LCD projectors, two laptop computers, two speaker systems, two ELMOs (overhead projectors), two lapel mikes, and two mice for the computers. The latter purchase is being made because many LLI members are more comfortable using a mouse than a computer touchpad.

Matching & Memorial Gifts

Thank you to those members who have made contributions to the LLI fund with the NIU Foundation. Some were memorial gifts, some were made at the time of the Soiree, and some were just contributions from the heart. A reminder to check whether your gifts may be eligible for matching funds from an employer; a recent gift from an LLI member and retired GE employee was matched by GE.

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1]

Also on that morning, retired accounting professor Bill Cummings, whose LLI convenings have ranged from war to railroads, will explore the development of the atom bomb and the Manhattan Project’s role in the weapon’s construction.

Thursday Afternoon: The choice here may seem to be a no-brainer to some, but not-so-fast-my friend! Both study groups feature two popular conveners, both of whom have hosted LLI sessions proven to be thought-provoking. Gary Glenn, emeritus professor from NIU’s political science department, will lead a discussion on whether we should care about the Constitution. Meanwhile, retired educator Marilyn Cleland has titled her offering Moving into the Light, exploring aging, living, and dying. How do these sound for the possibility of some wide-ranging discussions?

I wish you well in deciding what study groups to take this spring.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the tremendous success of our fall luncheon at Ellington’s Restaurant. What started as a planned affair for a few resulted in an overwhelming signup of over 45 people. Not only did Chef Bryan Flower and his class of hospitality/nutrition students present a marvelous multi-course lunch, but their description of the food and of their curriculum kept us all fascinated. There were numerous requests to consider doing a similar Ellington’s event next fall; and, if we can get it scheduled, your Lifelong Learning leadership team will do our best to make it happen!
COMING THIS SPRING TO LLI

March 15 - May 5 (All study groups eight weeks, unless noted.)

Ten Commandements for the 21st Century – Joe Gastiger
Profiles in Patriotism – Dick Dowen
Geography Potpourri (4 weeks) – Dan Dillman
The Story of Human Language (4 weeks) – Jitka Hurych
Chautauqua: Taking the Long View of America’s Last 100 Years (4 weeks) - Guy Todnem
Seven Up! Onward (4 weeks) - Marilyn Loy & Nancy Quick
Poverty, Hunger, & Charity in America: Past, Present, & Future - Dan Kenney
The 1960s, Part One - George & Elaine Spencer
Opera - Clark Neher
The Greatest Altarpieces Ever Painted (5 weeks) - Judith Testa
The Manhattan Project: Making of a Super Weapon (5 weeks) - Bill Cummings
Should We Learn (and Care) About the Constitution? - Gary Glenn
Moving into the Light - Marilyn Cleland

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

Fall 2015
Lorraine Daly, DeKalb
Raymond Ditrichs, DeKalb
Kathleen Gosnell Seiler, DeKalb
Ruth Ann Hart, DeKalb
Kathryn Lyle, Kingston
James Moss, DeKalb
Cheryl Ross, DeKalb
Mary Vincent, Sycamore

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

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LLI: Where Interesting People Meet

The most appealing aspect of LLI is the opportunity to meet and socialize with some of the most interesting people in northern Illinois from all walks of life and all with their own stories to share -- lawyers, teachers, bankers, homemakers, administrators, farmers, engineers, ministers, blue collar and white collar. What they all possess are the only requirements for membership: curiosity and a love of learning. Research shows that keeping one’s mind active and engaged is a major factor in maintaining a happy and productive life. There have been many physical changes over the 50 years at both the university and in myself, but participation in the LLI program is a welcome and rewarding change.

--Brian Fulton, in a column about LLI for the NIU Annuitant