Transformations Through Teaching and Learning

The Story of Maine's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

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The history of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at University of Southern Maine (USM) presents a microcosm of lifelong learning institutes in the United States. These grassroots, largely volunteer-managed organizations providing educational opportunities for adults older than 50 started at the New School for Social Research in 1962. Recently, OLLI at USM conducted two research studies, one on the experience of peer teaching in lifelong learning institutes and another on the nature of the learning experience for students in such an organization. Both provide evidence of transformation possible for older adults through engagement in the learning process either as teacher or student. The next research, still in progress, looks at service learning as part of institute curricula. And finally, the authors pose questions about the future of lifelong learning institutes and the changes that may come as a result of the philanthropy of the Bernard Osher Foundation.

Keywords: *Osher Institute; lifelong learning; service learning; older learner; senior education; learning in retirement; OLLI; senior college*

This wasteful, tragic process of disengagement will continue unless older people themselves can realize their worth and become their own agents for change.

—Marty Knowlton, 1975

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Overview of Lifelong Learning Institutes and Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes

In 1962, a group of retired New York City public school teachers approached what was then the New School for Social Research (now New School University) in Greenwich Village to ask if the school would design a program for them. The group was "dissatisfied with the unchallenging continuing education programs offered by their union" (Mills, 1993, p. 162) and wanted the New School to sponsor something more intellectually rigorous. Thus was born the Institute for Retired Professionals, the first "lifelong learning institute" focused on meeting the educational needs of adults older than the age of 50.

Lifelong Learning Institute (LLI) has lately become the generic name for a range of organizations and programs geared toward educating older adults. Since 1962 they have gone by generic names including *Institute for Learning in Retirement, Academy of Lifelong Learning*, and *Senior College*. In addition, individual programs have adopted names such as Plato Society, Gold Leaf Institute, Seniors Achieving Greater Education (SAGE), or Rivier Institute for Senior Education (RISE).

The more than 400 LLIs that exist in the United States today owe their guiding principles and philosophy of education to the serendipitous fact that those New York schoolteachers chose to approach the New School rather than some more traditional purveyor of continuing education courses. But perhaps it wasn't so serendipitous. Founded in 1919 as a center for "discussion, instruction and counseling for mature men and women" (http://www.nsu.newschool.edu/01b_history.htm), the New School for Social Research is credited as the first American university for adults. It now is fully a university with some 25,000 students of diverse ages and backgrounds enrolling every year. In 1962, as today, it was a place of innovative educational programming that would have appealed to a group of older adults looking for interesting learning opportunities.

The administrators at the New School responded to the New York schoolteachers enthusiastically. Coming from their own respect for the abilities of adult learners, the administrators encouraged the schoolteachers to form a self-governing group that would be responsible for managing their own courses taught by New School faculty or the group members themselves. As the first part of a 3-year experiment, the school gave the group access to regular courses at a reduced fee and use of all of the school's facilities. The second part of the experiment became weekly study groups organized and taught or led by the members. The school administrators required only that the evolving "institute" be open to membership by people outside the original group.

From the beginning the courses were successful, attracting enough students/members to require waiting lists. The group grew and developed its own operating structure, and in 1976 hosted a national conference at the New School focused on the Institute for Retired Professionals. That conference spawned a group of institutes that seeded a movement across the country. And to this day, the movement owes its flavor and texture to the philosophy and mission of New

School University. The following is the statement of purpose drafted by the New School University Commission on Continuing Education in 1984:

> The New School does not set any limits to its programs in regard to subject matter. Whatever seriously interests persons of mature intelligence properly falls within the province of the school. History and philosophy, the social and behavioral sciences, literature and art, the natural and biological sciences, education, and ethics naturally take up a significant part of The New School curriculum, since these are the fields in which the forces of culture and change are most significantly active, and in which human beings, their institutions, and their products are directly studied. The centrality of the liberal arts is maintained and strengthened in every possible way, but not to the exclusion of other educational programs that serve a legitimate need for mature adults in a mature community. (http://www.nsu.newschool.edu/01b_history.htm)

Historically, the common characteristics of the majority of LLIs in the United States were and still are as follows:

1. Some level of self-governance, on a continuum from groups with complete autonomy as 501c3 nonprofit organizations to groups with a strong advisory role in the planning of courses and activities that are managed by staff of a university.
2. A predominately liberal arts curriculum. However, to paraphrase the New School, whatever seriously interests persons of mature intelligence properly falls within the province of the LLI course menu.
3. Teachers or study group leaders who are peers in age with their students. LLI teachers are either experienced faculty, mostly retired from teaching careers, or are community members who teach from a passion for a particular subject that is an avocation for them. In contrast, study group leaders are people who are willing to organize group inquiry into a topic (e.g., The Life of Thomas Jefferson, Women in Islam) without claiming any special knowledge of it. Here as well, the New School's promotional materials about its own university faculty set the tone for LLIs: "teachers who not only teach what they know best but also what they are most interested in."
4. Age segregation, either stated or de facto. Most LLIs have a lower age limit of 50 or 55.
5. Affiliation with a college or university, often within the continuing education operation of the school. Affiliation can range from a distant connection mostly on paper to full status as a department of the university.
6. A student body that is better educated and more affluent than the general population of people older than 50.
7. A strong sense of ownership of the program by its members. This results from the active role that volunteers often play in teaching courses, managing the organization, planning events and curriculum, and in many cases operating the LLI office.

In 1996 a retired rabbi in Portland, Maine, became aware of the LLI phenomenon and decided that the University of Southern Maine (USM) should host such a program. He went to see the president of the university, who admits that he was not particularly interested in the idea until his mother got wind of the conversation and told him that she thought he should do it, that it sounded like a great

idea. The subsequent support of the university president resulted in assignment of the director of Extended Academic Programs to work with the rabbi and see what they could come up with. The two of them convened a group of local movers and shakers to explore creating what they started calling Senior College. In the spring of 1997, the group put on an open house at the university's student center cafeteria to ascertain the level of interest among older people in the community. Invitations were sent by mail using lists from libraries, churches, and other organizations that might have large memberships of older adults. For the initial fall term, only four courses, each scheduled to run for 8 weeks, were proposed. Expecting a modest crowd to attend the open house, the university's food staff prepared clam chowder and pilot biscuits for 150 people. More than 500 came to the student center that afternoon, and somehow the chowder and biscuits kept coming from the kitchen. Thus, this inaugural LLI event has come to be known as the "loaves and fishes" meeting. When classes began in the fall, nearly 200 people had registered for the four courses. One way the program worked to accommodate all interested students was to change the format of one course, a study of world religions, into a large lecture hall followed by a small group discussion experience. Thus began, albeit relative latecomers to the LLI scene, the University of Southern Maine's journey in older adult education. What has transpired since may be viewed as nothing short of miraculous.

By 1999 the rabbi, who was then serving as the volunteer director of Senior College under the supervision of the director of Extended Academic Programs, decided that the Senior College at USM was such a good model that he set up a meeting with the governor of Maine and proposed that the state fund the development of programs similar to USM's statewide. The rabbi interested a legislator in sponsoring a bill to that effect in the Maine legislature. Leaders of the USM Senior College traveled to the capitol to testify in a hearing on the bill, but it did not ultimately emerge from committee. What did emerge was an annual line item appropriation of $150,000 into the university budget to fund a "Senior College initiative." That initiative allowed USM to hire a person to direct the USM Senior College and spend part of her time being Senior College's "Johnny Appleseed" in other communities. Several of the other campuses of the University of Maine System had created Senior College style programs of their own by this time, so between those spontaneous start-ups and the intentionally nurtured programs, there are today 15 LLIs in Maine. All are member organizations of the Maine Senior College Network (MSCN). The MSCN Coordinating Committee meets bimonthly via the University of Maine System's interactive video network to share information about local programming successes, plan an annual statewide conference for all LLI members, and ask for advice or experience with any issues that might arise in a local LLI. The MSCN is not intended to be a governing body, and the Coordinating Committee cannot make statewide policy or indeed any decisions that will affect the operations of any of the individual LLIs. Over the years each Senior College has grown to reflect the nature/culture of its own membership, host institution, and local community.

Also in 1999, the Senior College members at USM decided that they needed better space for their classes. They initially thought they might be able to fund a building on the campus, but reality set in pretty quickly and they ultimately decided to try to raise $150,000 to upgrade the campus classroom building where most of the Senior College classes were held. By the time the campaign was over in 2004, they had raised $135,000 that was spent to paint the classrooms and hallways, buy new classroom furniture, and install sound amplification systems.

In 2000, what was happening at USM attracted the attention of Bernard Osher, a philanthropist living in San Francisco. Mr. Osher was born in Biddeford, Maine, and retained strong affection for his home state. He had funded a number of scholarships for Maine high school students to go on to college and was interested generally in education. Bernard Osher's brother, a retired cardiac surgeon, funded the Osher Map Library at USM. Bernard mentioned to his brother one day that he was becoming interested in what was happening in the area of lifelong learning. His brother told him that he should investigate the Senior College program at USM. Bernard Osher talked with the university's president, resulting in one of the university vice presidents and the director of Senior College being asked to create a proposal to the Osher Foundation. The two decided that the area that was currently underserved at USM and nationally was research on educational programs for older adults. They subsequently asked the Osher Foundation to fund a research collaborative at the Senior College under the direction of a senior research fellow. They would also hire a part-time public relations person to make sure that the research results were disseminated through media contacts and conferences, establish a distinguished lecture series at USM, and support scholarships for low-income LLI members. The Osher Foundation accepted the proposal and to everyone's surprise made an endowment gift of $2,000,000 to the university to support what was soon to be named the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI). The endowment funds a research collaborative that now includes the senior research fellow, a graduate assistant, and a committee of OLLI and MSCN members who help to set the research direction and carry out the studies. The public relations director not only publicizes the research but also the activities of OLLI and manages statewide and regional conferences on topics of interest to MSCN and LLI members.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the country, Sonoma State University in California had started an LLI program through its continuing education division. Although the impetus to start the program came from a retiree in the community, the model used was the Fromm Institute at the University of San Francisco. As a result, the Sonoma State program began as a continuing education program managed by paid staff with regular faculty of the university teaching classes for which they are paid. University staff designed the curriculum and determined the activities and policies of the institute. Sonoma State University became the second Osher Lifelong Learning Institute in 2001. At that time, the Bernard Osher Foundation instituted a regimen that supplies $100,000 per year for 3 years (2nd- and 3rd-year funding is contingent on completion of reports at the end of each

year), with the possibility of endowment of $1,000,000+ at the end of the 3rd successful year.

The Bernard Osher Foundation has now given one or more years of funding to 61 Osher Lifelong Learning institutes in 23 states and intends to fund a total of 100 institutes. The OLLI network includes lifelong learning organizations offering a wide variety of different models of programming to adults older than 50 years of age. The models include USM's volunteer/staff blend, Sonoma's staff-led model, and a number of creative programming options, including OLLIs at California State University–Dominguez Hills and University of Texas at El Paso in which lectures are delivered over cable television to the local area and simultaneously on the Internet to anyone with a modem.

In 2004, the University of Southern Maine was chosen to be the National Resource Center for the OLLI network. The national center is in many ways simply a large and mostly cyberspace version of the Maine Senior College Network. The center will exist to provide a means of communication among the OLLIs, a place to collect and disseminate useful resources, and a means for collaborating on older learner research, jointly planning travel programs, raising funds, planning and managing national conferences, and engaging in other projects that we cannot yet even dimly envision.

Thus, in less than 10 years, a group of enthusiastic volunteers and committed staff at the University of Southern Maine has built a program that not only provides a range of fascinating educational options for older Mainers but is now recognized as a national leader in the field. At the core of all of these activities however, and the primary reason why all of these programs and models and networks exist, is teaching and learning.

Peer Teaching as a Way of Learning

As we stated earlier, one of the characteristics that has differentiated many of the lifelong learning institutes from other adult education programs has been peer teaching, that is, older persons teaching and learning from one another. Although there were three studies conducted in the early 1980s exploring the nature of peer teaching among elders (Brown, 1981; Delaloye, 1981; Kaye, Monk, & Stuen, 1982), these investigations involved programs that were located in social service and community-based health agencies rather than in higher education. Until 2003 and a study we undertook in the Maine Senior College Network (Brady, Holt, & Welt, 2003), the educational gerontology literature was mostly silent about the nature of peer teaching in lifelong learning institutes.

This recent study of peer teaching explored preferred methods of teaching, how peer teaching differs from other teaching experiences, and the special challenges that are regularly encountered by those who engage in peer teaching among 48 faculty members in five different lifelong learning institutes in Maine. One finding was that peer teachers use a wide variety of teaching practices that include lecture, facilitated discussion, a studio or "hands-on" approach, course coordination (akin to a general manager), and a blended or hybrid approach that mixes two or more of the other approaches. In fact, the blending of methods was the most frequently used approach. One conclusion we drew from this finding was that mixing methods helps to maximize flexibility and allows lifelong learning institute teachers to be more responsive to the needs of their students. The ability and willingness to be both flexible and adaptive to learners' needs are generally viewed in the field of adult education as core elements of good teaching (Brookfield, 1995; Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1997; Palmer, 1998).

Not every instructor entered the peer teaching experience with a flexible *andragogy*. This term, with etymological roots in the Greek word meaning adult, was introduced into the 20th-century educational lexicon by the late Malcolm Knowles and is often used by adult educators to differentiate their practice from that of teaching children (Knowles, 1970; Knowles & Associates, 1984). Peer teachers, especially those who come to their volunteer roles in lifelong learning institutes after having spent long careers as professional teachers in primary and secondary schools, have to learn to become adult educators. This is potentially one of the most important ways in which elders transform through engagement in a peer teaching environment.

Unlike other educational settings—be they in K-12 or postsecondary education—in which students enroll to earn extrinsic rewards such as grades, diplomas, certificates, credits, and/or degrees, the culture of lifelong learning institutes is one of volunteerism and freedom. There are no tests, grades, attendance requirements, or mandatory assignments. Older students attend these programs to learn. Although there are rare occasions when this spirit of freedom brings about less than desirable outcomes (e.g., people attend class irregularly, feel no compulsion to read in advance of discussions, etc.), for the most part it is a highly desirable situation for peer teachers. After all, what teacher would not want a context in which all of his or her students have one principal goal in mind—learning? Yet an environment in which learning and sheer enjoyment of the academic content are the primary goals creates a different set of challenges than those in which extrinsic rewards dominate. Because it is commonly agreed that adult students "vote with their feet," the quality of the educational experience needs to be good—early. Peer teachers who are not sufficiently skilled or knowledgeable may find their class size shrinking by 50% by the second or third week.

Another difference between the traditional and lifelong learning institute cultures is in the expectations of the learner vis-à-vis the instructor's knowledge. Although older learners do not expect omniscience from their peer teachers, they do insist on content competence and also, at least in many cases, a facilitator who creates a space in which the students' own voices can be heard. At OLLI and in lifelong learning institutes across the United States, older learners may not expect their teachers to have immediate and definitive answers to every question. One teacher in our study put it this way, "In senior college students have many questions, and you'd better know the answers. But if you don't they'll be patient with you. They'll wait until the next class." Other teachers who were interviewed

shared stories about their past experiences as teachers of traditional-aged college students and the fact that many of these younger people looked upon their professors as subject matter experts, expecting them to teach with an apparent high degree of certitude and even omniscience. This is not the case with the vast majority of older students in lifelong learning institutes. An experienced peer teacher made this comment,

> I found the best thing you can do is to think of a course that you believe would be enjoyable for yourself....First of all is honesty. You need to stand there and say: "This is the truth. This is what I know about this subject. I'm going to share it with you, and there may be others who know much more about it and if there are, please tell us."

The passion for learning manifested by lifelong learning institute students and the enthusiasm for teaching expressed by faculty creates an atmosphere that is significantly different from traditional education environments in which instructors more often than not see their role as providing knowledge to uninitiated learners. Peer teachers see themselves engaging in a conversation among equals. Everyone—student and teacher—wants to learn. The richness of the colearning experience is, in good measure, made possible by the depth of knowledge and range of life experiences found in each member of the class. However, because these older learners have such breadth and depth of knowledge, discussions can be harder to guide once they get started. As one peer teacher in our study reported, "You get tremendous opinion statements. With 18-year-olds you retain the power to end discussion. But this is not the case with one's peers." This is yet another dimension in which, especially among individuals who come into lifelong learning institutes from more traditional educational contexts, teachers must change and learn.

Another especially challenging aspect of peer teaching is measuring expectations and seeking feedback from one's students. One participant in our study talked about how he constantly asks his students why they signed up for this particular course. Obtaining a better sense of learners' motivations helps his own preparation from week to week. Asking for and receiving information about students' original goals and motivation for participation as well as about the curriculum being studied from week to week is important in the peer teaching process because it helps to keep the course on track. It also facilitates a culture of collegiality and nurtures healthy teacher-student relationships.

One of the risks of having close relationships between teacher and student involves the management of emotion. At times, intense feelings may rise to the surface when people are writing stories or retelling experiences in class. One might expect this to occur in deeply personal classes such as memoir writing (a popular curriculum across lifelong learning institutes), poetry, or other highly evocative curricula. But sometimes emotions surge unpredictably, as the following peer teacher recounted:

> We had one woman who I thought was going to have a breakdown because she was looking directly at the Brookside Nursing Home....She was obviously uncomfortable in the class so I said something and she said, "My sister is there. She's dying in that room. She's schizophrenic, and I'm looking right into her bedroom." So I said the first thing that occurred to me: "Why don't you come and sit over here so you're not looking into that room." She was dealing with a dying situation and she eventually wrote about it...and she stuck with it and dealt to a certain extent with the problem. But we did have a lot of emotion and sensitivity and I tried to be very careful of that, and the class I would say was very supportive of the fact. They were great.

The same teacher went on to add, "You must limit the class in terms of it becoming a therapy session" (Brady et al., 2003, p. 860).

Still another way peer teachers need to adapt and change is in dealing with the physical deficits that accompany aging. Students in lifelong learning institutes often have impaired hearing, vision, or memory. Teachers who talked about this in our study said that the students themselves are not reluctant to admit a special need. They readily come forward and say, "You're going to have to speak loud because of my hearing aid." The students themselves also chip in to create accommodations. In a class on Ukrainian egg dyeing, one student with macular degeneration was having difficulty seeing the lines. Both the visually impaired student and a classmate came up with the idea that perhaps a different colored background would help. The teacher agreed to this experiment, and the result was successful.

Another peer teacher commented about a fundamental change she found herself making now that she was working with older instead of younger students,

> I find that with all the dimensions of the senior student there is the inevitable decay of the mind, of energy. I'm 87 years old but—I'm very conscious of this—there's all that resilience that just goes with age....I used to teach with a high degree of irritability and of intolerance of any kind of slackness or sloppiness in students' attention. I don't do this anymore.

Transformation Through Learning

Among the earliest explorations of outcomes derived from participation in educational activities by older adults were those conducted by Mary Alice Wolf at St. Joseph College in Connecticut (Wolf, 1982, 1985a, 1985b). The focus of much of Wolf's work was to investigate the impact of the educational experience on life satisfaction and self-fulfillment. A consistent finding that ran through these studies was that participating in educational programs was an "empowering experience" for older learners.

In 2004, the OLLI Research Collaborative designed a study to explore the specific nature of the empowering experience of participating in an LLI. We selected

a research sample of 45 rank-and-file members at OLLI (i.e., individuals who were not serving as members of the board of directors, program faculty, committee chairpersons, or in other leadership roles in the organization). These were all experienced participants who at minimum had registered for one course during each of the previous six semesters. Their average age was 73.4 years (as compared with the general OLLI profile of 71.3 years), and 78% of the sample was women (as compared with 72% in the overall OLLI community). Each of these 45 individuals was invited to join one of six focus groups. The focus groups were designed to elicit and discuss details about critical incidents and other experiences at the institute as well as the perceived significance of those experiences.

To nobody's surprise, one general finding from these focus group conversations was that members were intellectually stimulated by way of their participation in this program (for a full description of this study, see Lamb & Brady, 2005). People talked about the new and exciting ideas they were learning and the "joy" it provided. One man in his late 60s described his involvement as "an aphrodisiac of the mind." Another participant, a woman in her late 70s, reported, "The first word that comes to mind is *fun*." A third individual who was a retired teacher said that she had taken professional development courses throughout her career, but it wasn't until she came to this lifelong learning institute that she could experience "the sheer joy of taking a course and just being able to listen."

As we probed focus group members' comments, deeper insights emerged. Several people emphasized that despite the absence of the usual academic demands and controls, they found themselves taking responsibility for their own learning. One woman with advanced professional degrees commented, "It's interesting that not being required to do something, you tend to do more work on your own." The liberal arts curriculum also allowed a number of OLLI members to broaden their education beyond the narrow technical or professional parameters they had set during early and middle adulthood. Prior to enrolling at OLLI, these people never took the opportunity to study religion, poetry, philosophy, or music. One woman who raised four children and after they had grown up turned her caregiving attention to her frail elderly parents found that when she finally had time for herself and chose to join a lifelong learning institute, it proved to be "a wonderful outlet…to learn things I had only heard about before."

Many learners used the metaphor of "stretching" to describe their growth. They told stories, often with a sense of pride, about ways they were being challenged to think beyond their usual frames of reference. The oldest woman in the sample, a retired clinical social worker approaching her mid-90s, explained that she eagerly sought courses that were "mind stretching….This way I learn new things. I think new things." Other people talked about their experience of being intellectually stretched by way of their lifelong learning institute courses as a formidable challenge and one that was definitely "not for the timid."

One of the most important dimensions of active membership in OLLI is the experience of community. Participants in this focus group study consistently reported how they found the institute community to be a safe place to take both intellectual and emotional risks. Even people who had uncomfortable experiences

in the past taking courses in a college or university and consequently came to OLLI feeling insecure about their ability to function well in a higher education setting talked about how their fellow students and (peer) teachers were respectful and welcoming of their input. Especially among women who had not been able to attend college at an earlier age, this sense of being accepted and not belittled or ignored was critical. One woman explained that because she had not attended college she did not know what to expect at OLLI and was, at least in the beginning, afraid. However, by "sharing with others in the community I learned to trust." Another woman with a similar educational background commented that, "There were no dumb questions…you could ask anything." We heard from focus group members repeatedly that even when there were sharp differences of opinion on controversial subjects such as politics or religion, as one member put it, "People really listen to each other."

The safety of the learning community provides a healthy forum for these elders to tell their stories and listen to others' stories. People feel free to talk inside and outside of class about even their most sensitive vulnerabilities—loneliness, health problems, poor relationships with family members, and even fears about death and their personal legacy. No topic seems to be taboo. In the words of one participant, "You don't have to be afraid. You can let your guard down."

Attending classes and extracurricular activities in a supportive learning community has resulted in building self-esteem on the part of many members. People talked in the focus groups about feeling smarter and "more interesting." Even the more introverted students reported that they have grown in confidence in their ability to make a valuable contribution to class discussions. Women especially felt that by participating in these educational activities they were finally able to get beyond the role of family caretaker. One described how her husband pursued further education to advance his career while she stayed home to take care of their children. Now, "If you saw me in class contributing and speaking up you would say, 'Who is this person?'" Another woman commented that her participation in the institute "provided validation for who I am."

Many of the women in the focus groups contrasted their experience at OLLI with earlier times when their participation in education was devalued or ignored. Sometimes this devaluation began at an early age. One woman recounted attending a grammar school where only the boys were taught science. Others described being intimidated or ignored in high school and college. Some found that this repression continued at home. One individual described her struggle to go beyond "the typical woman of my generation who stood behind their husband smiling and not saying a thing." These and other women talked enthusiastically about finding their "voice" at OLLI. "You suddenly realize that women have so much to say," said one participant. "We have a voice!"

Still one more area in which participants in this study reported an enhanced self-image was in their rejection of previously accepted stereotypes about aging. Often this was in response to the inspirational example set by many of their peers. Several members reported feeling an initial sense of reluctance to participate in a lifelong learning institute because they did not want to be "with a bunch of old

people." But once they overcame this initial barrier and joined the institute, they began to look upon "old people" differently. In fact, one of these reluctant joiners quickly came around to admire the ability and verve of her 70-, 80-, and even 90-year-old classmates, calling them "inspirational." Another conceded that she had stereotyped older women as "just sitting around and playing bridge." Now she saw things differently. One of the oldest members of the research sample said that seeing the energy of other older people at OLLI "was really a turn-on. I became less concerned about my body, how I looked." A nurse in one of the focus groups, who continues to work part-time commented, "If half of [her patients] were in OLLI, they wouldn't be in hospital beds."

Engaging the Future

Some years ago a friend said that she would like to do a study on women who graduated from college at the beginning of the women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many of these women belonged to the protest movements of the 1960s and were the first generation of women who started to challenge the stereotyped notion that women went to college to become teachers or nurses and find a suitable husband. They graduated into a society that wasn't ready to offer them jobs in business and industry in the numbers that are available now. They are women in their 50s and 60s who are educated, experienced as activists organizing grass-roots efforts, and often in jobs or professions with social conscience rather than high salaries for some portion of their careers. They have not amassed large retirement funds, but they have voices and experience at bucking the system. They will arrive at the door of retirement and find themselves looking at reduced financial circumstances. Will they passively accept that condition? Add these to the thousands of women from earlier generations who are finding their voices through the transformative educational opportunities at LLIs, and our nation could be on the verge of new and exciting forms of civic engagement emerging in the next decade.

From the beginning, faculty and students at the University of Southern Maine's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute have expressed a desire to serve the larger community. In 2003, the curriculum committee and OLLI director launched a service learning initiative designed to create a service community within OLLI itself. Service learning has become popular in high schools and colleges partly as a way to apply classroom learning to the real world and partly to teach young people to be more like older people, namely, to assume civic responsibility and participate in the life of their communities. Typically this has meant adding a service component to academic courses, broadening the offering to include learning, service, and time for reflection on the experience...to derive meaning and knowledge about oneself and one's place in the world.

Although there are many opportunities for older adults to volunteer their time and energy in service to organizations and communities, there are few programs that offer service learning opportunities to older adults in an academic setting.

Older adults are often the recipients of services in service learning courses, not the providers. OLLI at USM decided it was high time to change this equation.

The OLLI version of service learning involves offering courses in partnership with local agencies and organizations. The local organization defines a project that would be of benefit to the organization and with the guidance of OLLI leaders creates a course that includes learning, service, and reflection components. The course is then offered to OLLI students as part of the regular menu of offerings. To date, students have created a volunteer training program and updated the trail map for Portland Trails, tutored ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students at Portland Adult Education, transcribed and scanned documents for the Maine Memory Network at the Maine Historical Society, and worked as conversation partners for English as a Second Language courses at the University of Southern Maine. Many of the service learning students have gone on to become regular volunteers with their respective organizations once their service learning course has ended. One organization commented that they wished that all of their volunteers could go through the OLLI service learning course. The OLLI leaders found this humorous because the organization itself had devised and taught the course—another of the many splendors of peer teaching! But it also said something positive about the value of the experience to the partner organization. The OLLI Research Collaborative is currently interviewing past participants in the service learning courses for an in-depth study of the effects of this brand of civic engagement on the OLLI students.

The Osher Foundation in the next few years will expend something in the neighborhood of $100 million to support the growth and creativity of programming at lifelong learning institutes at some of the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the country, as well as less well-known state universities and colleges. What will this mean for the lifelong learning institute movement as a whole? And what will it mean for the host colleges and universities?

At the very least, it seems that traditional students will see active, engaged adults well into their 80s and 90s walking around campus, carrying books, and talking with each other about ideas. That will be a very different experience than the one experienced on campus back in the 1960s and 1970s! Perhaps the traditional-age students will even find themselves talking with LLI members on the sidewalks and in the campus centers of universities across our nation. And—better still—join them in intergenerational courses so older and younger students can have systematic and rigorous opportunities to teach and learn from one another. This is already happening on many campuses not only thanks to the large number of LLIs across the United States but also due to the fact that most states have tuition reduction or waiver opportunities for older learners who wish to take mainstream (credit-bearing) courses.

Beyond the obvious infusion of cash that the Osher Institute represents to a campus, lifelong learning institute members also represent voters. Older adults are commonly regarded as more likely to vote, particularly in local and state elections, than the traditional college-age student. What sort of effect will participation in any lifelong learning institute have on voting patterns and thus civic en-

people." But once they overcame this initial barrier and joined the institute, they began to look upon "old people" differently. In fact, one of these reluctant joiners quickly came around to admire the ability and verve of her 70-, 80-, and even 90-year-old classmates, calling them "inspirational." Another conceded that she had stereotyped older women as "just sitting around and playing bridge." Now she saw things differently. One of the oldest members of the research sample said that seeing the energy of other older people at OLLI "was really a turn-on. I became less concerned about my body, how I looked." A nurse in one of the focus groups, who continues to work part-time commented, "If half of [her patients] were in OLLI, they wouldn't be in hospital beds."

Engaging the Future

Some years ago a friend said that she would like to do a study on women who graduated from college at the beginning of the women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many of these women belonged to the protest movements of the 1960s and were the first generation of women who started to challenge the stereotyped notion that women went to college to become teachers or nurses and find a suitable husband. They graduated into a society that wasn't ready to offer them jobs in business and industry in the numbers that are available now. They are women in their 50s and 60s who are educated, experienced as activists organizing grass-roots efforts, and often in jobs or professions with social conscience rather than high salaries for some portion of their careers. They have not amassed large retirement funds, but they have voices and experience at bucking the system. They will arrive at the door of retirement and find themselves looking at reduced financial circumstances. Will they passively accept that condition? Add these to the thousands of women from earlier generations who are finding their voices through the transformative educational opportunities at LLIs, and our nation could be on the verge of new and exciting forms of civic engagement emerging in the next decade.

From the beginning, faculty and students at the University of Southern Maine's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute have expressed a desire to serve the larger community. In 2003, the curriculum committee and OLLI director launched a service learning initiative designed to create a service community within OLLI itself. Service learning has become popular in high schools and colleges partly as a way to apply classroom learning to the real world and partly to teach young people to be more like older people, namely, to assume civic responsibility and participate in the life of their communities. Typically this has meant adding a service component to academic courses, broadening the offering to include learning, service, and time for reflection on the experience...to derive meaning and knowledge about oneself and one's place in the world.

Although there are many opportunities for older adults to volunteer their time and energy in service to organizations and communities, there are few programs that offer service learning opportunities to older adults in an academic setting.

Older adults are often the recipients of services in service learning courses, not the providers. OLLI at USM decided it was high time to change this equation.

The OLLI version of service learning involves offering courses in partnership with local agencies and organizations. The local organization defines a project that would be of benefit to the organization and with the guidance of OLLI leaders creates a course that includes learning, service, and reflection components. The course is then offered to OLLI students as part of the regular menu of offerings. To date, students have created a volunteer training program and updated the trail map for Portland Trails, tutored ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) students at Portland Adult Education, transcribed and scanned documents for the Maine Memory Network at the Maine Historical Society, and worked as conversation partners for English as a Second Language courses at the University of Southern Maine. Many of the service learning students have gone on to become regular volunteers with their respective organizations once their service learning course has ended. One organization commented that they wished that all of their volunteers could go through the OLLI service learning course. The OLLI leaders found this humorous because the organization itself had devised and taught the course—another of the many splendors of peer teaching! But it also said something positive about the value of the experience to the partner organization. The OLLI Research Collaborative is currently interviewing past participants in the service learning courses for an in-depth study of the effects of this brand of civic engagement on the OLLI students.

The Osher Foundation in the next few years will expend something in the neighborhood of $100 million to support the growth and creativity of programming at lifelong learning institutes at some of the most prestigious institutions of higher education in the country, as well as less well-known state universities and colleges. What will this mean for the lifelong learning institute movement as a whole? And what will it mean for the host colleges and universities?

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gagement by older adults on education-related ballot issues? Will OLLI members in Maine and elsewhere demonstrate unique characteristics as voters, different from members of the general elder community or even lifelong learning institutes that are not OLLIs? Does participating in an institute that enjoys substantial support from a private foundation have any influence on attitudes about how public money is spent on higher education?

Most Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes have full-time professional or administrative staff. Some Osher Institutes also pay the faculty and use current university faculty rather than volunteers who may be retired professors or simply passionate amateur teachers. This distinguishes these institutes from the typical volunteer-founded, -managed, and -taught lifelong learning institutes that form the vast majority of the more than 400 in existence today. What effect will that have on the character of the Osher Institute experience? If a benefit of the experience of peer teaching and learning is a sense of engagement and empowerment, will funding and staffing programs eventually mean a more passive experience? In what ways will the institute members engage with each other that will create a sense of self-efficacy and empowerment? Will freedom from preparing for teaching a class and exposure to other generations of teachers mean a loss of engagement/empowerment, or will it bring new avenues of creativity and thought? Will engagement and fully democratic participation in planning and delivery of LLI programs even be seen as important? And will these values be viewed differently by future generations?

This is clearly an exciting time for lifelong learning institutes, if not also a critical one. On the one hand, current members worry about the effects of the arrival of the baby boom generation. Will boomers even be interested in the institutes as they currently exist, or will fundamental change take place? On the other hand, the Osher Foundation and a large number of leaders on university campuses are looking at new models and new meanings for lifelong learning as it relates to traditional higher education. A quote attributed to Dorothy Sayers comes to mind: "Time and trouble may tame an advanced young woman, but an advanced old woman [or man] is uncontrollable by any earthly force." Nobody knows where the next years will take the lifelong learning institute movement, but it will no doubt be an interesting ride.

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