Snazzy Fall Catalog Linked to New Registration System

By Byron Gottfried, Osher Board Member

By now, you’ve undoubtedly received your Fall 2013 catalog, and you’re probably impressed with its new organization and professional appearance. As Osher President Jan Davis recently remarked, “The quality of our catalog now matches the quality of our courses.”

The information in the catalog comes from a comprehensive database that is a part of our newly acquired online class registration system. As a result, we were able to create this beautiful catalog for a significantly lower per-copy cost than before. Jan Davis and the office staff deserve our sincere appreciation for their hard work in bringing this about.

In the future, the catalog will be posted online for easy access. Most other Osher Institutes around the country find that online registration is preferred once it is made available. However, everyone will still receive a printed copy in the mail, so if you don’t have a computer or you’re not thrilled with the online experience, you can continue to view the catalog and select classes in the same manner as in the past.

Looking beyond the newly designed catalog, we plan to begin using the new registration system for the Winter 2014 term. In addition to class registration, you will be able to sign up for trips and special events using this system. You’ll be able to select your classes individually and receive an

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Photograph by Erica Dilcer, a freelancer assigned by University Communications Design & Photography

Where was Gandalf? (See page 10)
From the President

By Jan Davis

By the time you receive this newsletter you will have sent in your registration form from our newly designed catalog. We are excited to have this new look complement the wonderful courses offered this fall. Our online registration system required that we export the course information into a different template, and we therefore had this opportunity to change the design and cut costs! Yes, this new full-color catalog cost less to print than the previous catalog.

This year we welcome the wisdom and guidance of five new board members: Rhoda Eligator, Joseph Scorpion, Alan James, Errol Miller, and Anna Estop. They bring a wide variety of interests and accomplishments to our leadership.

*Rhoda Eligator* has been a member since 1999. She has generously agreed to chair our Membership Committee and has begun to plan a picnic scheduled for September 7. Rhoda has a B.A. from Wellesley College and M.S. degrees in child development and social work from Pitt. She has taught grade school in Billerica, Massachusetts, and GED courses to U.S. servicemen in France. She has also worked as a researcher, a social work intern, and a therapist.

*Alan James* Retired from California University Alumni Board, a volunteer at the Heinz History Center, a narrator for the Carnegie Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, and a consultant with the Executive Service Corp. of the Robert Morris University Bayer Institute for Non-Profit Management. He has been an Osher member since 2009.

*Anna Estop* has been a member of our Curriculum Committee for several years. Dr. Estop is a clinical laboratory geneticist. She also has experience in research and teaching as a professor at the University of Barcelona, the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health, and Drexel University School of Medicine. She continues to publish in the field of human genetics, teach yearly in Barcelona, and serve as a cytogenetics consultant.

*Joe Scorpion* has been a member of A.L.L./Osher for over 20 years. He has served as administrative director, president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. He currently chairs one of the Mailing Committees and is a member of the Newsletter and Curriculum Committees. Joe retired after 35 years with the Allegheny County Health Department, where he was deputy director of the Bureau of Medical Services. He remains very active in retirement.

*Errol Miller* is a graduate of Dartmouth College and Harvard Law School. He has practiced law for over 45 years and for the last 30 years has been involved in the legal problems of estate planning and estate administration. Since 2008 he has taught the Osher at CMU courses “Estate Planning” and “Questioning the Criminal Justice System” and a course on torts. He has been the principal writer of the Allegheny County Bar Association’s topical satirical review for 27 years.

The Executive Committee is pleased to work with such a dedicated, enthusiastic and talented team. I look forward to working with them all.
Osher Annual Meeting Combines Business and Pleasure

The lush plantings of Phipps Conservatory greeted a record number of Osher members attending the 21st Annual Meeting on Thursday, April 25. The gathering began with a tasty buffet lunch.

There were many thank-yous. During the business meeting, both veterans and new recruits were recognized. Past presidents and new members attending were introduced and applauded. President Jan Davis thanked Curriculum Committee Chair Sally Cohen for her long and continuing service and thanked retiring board members Alan Ackerman, Ann Austin, Secretary Gloria Bodek, and Alan Colker for their service. Chris Dashti and Kalyani Kedarnath, who joined the office staff during the past year, were introduced. Joe Shirk was applauded for his fine photography and for organizing the event.

In recognition of CMU support for Osher, Thank-You Awards were announced for the School of Computer Science and the School of Music. Catherine Copetas, assistant dean, industrial relations, and director of special events, who has been very helpful to Osher, could not attend. Monique Mead, violinist, educator, and study leader, accepted on behalf of Denis Colwell, head of the School of Music. A gift to the Libraries was made in honor of Gloriana St. Clair. She is retiring this summer but will continue to serve as a member of the Osher board and Executive Committee and as liaison with the university.

Nominating Committee Chair Betsy Martin presented a motion, quickly approved, to elect officers and new members of the Board of Directors: officers Jan Davis, president; Joe Shirk, vice president; Gloriana St. Clair, secretary; and Fritz Okie, treasurer. New board members Rhoda Eligator, who will chair the Membership Committee; Ann Estop, Alan James, Errol Miller, and Joe Scorpion.

A delightful performance by the C Street Brass with Monique Mead followed the business meeting.

Rosalyn Treger
A New Look: Changing with the Times

By Sally Cohen, Curriculum Committee Chair

You may be noticing changes at Osher at CMU, and we’d like to formally introduce them to you in this issue.

The board, Curriculum Committee, and office staff have thought a lot about how to make these changes without causing too much inconvenience—especially when the same procedures have existed for a long time. We intend to create more options, not fewer.

For starters, we have a new catalog. At first glance, it certainly is attractive, and most people feel it is something we can show off with pride. It presents clear course descriptions and has familiar details that we have had in previous catalogs.

More Courses, Evening Classes, More Locations

We’ve always tried to introduce changes in the curriculum. We work hard to offer new course topics and new study leaders who stimulate Osher students and provide some excitement and surprise as they select courses. In addition, we now have early evening courses that are pleasing to members who are still working and courses that meet just once to give people an in-depth view of a specific aspect of a topic. The number of courses continues to increase (most terms have well over 100 offerings!) and make it necessary to expand into class space off campus. Osher students and study leaders have become accustomed to getting to and enjoying these classes that now are in a variety of locations.

Online Information and Payment Option

Osher members will continue to receive a catalog and be able to register by mail or in person at the office. However, our website is being used more and more by people who are curious and want to learn about our program as well as by study leaders and students who are computer savvy. Catalog information, as well as material about trips and events, can be found here. In the very near future, total online registration will be available with credit card or check.

Our Administrative Offices

The office itself has a new look—space-wise and staff-wise, and although members may be surprised by these changes initially, the setting is gradually becoming more familiar and we are trying to be responsive to people’s needs.

Necessity to Adapt

We cannot escape the role that the digital world plays in our lives today. It affects the speed with which we do things, as well as the cost of what we do—in energy, display, promotion, and dollars. Osher programs around the country are adapting to this digital environment. It is important to realize that we are not creating a brand new program, we are simply enhancing the program we have. We will not give up the aspects of doing things that are “non-digital.” Rather, it makes sense to do things more than one way.

Let Us Know What You Think

We have prided ourselves in maintaining a high level of intellectually stimulating programming that touches all aspects of life, and we will continue to do so.

However, as often happens with new approaches, tweaks may be made in the future. So we want to get ideas from Osher members about what works well, what should be changed, and in what way. Please let us know if these changes are helping you.
A Day in the World of the Amish
By Joan Morse Gordon

Remember when Julie Andrews as Queen Guinevere in Camelot asked King Arthur, “What do the simple folk do?” Assuredly she wasn’t asking about the “world’s largest Amish community” that our Osher bus tour visited in eastern Ohio on May 30. Ably led and fed by Roz Sherman, we first encountered the simple folk when an Amish man prodding his pig on the road slowed down our powerful bus.

Covering five counties, with Holmes County as its hub, things Amish pervade the air. Signs for quilts, cheese, wine, chocolate, furniture, and buggy rides pepper the road along which we see neat white farmsteads devoid of overhead electric wires. And black buggies in lieu of cars. Farms with cars and electricity could belong to Mennonites, who live alongside their Anabaptist brethren, but who live more “within the world.”

Amish sects define the Ordnung, the set of rules that governs most aspects of Amish life.

The Amish have no churches but hold services in each other’s homes. The backless wooden benches have folding legs and are transported in a special cart from house to house on Sundays. There’s been a pattern over the years of Amish moving over to the more liberal Mennonite church. Most of our guides were Mennonites, as were the owners of the major attractions we visited. Apparently heavy commercialism and orthodox Amish Ordnung are at odds.

Yoder’s Amish Farm afforded us the opportunity to visit inside an Amish home; delight in viewing baby goats, calves, colts, and other newborns in the barn; and then experience a buggy ride. The setting was spacious and tranquil, but on questioning the Mennonite guide, I learned that Mr. Yoder (an omnipresent Amish name) was not Amish. His parents were, but he did not join the church.

At Mrs. Yoder’s (yet another) Kitchen, in Mt. Hope, the buffet lunch was delicious. The salad bar included red and yellow hard-boiled eggs. Our tour also featured a visit to Lehman’s store, famous for unusual Amish products, visits to the Behalt Amish and Mennonite Heritage Center and the South Trail Parochial School, and finally, a stop at the bountiful Walnut Creek Cheese Shop, which provided a box dinner of Amish and local delicacies for the way home.

Getting back to our original question. Some of the simple folk do precisely what they’ve been doing for hundreds of years, and others have made minor adjustments to today’s world, while juggling the old and the new.

Joan Morse Gordon is a member of Osher and the author of The Road Taken: a Journey in Time down Pennsylvania Route 45, published by the Local History Company, in which she writes about Centre County Amish.
My Favorite Osher Course: It’s All About the Characters
By Gail Ditkoff

What happens when approximately two dozen CMU Osher members, including a lawyer, an engineer, several English teachers, medical doctors, published authors, psychologists, and people with a wide array of other backgrounds come together to talk about some of the most outstanding novels ever written? Invigorating discussion ensues! This is exactly what happens every other week, in the course “Great and Notable Novels Read and Revisited.”

During the three terms I’ve participated in this course, reading lists have evolved from novels that have stood the test of time, as well as notable contemporary novels that are good candidates. A book committee, consisting of Helen-Faye Rosenblum, Jane Purifoy, Thomas Lazaroff, Martha Brown, and Mary Schinhofen, constructs the reading list after eliciting input from everyone. We dissect one novel per class, after having two weeks to read each book. A discussion leader, who has volunteered at the beginning of the term, generally begins with a brief biography of the author, and then we examine themes, characters, and writing style.

Among the many novels we’ve read I’ve found these to be the most memorable: Tolkien’s The Hobbit, Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment, Pasternak’s Doctor Zhivago, Donoghue’s Room, Erdrich’s The Round House, and Faulkner’s Light in August—plus the two I researched and led—Heinlein’s Stranger in a Strange Land and Cary’s The Horse’s Mouth. Leading a discussion is intellectually stimulating, challenging, and fun.

I’ve met for the first time, or been reintroduced to, many characters. There’s five-year-old Jack, who has spent his entire life in a single room. And Gully Jimson, a gifted artist but a selfish and erratic man. And Zhivago who, when I first met him—I was probably in my teens—was a handsome and dashing figure (of course he looked just like Omar Sharif!). Somehow, upon our reintroduction some 50 years later, Zhivago has morphed into a much more complex, conflicted and sometimes pitiful figure.

What motivates us to return to this course term after term? For me, it’s the amazing individuals I’ve met here both on paper and in the flesh.

Gail Ditkoff, Ph.D, professor of psychology emeritus, leads courses in her field at our program. She is a dog rescue volunteer and loves textile arts.
Our Osher Classrooms

True Confessions
Of a Tree Killer
By Leslie Evans

After taking Susan Parker’s course, “Have You Hugged a Tree? Have You Killed a Tree?” I now realize my husband has killed at least two in our brief three-year landscaping efforts. At least now I know why!

Even if you don’t have marital squabbles over landscaping, Susan’s practical advice for do-it-yourself arborists can prevent a lot of landscape mistakes. And she does so with a terrific slide show that tells you how to do things right. Here are some of the hints I gathered to give to my husband.

At the Nursery
1. Select a tree with good shape and good root system—with consideration for bark, bird habitat, blossoms, height and spread, growth rate, light, shade, and hardiness for your zone.
2. Avoid buying a tree that splits into two or more branches; select one with a single strong stem.
3. Never pick up a tree by its trunk. Use the rootball.
4. Get advice on how much to water the tree.
5. Ask whether you should stake it and how long.

Mulching Under the Tree
1. Don’t scalp your tree roots with your lawn mower. It damages and can kill the tree! You can raise newer lawn mowers up to four inches—which also stifles the weeds better; less sun means less growth.
2. Save your pine needles; they make superb mulch for azaleas.
3. Use a soil test kit every year or so to see if you need to add nitrogen to the soil around your trees.
4. Do not use peat moss or topsoil as mulch.

Pruning
1. If a branch is not cut properly, it may destroy the tree. Angles and pre-cuts are important.
2. Don’t take more than 25% of the foliage off the tree while pruning.
3. Cut back old prunings to green (living) wood. Leave completely dead branches to fall off on their own. Cutting dead wood can cause rot to spread into the live tree and cause damage.
Claire Messud’s elegant new novel, *The Woman Upstairs*, opens with surprisingly obscene invective, and ends with enraged determination. During the five-year flashback spanning those two poles, furious protagonist/narrator Nora Eldridge carries the reader through an intricate awakening, much of which takes place within the confines of her own coolly analytical brain. Literary allusions abound, beginning with the most basic: this is *Nora*, after all. A successful third-grade teacher by day, she is also an unfulfilled artist whose creative output consists of miniature dioramas—*dollhouses*!—representing the dwellings of such idealized feminist icons as Virginia Woolf, Emily Dickinson, Alice Neel. Nora is *The Woman Upstairs*. Who?

“We’re not the madwomen in the attic. . . . We’re the quiet woman at the end of the third-floor hallway, whose trash is always tidy, who smiles brightly in the stairwell with a cheerful greeting, and who, from behind closed doors, never makes a sound. In our lives of quiet desperation, the woman upstairs is who we are. . . . We’re completely invisible. I thought it wasn’t true, not true of me, but I’ve learned I am no different at all. The question now is how to work it, how to use that invisibility, to make it burn.”

So: You think we’re looking at a static slog of a novel, do you, all brain, little action and less heart? Well, think again. Working with a limited cast, the most rarefied of environments, and the threadiest of plots, Claire Messud has created a universe of engagement, a constellation whose every nook and cranny sets up an invitation to keep turning the pages and parsing the intimations of intimacy or doom.

The core of the narrative begins with the arrival of the boy, Reza Shahid, in Nora’s third-grade classroom. In fact, teacher and student have encountered one another by chance one week previously in a supermarket, in an incident involving apples. A foretaste of lost Eden? Perhaps, but, in the very human and light-hearted moment, what Nora receives is a first impression of Reza that lingers through the years: “He glows in my mind’s eye, eight years old and a canonical boy, a child from a fairy tale.”

Reza has arrived in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from his home in Paris because his father, the Lebanese-born historian and ethicist Skandar Shahid, has accepted a year-long resident fellowship at Harvard. Reza’s mother, Italian-born Sirena, is an installation artist on the cusp of international stardom. In short order, collectively and individually, this small and bountifully gifted family captivates Nora. Her own life, previously circumscribed by her job, her dutiful visits to her elderly father and aunt, and her frustrated forays into her dollhouse art, suddenly springs into fresh vivacity, as she enters a complexity of relationships with these exotic newcomers.

Validated by Sirena’s acceptance of her as a legitimate artist, Nora swiftly accepts an offer to share studio space with her. Friendship develops over tea, 

*every work of fiction is a coming-of-age story, regardless of the chronology of the character in question, as long as a quest has been met and someone experiences self-realization.*

What was private? What was sacred? What was friendship? What was love? What was unadulterated artistic opportunism?
conversation, and the mutual silences of simultaneous creativity. Breaching many of the boundaries of student/teacher relations, Nora soon volunteers to act as occasional, unpaid babysitter to the adored Reza, the embodiment of the child she would never have. She relishes his progress as he assimilates into the American classroom, maintaining all the while the irresistible beauty of face and spirit that enchanted her so thoroughly at the outset.

Nora and the little family of three break bread together. Her infatuation—love? knows few bounds. After her evenings of babysitting with Reza, she walks home accompanied by Skandar, the two enjoying philosophical conversations about Skandar’s professional pursuits and his personal, geo-political concerns. Nora, meanwhile, adds romantic fantasies to the mix, fantasies that remain deeply private until one evening when events turn in a fresh direction.

Rather precipitously, or so it seems from Nora’s questionably reliable point of view, the entire Shahid family will decamp. Sirena will have made the contacts that propel her career into the international prominence she has craved. Skandar will conclude his American tenure. The darling Reza will return with his parents to Paris, where he will proceed to adolesce in the language most familiar to him.

By grace of a financial windfall, and having endured a painfully measured passage of time, Nora will, at long last, betake herself to Paris, anticipating . . . what? The ultimate renewal of the exhilarating interim she spent with the Shahids? An affirmation that the form-world she spun around their relationships was as real to them as it was to her? An invitation to become more the participant, less the observer, to share once again in the dailiness of their lives, to put an end, once and for all, to the invisibility of herself as the Woman Upstairs?

Instead, what Nora, a most private person, finds in the high-tech center of Sirena’s most public installation art, is a most public betrayal of her own most intimate moments, throwing into grotesquely painful question every assumption she had ever held about the contours of her multifarious relationships with this once-cherished family. What was private? What was sacred? What was friendship? What was love? What was unadulterated artistic opportunism?

It has been said that every work of fiction is a coming-of-age story, regardless of the chronology of the character in question, as long as a quest has been met and someone experiences self-realization. Nora has, indeed, grown into someone larger and more potent than the meek, self-effacing Woman Upstairs she has proclaimed herself to be. And Claire Messud has turned her own fine, poetic prose and spot-on insights into an audacious novel that violates many expectations of driving action and peaceful outcome to give the reader a character with an inner life and a possible future that take hold of the imagination and won’t let go.

Anticipating . . . what? The ultimate renewal of the exhilarating interim she spent with the Shahids? An affirmation that the form-world she spun around their relationships was as real to them as it was to her?
The bad news is that Carnegie Mellon is losing the dean of University Libraries, Gloriana St. Clair, who retires June 30. The good news is that she remains on campus at the Roger Sorrells Engineering & Science Library working on a research project.

On May 1 Carnegie Mellon professors, administrators, associates, and friends gathered in the Posner Center to honor and thank her for her achievements during her tenure. Formalities began with the appearance at the speaker's stand of a tall, bearded man dressed in a dark brown woodsman-like suit, wearing a brown, high-pointed, wide-brimmed floppy hat. (Tolkien is a favorite author of Gloriana's; thus Gandalf, of Hobbit and Lord of the Rings fame, came to her party.)

Many CMU luminaries attended: Associate Dean of the Libraries Erika Linke, Circulation Supervisor Ona Taylor, Head of Acquisitions Denise Novak, Distinguished Professor of the Language Technology Institute at CMU Michael Shamus, Trustee and Hunt heir Tod Hunt, Provost Mark Kamlet, and CMU President Jared Cohon.

Gloriana was described as the first Hunt Library dean who was more than management; she showed leadership in the community and outside the university. She was described as kind, creative, whimsical, and one who seized opportunities—a great communicator. She was highly and frequently praised for the successful digitization of millions of books. Enlisted partners were China, Egypt, India, and Qatar.

During her tenure, it was said, the Hunt Library progressed from its traditional character into a 21st century facility. She became a graceful change agent and leader. The library became a student-friendly study space, which includes the Maggie Murph Café. (Note: along with the many kudos for the digitization accomplishments, the Maggie Murph Café received frequent compliments.) The Posner family rare book collection piqued her interest, and she worked with donors for the building of the Posner Center on campus, which contains the collection.

Gloriana thanked everyone for attending the fete and for the many gracious comments made. She said the support and assistance of many people made her achievements possible.

Osher members can be confident that her participation will continue. She is currently serving as secretary on the board and will be a study leader in the fall term.

New Online Registration
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immediate online confirmation for each class. If you don’t have access to a computer, you can stop in the Osher office and register online using our computer.

A registration schedule will be put in place so that everyone has equal access to all classes. We plan to continue using a lottery for those classes that are likely to be oversubscribed based upon our past experiences.

We plan to offer brief training sessions on campus this fall, prior to the actual implementation. More detailed information will be provided as the time grows nearer.

Eventually, we expect that the adoption of this new system will enhance the Osher experience for everyone. Please be patient and bear with us as we climb the learning curve together.
Famous First: Osher Members Invited to Audit CMU Music Classes

In a first for Osher at CMU, a few university courses were offered to our members. Professor Stephen Schultz invited Osher members to audit two Fall 2012 classes: one on Mahler and one on the Beatles. Joe and Rosemarie Shirk attended the class on Mahler, and Joe found it very interesting.

The classes are offered again for Fall 2013. A limited number of Osher students will be able to audit. Professor Schultz stipulates that those who sign up come to all 15 classes, but Osher students are exempt from the written and oral work required of the CMU students. If you join the class on Mahler or the class on the Beatles, It’s All Talk would like to hear from you. Reach us at itsalltalkcmu@gmail.com.

Evening Lectures

Michael Driver, Lecture Committee chair, applauds Dr. Edward Rubin after his March 12 talk on “Clean Coal: Oxymoron or Bridge to Sustainability.”

On May 21 Michael Bikerman lectured on “Disasters—Natural and Man Made.” An emeritus professor of geography at the University of Pittsburgh, he discussed examples such as volcanoes, tsunamis, and the Costa Concordia cruise ship.

At Annual Meeting: left, in Phipps Conservatory, Osher’s great photographer and videographer, Vice President Joe Shirk (who took the other photos on this page). Below, Osher staff at the lunch before the business meeting: from left, Lyn Decker, registrar/manager; Chris Dashti, assistant to the registrar; Kalyani Kedarnath, administrative assistant.
Help Wanted: Day Trip Chair

Each year we offer members several day-long bus trips to the tri-state area. Roz Sherman has organized our Day Trips for several years and is looking to transition by the end of the year. If you have taken any of these wonderful trips or would like to participate in the planning, organizing, and execution of similar adventures, please contact the office to discuss.

More hands make less work. We would also consider creating a committee that would plan a year’s worth of trips and ask that each committee member be in charge of one trip/year. Training and office support will be provided. If you have an adventurous spirit and good organizational skills, come help us continue these successful events beyond the classroom!

Contact Lyn Decker at 412 268-7489 or ldecker@andrew.cmu.edu