

ENGAGING Lives



Engagement has no age limits. It's a commitment to improving the quality of life of individuals and entire communities, expressed by people of all ages and in all strata of society who rise to the call to action. Among those who enjoy the rewards of service are retirees who could be enjoying quiet lives of ease and relaxation, but instead choose to roll up their sleeves and plunge into volunteer duties.

Seeing them in action gives Cal State Fullerton students life lessons as they benefit from the direct services of this cadre of retirees who have become part of the University. They are members of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, otherwise known as OLLI – one of 118 such institutes that are housed on university campuses throughout the United States.

At Cal State Fullerton, OLLI has its roots in the Continuing Learning Experience program established in 1979 by 47 retirees who came together to enjoy lectures, seminars and field trips spanning an eclectic mix of subjects. Even at the beginning, these members were prepared to work: They raised all of the funds to construct the Ruby Gerontology Center, the first facility on campus to be built entirely through private funds. Most recently, the program entered a new phase with a new name after the Bernard Osher Foundation made two \$1 million endowment gifts in 2006 and 2012, and invited the organization to join the national network of OLLIs.

The organization's long-range planning in 2009 considered research that emphasizes the healthful benefits to seniors of volunteering, as well as the stresses being placed on the California State University system as a result of statewide budget cuts.

Demonstrating the ethic of service and engagement imprinted on their generation when President John F. Kennedy urged them to "ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," the members went to work identifying ways to get plugged in to classrooms. The resulting CSUF-OLLI Collaboration plan was launched in 2010 to tap into OLLI members' skills and knowledge in order to enhance students' university experience.

OLLI worked with each of the colleges to identify collaboration opportunities. Many members brought insider knowledge as former Cal State Fullerton administrators, faculty or staff, but



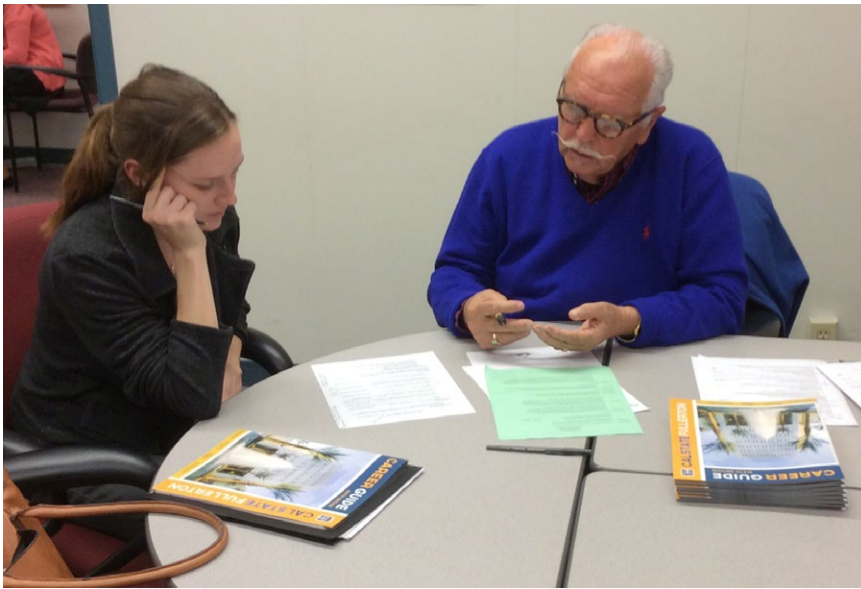
OLLI tutors such as Betty Elsing-Bard spend two to four hours per session once or twice a week with students in the School of Nursing, College of Natural Sciences and Mathematics or the College of Education. Results show the benefits of one-on-one interaction. In one example, a student with six failed attempts on a standard test required for entry into the graduate program passed on her next try after working with an OLLI tutor. In another case, after working with her tutor, a nursing student who had feared she would fail her class raised her grade to an A.

the OLLI ranks also represent a gamut of professions – from teaching and business to aerospace and marketing. They keep their skills sharp by sharing them with students, while students benefit from the additional coaching, mentoring or study sessions they receive from OLLI members.

Responding to the calls for collaboration, OLLI members report for duty as guest lecturers, coaches, mentors, panelists, research subjects, business consultants and more. By 2013, the collaboration had grown to about 200 members in more than 400 activities per year,

ranging from filling out a research study questionnaire to semester-length tutoring and mentoring projects.

Retirees join OLLI seeking the stimulation and enrichment of continued learning, but participants in the collaboration have found it equally compelling to give something back and share their wisdom with young people. School of Nursing Professor Christine



OLLI consultants such as retired school principal John Blaydes work with students to help them create effective résumés, business plans, marketing strategies and research proposals. In addition to critiques of materials they draft for review, students receive invaluable introductions and personal connections. In one case, a student's impressive résumé garnered a referral and lead for a prospective job. In other consultancies, OLLI members judged an exhibit of student science projects; contributed to plans for a bioengineering program in the College of Engineering and Computer Science; and worked with a graduate student to develop a statistical analysis plan for a class about marketing to people aged 50+.



OLLI study participants advance the work of faculty and graduate students in departments and centers that conduct research on lifespan wellness, fall prevention, fibromyalgia, and various physical and psychological effects of aging. OLLI member Bonnie Harrington is shown testing new technology for graduate student Eric Murine's research project for Dr. Laura Zettel-Watson's psychology course.

Latham wrote, "Our observations are that the OLLI tutors are especially helpful because they are patient and respectful in their sessions with students. They are true advocates for our students, in that they are willing to listen and coach students with professional writing skills, not editing, of their papers." One of Dr. Latham's students wrote about the tutors: "They are great. I would not have passed my class without this."

The example that OLLI members set for students highlights the rewards of persistence in education, achievement in work, remaining curious and intellectually stimulated in retirement, and maintaining a sense of engagement with the community throughout their lives. In tutoring relationships, the age differences between the OLLI member and the student can disappear. As health science major Aveena Savongsy said, "I actually think that working with an older person who has more experience is great. They know how to deal with students' problems and how to teach." After seeking tutoring help from OLLI member Gordon Owens for her chemistry course, Aveena turned her grade around and earned a B.

As part of the OLLI-CSUF Collaboration, these volunteers are doing much more than helping students prepare for exams, pass courses, or draft résumés. In tapping into their accumulated wisdom and experience to connect with students, lecture to classes, and advance clinical research about healthy aging, they are exercising the muscles of engagement that they have strengthened over their active lifetimes and passing their knowledge along to the next generation. They are rewarded by grateful students and faculty members, and by the knowledge that they are helping to create the community of the future.

OLLI members are proving the adage that "those who give, also receive." And that is a valuable life lesson for all of us, no matter how old we are.



OLLI members' life experiences provide rich context for courses across many colleges and departments. Retired counselor Ron Pierre's personal experiences about growing up in the segregated South resonate with Professor Karen Wong's Sociology 101 students, who are studying the effects of racism and socio-economic differences on life and career success. In other instances, students studying oral history, gerontology, marketing and related subjects have gained insight from the life experiences shared by OLLI members.



OLLI career panels provide students in many disciplines with the chance to explore industries they are considering for their future careers. The chance to ask what to expect or how to prepare for a career is invaluable to students considering such fields as insurance, counseling, teaching, software project management or real estate. Panelists Ron Osajima, David Jeng and Janet Jeng spoke to students in Dr. Susan Cadwallader's "Marketing to 50+ Consumers" course about how to reach their generation with messages that translate to purchasing decisions.