

Under the Gunn – A CFS Update

by David Langdon

OLLI College for Seniors (CFS) program manager Herb Gunn offers a program update with a twinkle in his eye as he says, “We actually ‘ride’ the CFS program rather than ‘run’ it.” College for Seniors, he explains, is actually ‘run’ by those who volunteer on its 11 curriculum committees. Herb and program assistant Pascale Couturier-Armstrong shared some exciting new CFS opportunities.

Partnerships are a growing part of the College for Seniors program. Partners offer OLLI an opportunity to expand course offerings while alleviating space and parking issues. For instance, our relationship with the Woodfin YMCA has allowed us to hold fitness classes in a facility better designed for them. Other partnerships include Harvest House, an Asheville Parks and Recreation facility in the Kenilworth neighborhood, where CFS now offers a pottery class. There is a new class this spring at the Purple Crayon artist studio as well as several hiking classes that also take place off campus. The hope is that these partnerships will expand OLLI course offerings and member options.

The conversation about College for Seniors then turned to course popularity, demand and registration. OLLI’s priority-based computer registration system allows for a more fair and equitable distribution of classes and participants. There has been a learning curve to understand how to successfully select classes, but it has been effective at OLLI. A growing membership population, space constraints and strong demand for quality classes often create the case for a member missing second and third class options because classes are “spread thin” due to their popularity. Herb says it can be frustrating, “but it is a good problem to have” at one of the country’s most popular lifelong learning facilities. Instructors will sometimes offer to add a second section if demand warrants. This spring there are 110 courses being taken by 1,129 members.

Conversation shifted to the popularity of the themed class sessions here. Last spring there were 24 classes that dealt in some way with “Race in Black and White.” The themed sessions were developed to facilitate conversations among members and others about race. The 2019 fall themed classes on “Appalachia” already received 26 course proposals. Classes will focus on Appalachian culture, race, religion and geography. These classes will be in addition to the regular course offerings.

Pascale recently joined Herb as assistant program director to share duties and become more involved with the CFS Class Reps program and CFS curriculum committees. At a recent training session Pascale facilitated many of the committee details of working as instructor support. She is beginning to circulate among the 11 curriculum committees to better understand their role in developing highly regarded classes.

What’s ahead for the College for Seniors? Rest assured it will be interesting, designed to make maximum use of our Reuter Center facility and involve our resourceful membership. Clearly, no one is “Under the Gunn” in the CFS program, but Herb and Pascale and our CFS volunteers are leading us into an exciting future.