Bernard Osher Foundation awards $1 million endowment gift to Nevada’s Osher Lifelong Learning Institute

The University’s learning-in-retirement organization, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute has been awarded a $1 million endowment gift by the Bernard Osher Foundation for programming excellence and for demonstrating potential for long-term success and sustainability. Since 2007, OLLI at Nevada has received three separate grants of $100,000 from the Osher Foundation, enabling the organization to increase membership, improve outreach and develop course offerings.

“We are delighted to provide this permanent gift for a program that offers such a diverse and engaging array of educational opportunities for older adults,” says Mary Bitterman, Osher Foundation president. “From thought-provoking courses such as ‘American Film History,’ ‘Classical Music Seminar’ and ‘Writing Fiction,’ to lectures, group activities and special events, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at the University has developed an outstanding curriculum that appeals to an ever-increasing and grateful membership.”

Founded in 1991 by a small group of lifelong learners dedicated to continuing education beyond retirement, the University’s ElderCollege was selected by the Osher Foundation to become an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute in March 2007 in recognition of its exceptional success as a member-directed learning-in-retirement organization. OLLI is one of 119 Osher institutes established since 2001 at such colleges and universities as University of California Berkeley, UC Davis, UCLA, Brandeis University, Duke, Northwestern, Rutgers, Tufts and Arizona State University.

Affectionately called OLLI by its more than 800 members, the University’s institute for older adult learners is guided by a volunteer board and sponsored by Extended Studies. OLLI is based off-campus at the University’s Warren Nelson Building in downtown Reno and, as part of an annual membership fee of $45, offers free non-credit educational programs to adults age 50 and over.

Fred Holman, vice provost for Extended Studies, says, “The generosity of the Osher Foundation Endowment ensures the continuation of a level of social engagement for our senior adults in the region that integrates volunteerism and self-development for years to come.”

According to Pat Zimmerman, who serves as past-president of the OLLI board of directors, programming has grown from 104 classes in spring 2006 to 252 classes in spring 2009, and membership has grown from about 300 members as ElderCollege in 2006 to more than 800 members today as an Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. Zimmerman is one of scores of local OLLI members who take an active role in curriculum development, leadership and daily planning and running of the organization.

Based in San Francisco, the Bernard Osher Foundation has supported higher education and the arts since its founding in 1977 by community leader Bernard Osher.

For more information about OLLI at the University of Nevada, Reno, visit www.olli.unr.edu or call (775) 784-8053.

Andrea Turman