

Lifelong Learning Institute

FALL 2023 *Newsletter*



Northern Illinois University

LLI@niu.edu

Musings

Carol Zar

Steering Committee Chair (Retired)

I've written many letters for the LLI newsletter, but this one is probably the hardest that I've ever had to write. LLI is facing several critical challenges. First, this past spring term LLI had fewer than 50 participants. Last fall, we only had about 70. These numbers are about half of our typical enrollments prior to COVID-19. We expected that our numbers would be lower when we started back to in-person programming. But, at this rate, our LLI program may not be sustainable. Getting our enrollment numbers back to where they were is crucial if LLI is to remain viable.

Our second challenge is the need for new leadership. I have stepped down after more than 10 years as the chair of the Steering Committee. Others who have served as committee chairs for a number of years also want to step down. However, we have been unsuccessful in recruiting new leadership.

LLI is, and has always been, a volunteer-led group with only administrative backup coming from the university. Our conveners have all been volunteers as well. This is by design. But, unless some folks step up and agree to serve on and chair our various committees, most notably the Curriculum Committee and the Steering Committee, LLI will not be able to continue in its present format.

Over the summer, a small group has been meeting to brainstorm how best to move forward. We will spend some time during the fall term talking with you about our ideas. If you have suggestions, or if you are willing

to be a part of our leadership group, please contact Pat Vary, who has agreed to chair our Steering Committee on a temporary basis. I am also available to talk to anyone who wants more information.

The good news is that there will be an interesting fall term and probably a winter term on Zoom. What happens over the next few months will determine whether we are able to move forward beyond that.

On a personal note, I want to thank all of our members who have given so much time and energy to making LLI what it is. I won't mention names for fear of forgetting someone. Out curriculum chairs and committee members who over the years have recruited conveners have done a terrific job in finding and encouraging those vital folk.

Our many conveners who have offered classes on diverse topics are the lifeblood of LLI. Without them, there would be no program. The folks who have served on the steering committee with me have helped chart the course for LLI and kept it moving along as we've adapted to changes in our NIU staff liaisons. To all these people, I send a huge expression of gratitude: Thank you!

Finally, thank you to all for your loyalty to LLI and to the friendship you have shown me. I intend to continue taking classes and will see you in class in the fall.

— Carol

Treasuring Art and Asia

Richard Cooler grew up in the small town of Waltersboro, South Carolina, an hour's drive from both Charleston and Savannah, where his family roots go back nine generations to an ancestral land grant from King George III. A less distant ancestor, a great-grandfather who was a Protestant minister, had an interest in world religions and a substantial personal library that reflected it.

Upon his passing, young Richard inherited that library, and there's little doubt that those volumes strongly influenced his interests as well. One early example: A class presentation on the "Hindoo" religion, given in sixth grade, earned Richard the nickname "the guru of grammar school," a term of endearment coined by his teacher. In some ways it marked a starting point for a lifelong interest in the arts and cultures of other lands, most importantly those of southeast Asia.

After high school, Richard enrolled at the University of North Carolina, his mother's alma mater, where he earned a B.A. in anthropology. From there he went on to Cornell University where he completed a Ph.D. in Asian art and subsequently accepted a faculty position in the NIU School of Art.

At NIU, his scholarship, research, and flair for informative and insightful lectures put him on a steady track to the rank of full professor. At his retirement, Richard's professional accomplishments included being director of the Center for Burma Studies, curator of the Burma Art Collection at the NIU Art Museum, editor of the *Journal of Burma Studies*, and, in more recent years, an adjunct professor at the University of Chicago for nearly a decade.

Though he's traveled the world and experienced many different cultures, our local area has remained Richard's anchor these past 53 years. He and his wife, Thecla, live in a beautifully restored Victorian Italianate home in Sycamore, surrounded by artifacts reflecting their travels and interests.

LLI members will be the beneficiaries of this proximity, because this fall Richard will convene a four-week LLI course entitled "National Treasures: Revered, Stolen, Returned, Preserved". Drawing upon his extensive



In 1974, at the Royal Palace in Luang Prabang, Laos, Richard Cooler (front) examines an artifact with Prince Manivong, who was slated to become king but who was later assassinated by the communists.

experience in these areas, he plans to incorporate details about international law, diplomatic relationships with other countries, and fascinating stories from his personal involvement with one particular case in which Sotheby's Auction House suspected an item being offered for sale might indeed have been stolen.

When asked what he hoped participants would take away from his forthcoming presentation, Richard paused for a few moments and then replied, "Well, first of all there's the matter of what 'national treasures' actually are. But once defined, I hope everyone will come away appreciating the importance of protecting and of conserving them." This class promises to be a unique and entertaining experience. So please join Richard as he pulls back the curtain to reveal aspects of the art world that we never knew existed.

— Brad Pietens

And The Answer Is...

Why did you join LLI? Over the years, the number one answer consistently has been that a friend introduced you. In Carol Zar's Page 1 column, you read about the membership issues LLI faces. So now is an important time to invite your friends to join LLI. You are always welcome to bring a guest to a class to convince them that they should join us.

While not each of us could convene a study group, each of us could introduce a friend to LLI. Be that friend today. It's as easy as sending a note about our fall program along with this link: go.niu.edu/lli

Notes on Upcoming Notables

As always, our weekly fall Notables talks cover diverse topics. Public health specialist Lynn Herrmann tells us about the questionable influences of social media on our health behaviors. Interdisciplinary health school chair Paul Priester helps us understand why addiction is a disease. Physicist Mike Eads explains the physics of football. Artificial intelligence, an increasing concern for many, is the topic for Andrea Guzman. Local distiller Jamie Walter explains the how and why of making whiskey in the cornfields. Educational philosopher Kerry Burch concentrates on Thomas Jefferson's mixed legacy. And there's more!

So join us 1 p.m. Wednesday afternoons. Everyone is welcome, even if you didn't sign up for the Notables class—and guests are always welcome at Notables. It's a great way to introduce a friend to LLI.

Feast on LLI's Fall Menu

Italian Civilization of the Late Renaissance (8 weeks)

Christopher Nissen
Enjoy Michelangelo, Titian, Veronese, Galileo, others.

What's New in DeKalb (3 weeks)

LLI members
Hear about Willrett Flower, Byers Brewing, cybersecurity.

20th Century Philosophy and Its Major Conflicts: Ludwig Wittgenstein and Carl Popper (4 weeks)

Richard Downen
Learn about life, times and conflicts of two major philosophers.

Islam 101 (4 weeks)

Mohammad Labadi
Focus on history, cultures, core beliefs, Islam and Western World.

Notables (8 weeks)

LLI Notables Committee
Listen to experts on topics from addiction to football.

International Art Treasures: Revered, Discarded, Looted, Returned (4 weeks)

Richard Cooler
Look at complicated issues of stolen art and repatriation.

Spanish Language (5 weeks)

Jan Modloff
Practice and learn Spanish, whatever your level.

Potpourri (1 week each)

Illustrations of Homer, Dante and More

Marilyn Brusherd
Examine life and works of English artist John Flaxman.

Interpreting Disney's Movie "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs"

Tom Roberts
Take a psychedelic, psychological look at the classic movie.

Deception in World War II

Dan Dillman
Hear about the Ghost Army of WW II and other secret tactics.

How Sweet It Was!

The weather, the company and the food were all great for our June Soiree party and fundraiser. Thanks to all who brought an hors d'oeuvre or dessert to share. Special thanks to Linda and Brad Pietens for opening their home to LLI members and guests.



In Memoriam

Joe Grush
Chris Guhl
Pat Suchner
Luz Van Cromphout

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

LLI Fall 2023 Sept. 12 - Nov. 2
LLI Winter 2024 Jan. 16 - Feb. 8
LLI Spring 2024 March 19 - May 9