University faculty and OLLI members strengthen community connections

At the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI), rich and diverse perspectives informed by many lifetimes of learning combine with the enthusiasm of community and faculty volunteers to bring immeasurable benefits to the University of Nevada, Reno and beyond.

“OLLI fosters connections among the cultural and educational institutions in the Reno area,” says James Mardock, Crowley Distinguished Professor of the Humanities and associate professor of English. “OLLI members go to everything from drama to football to architecture tours, and often they’re the driving force behind or enthusiastic volunteers at these events. Strengthening their connection to the University makes the University a hub for the creation of communal identity.”

That connection has indeed strengthened, as OLLI at the University has grown from 300 members in 2007 to more than 1,450 members today with support from The Bernard Osher Foundation, a dedicated and engaged core membership of the University who volunteer to teach at OLLI.

Joyce Starling, former OLLI board president and co-chair of the OLLI curriculum committee, says University faculty challenge and engage OLLI members, bringing high expectations to the classroom that are appreciated and met by students.

“University faculty set the bar high for us,” Starling says. “They expect us to be capable of a degree of excellence that makes the experience very rewarding. They respect us as an audience, and the respect and contributions are mutual.”

As the number of OLLI members has risen, so have the number and diversity of its classes. According to Starling, offerings have increased from 104 classes in spring 2006 to 360 in spring 2013. Basque studies, English, history, anthropology, biology, education, biochemistry and molecular biology, health sciences and theatre are among the many University departments and colleges whose faculty have brought their wisdom to OLLI over the years—wisdom that has been repaid, faculty say, with an enriching and rewarding teaching experience.

Crowley Distinguished Professor of the Humanities James Mardock takes a break from teaching “Remembering with Advantages: Henry V” with OLLI members Joyce Starling and Judith Cole.

“The life experiences of OLLI members lead to a different atmosphere in the classroom,” says Monica Grecu, English lecturer, emerita, who has taught at OLLI (formerly ElderCollege) since 1999. “The educational process gains the colors every instructor hopes to find in an amphitheater where ideas, truth and desire to share knowledge are truly appreciated.”

The mutual respect and exchange of ideas Grecu and Starling describe foster a stimulating learning environment for both teacher and student.

“Teaching at OLLI allows me to teach in a different way for a different audience, which helps me get a better grasp on the subjects,” says Grant Cramer, professor of biochemistry and molecular biology.

Just as OLLI members appreciate a vigorous intellectual exchange with University faculty inside and outside the classroom, faculty recognize the value of OLLI to themselves, to the University and to the community.

Founded in 1991 by a small group of lifelong learners dedicated to continuing education beyond retirement, the University’s ElderCollege was selected by The Bernard 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. Since 2007, OLLI at the University of Nevada, Reno has received three separate grants of $100,000 from the Osher Foundation, which have enabled the organization to increase membership, improve outreach and develop course offerings. In 2009, OLLI was awarded a $1 million endowment gift by The Bernard Osher Foundation for programming excellence and for demonstrating potential for long-term success and sustainability.

For more information, please visit www.olli.unr.edu or call (775) 784-8053. To learn more about supporting OLLI, please contact Donna Knotek ’12, (775) 682-5952 or dknotek@unr.edu.
Cooperative Extension teams up with USDA Risk Management Agency to help Nevada agriculture

University of Nevada Cooperative Extension is providing workshops for Nevada’s farmers and ranchers, with funding provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Risk Management Agency, helping producers manage their business risks through effective, market-based risk-management solutions. The workshops are aimed at preserving and strengthening the economic stability of Nevada’s agricultural producers. Cooperative Extension brings in experts from colleges across campus to help provide information on a variety of pertinent issues.

“There is great interest in assisting our agriculture industry,” says Staci Emm ’96 (journalism), Mineral County Extension educator, who has spearheaded many of these assistance programs in the state. “Nevadans know that our farmers and ranchers not only contribute to our economy, but can also provide us with a local, stable source for healthy, reliable foods.”

At an Aug. 20 workshop, presenters discussed the economic outlook for agricultural producers and provided information on financial assistance and how to mitigate risks during droughts and other challenges. An Aug. 12 workshop explained two new pieces of legislation that affect Nevada’s agricultural producers: AB206, the Cottage Foods legislation, clears the way for home cooks and farmers to make and sell up to $35,000 in products such as baked goods, jams, vinegars and more, without a commercial kitchen; while AB200, the Farm to Fork legislation, allows farmers to hold up to two dinners a month featuring their products without qualifying as food establishments.

Cooperative Extension continues to offer similar workshops throughout the state via videoconference. Call (775) 784-7070 or visit www.unce.unr.edu.

—Claudene Wharton ’86, ’99M.A.

KUNR celebrates 50 years on the air

On Oct. 7, 1963, students and staff heard the first-ever KUNR broadcast. Just 15 minutes long, this broadcast recognized the many individuals who had come together to bring the vision of a public radio station to life on the University campus.

A few minutes of classical music brought the broadcast to an end, but it was just the beginning for KUNR. For 50 years now, broadcasts on KUNR—Reno Public Radio—have informed and engaged audiences with timely, relevant and high quality news, information and entertainment programming. Today, KUNR covers the issues of relevance for upwards of 45,000 listeners in 20 communities throughout northern Nevada and northeastern California.

As public radio stations emerged on college campuses, University President Charles Armstrong received approval from the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents in June 1962 for a 10-watt FM radio station. The first studio was located in Church Fine Arts, with the transmitter on the roof directly above. Mary Robins English, KUNR’s first station manager, commented on the station she literally helped build from boxes of radio equipment: “We had to climb a rope ladder just to access the station, which was in a loft.”

With a listening radius of just 13 miles, broadcast was limited from 3:45-11 p.m. each day, in part due to the station’s limited record collection. The Federal Communications Commission granted KUNR an increase in power to 1,000 watts in 1969, and with a new transmitter installed atop Nye Hall, the listening area greatly expanded. In 1981, KUNR became an affiliate of NPR and a full-service public radio station eligible for Corporation for Public Broadcasting funds. KUNR simultaneously became an outreach service of the University system, which holds KUNR’s license.

To learn more about supporting KUNR, please visit www.kunr.org.

—By Stefanie Givens, director of development, 88.7 Reno Public Radio