Osher Officers Discuss Lifelong Learning and Technology With CMU President Suresh

“Is it K-grave or K-gray? It could be either.” Osher President Jan Davis asked this of Carnegie Mellon University President Subra Suresh when she, Osher Vice President Joe Shirk, and Secretary Gloriana St. Clair met with Dr. Suresh on March 4.

“It is K-grave or all the way to the end,” responded President Suresh, who uses this phrase when he talks about the importance of learning in the Simon Initiative, a broad set of projects about technology for education (www.cmu.edu/simon). He wants our Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at CMU to work with the Simon Initiative to make sure that appropriate technologies are enhancing the learning experience for all ages of students.

Davis, Shirk, and St. Clair had shaped their discussion about our organization and its history around three contributions we make to the university:

- Modeling lifelong learning for current students by our presence on campus
- Providing Carnegie Mellon University’s primary lifelong learning program
- Creating pleasurable interactions between faculty and students

The three Osher members covered the history and current state of the organization. President Suresh was particularly interested in how Osher can continue to contribute to the university’s mission.

Annual Meeting Reviews Active Year, Installs New Officers

Osher’s Annual Meeting on April 23 inaugurated our 23rd year of lifelong learning at CMU. The event, held in the Rangos Room at the University Center on campus, began with a tasty buffet lunch and concluded with a lively and spirited performance by Alan Stanford, the producing artistic director of Pittsburgh’s PICT Classic Theatre.

Before the business meeting, we were treated to a beautiful video presentation, produced by Joe Shirk, highlighting Osher activities and events of the past year. It certainly whet our appetites for what’s to come.

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From The President

By Joe Shirk

As you can imagine, being elected president of your Osher at Carnegie Mellon University is one of the highlights of my life. Not only is it an honor to be elected to this office, but also to be held at the same level as the 13 esteemed predecessors who have held this office before me is in itself an honor.

The Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Carnegie Mellon University, like the university itself, is viewed as one of the premier institutes of its kind. To be a member alone is a privilege—to be entrusted with a leadership role is beyond a privilege.

I view my role as perhaps that of a symphony conductor, coordinating a group of talented individuals in accomplishing a mutually satisfying goal of providing social and educational opportunities to a diversified group of intellectually stimulated older adults.

As I envision my primary goals for the coming year, I place at the top of my list obtaining increased involvement by members taking leadership roles in the various committees. This would ensure that we have more diversity in our program and help us meet the needs of a wider audience of our members.

Some thoughts on ways of meeting this goal are to perhaps explore the addition of “interest groups” to our program. Some possible examples might be a hiking/walking group, a biking group, book clubs, dining clubs, a bridge group, and dance clubs. The groups would be self-governing—Osher would provide only a forum to notify those interested of the activities. If you would be interested in starting or joining such a group, please let the Osher office know at 412 268-7489, and we will be glad to help with the startup.

Another idea I would like to explore is the formation of new committees to meet several current needs. The first that I envision would be a marketing committee—not to market in order to obtain new members, but to market to our current members and to other OLLIs throughout the country. It would be helpful if a group of members could document our activities by photography and videography and then turn events into web pages to add to our Facebook pages so that other members could become aware of happenings here at CMU. These efforts would enhance our web page and our newsletter and could be used to provide the national Osher Lifelong Learning Institute with our activities and accomplishments. Again, if you feel that you can make a contribution in such an effort, please let the office know.

Any ideas you may have to improve our organization are always welcome. I can be reached by email at JosShirk@gmail.com. All suggestions will receive a response. I am looking forward to hearing from anyone with constructive ideas.

At Annual Meeting: from top, Helen-Faye Rosenblum with Alan Stanford; Rita Zecher, Sue Gibbon, and Anna Estop; tables decorated by Chelsea Prestia, our staff administrative assistant.
An Osher Class to Blog About

Ruthe Karlin, a student in the course “Artists and Activists Choose Pittsburgh,” sent this blog posting about the course to the study leader, Leslie Golomb.

Art and An Osher class

I am from a crowded place where siren songs blast holes in the steady drone of traffic.
I see tall buildings and blue water and smell bread and flowers as I walk
and sometimes unpleasant perfume on fashionable women who walk past me.
I would like to taste the lilacs and touch the passing dogs and cats
But never come close to the lovely ladies.

I am rather pleased with this first attempt at poetry. It was inspired by a wonderful Osher class I took last month at Carnegie Mellon. It was called “Artists as Activists Choose Pittsburgh” and facilitated by Leslie Golomb, who presented ideas about activist art and in three subsequent weeks brought in other artists who created activist work. In the final class Amanda Gross, a fiber artist, asked us to tell her something about ourselves using the following:
I am from… sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch

This is only a small part of what I enjoyed in the class. To explain, I have to make a small digression. Some weeks ago I went to the Carnegie Museum of Art to a space they called “The Sandbox” filled with “photo books” that are actually for sale. I looked at all of the books and understood very little of what I was seeing. The curator/salesperson kept asking me if I had questions. I think slowly of late, and couldn’t even begin to frame my questions. The books contained photos that may or may not have been taken by their author/editor/curator and meant nothing to me. She showed me a book she had compiled, telling me the photos were “vernacular.” That meant they were taken from a collection, made by someone else, over a period of 25 years. She got permission from the owner to put them in “her book,” which was bound professionally. I told her I made books and she gave me a look that said ‘aren’t you a sweet, little old lady.’ So, I am an old lady, not necessarily sweet, and I was confused. All of this was absolutely meaningless to me.

Back to the class: four weeks of food for thought about meaningful art, often beautiful, certainly significant. My artist friends are not here in Pittsburgh and I don’t often have a chance to participate in this kind of stimulating conversation. In the first class, Leslie, who is a print maker, talked about artists as activists and also about her own work, which has dealt with feminism and slavery amongst other themes and ideas.

In the second class, Ben Sota, the founder of the Zany Umbrella Circus, talked about his passion for circus and how his presentations in other countries have generated thoughts about freedom in his audience.

Bec Young, a printmaker and fiber artist, talked to us in the third class. In addition to doing volunteer work in her community her prints deal with activist themes. Quoting from her artist statement: “…seek to give voice to stories that remain unheard with work that is beautiful and powerful.”

Amanda Gross, who inspired my poetry, showed us her beautiful work and talked to us about her huge community organizing project called knit the bridge, which brought people together from all over Pittsburgh. This last class tied together all of the ideas about making meaningful, beautiful art and banished the despair I felt in the Sandbox.

The posting is at http://ruthekarlin.wordpress.com/2014/06/23/art-and-an-osopher-class/art
Annual Meeting Reviews Active Year, Installs New Officers

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appetites for upcoming Osher courses and special events.

At the business meeting President Jan Davis highlighted many achievements noted in the reports of various committees:

- 310 new members
- Implementation and use of online registration
- New catalog design
- New member orientation
- Osher students participating in some CMU music classes
- 25% of members volunteering

There were many thank-yous. Jan Davis recognized outgoing board members Betsy Martin, Roz Treger, Sally Cohen, and Susan Parker. Thanking former presidents for meeting with her during the year, Jan recognized Helen-Faye Rosenblum, Julian Eligator, Rita Zecher, and Joe Scorpion, who were at the meeting. Sylvia Sachs and Sally Cohen were given special applause and gifts for their years of work as Curriculum Committee chair.

Rhoda Eligator, Nominating Committee chair, presented the slate for election: officers Joe Shirk, president; Jayne Keffer, vice-president; Gloriana St. Clair, secretary; and Carl Hohnbaum, treasurer; and board members Gary Bates, John Olmsted, and Ruth Reidbord. No nominations were proposed from the floor, and the slate was accepted by acclamation.

Following the business meeting, the members were treated to a lively and amusing performance by Alan Stanford, who was introduced by Helen-Faye Rosenblum. With the wit and energy that Osher members remembered from his remarkable evening lecture last year, Stanford talked about theater in general, his PICT theater in particular, and culminated with a spirited performance showcasing Oscar Wilde.

Rosalyn Treger

CMU Classes Available Online

How would you like to take a full-length CMU class online, free of charge? You can choose from any of 21 different classes in several different subject areas, including the physical and biological sciences, foreign languages, psychology, computing, probability and statistics, and various other topics. These are non-credit offerings. Take them at your own speed, for your own information.

Of course, CMU is not the only university offering online instruction these days, but there is a quality factor involved here. Besides, as Osher members, we’re a part of the CMU community, and it’s nice to be able to take advantage of other CMU programs outside of Osher.

For more information, fire up your favorite browser and go to Oli.cmu.edu. Then click on Learn with OLI/See Our Open + Free Courses. (By the way, OLI stands for Online Learning Initiative, not Osher Lifelong Learning Institute.)

Byron Gottfried, Curriculum Committee chair
Kamlet Shares His Vision of the Future Of Education

Using his own experience with Carnegie Learning and Carnegie Innovations, Mark S. Kamlet, then-CMU provost and executive vice president, spoke about the future economics and technology of higher education for an Osher audience on Tuesday, April 8, in McConomy Hall.

Kamlet explained that as tuitions increase, so does the popularity of MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) such as edX (www.edx.org) from MIT and Harvard, Coursera (with 108 partner universities), and Udacity (now a for-profit company that charges a fee for taking end-of-course tests). Open access, online education, sometimes free, sometimes with fees, provides unlimited participation for students worldwide. MOOCs provide captured quality lectures anytime, anywhere.

But MOOCs have weaknesses, Kamlet warned. There’s no business model for free “help desks” and “updates.” The low level of student interaction may account for why 100,000 students sign up, but only 1,000 complete these courses. The lack of active learning limits long-term retention. Without mentoring or small-class environments, MOOCs are impersonal. Kamlet described free online courses as “material thrown against the wall without evaluation, testing, or scientific assessment.”

Kamlet assured his audience that Carnegie Mellon, an innovation center of adaptive learning, focuses on absorption of material, not its transmission, and the “sciences of learning,” such as cognitive science, brain sciences, artificial intelligence, and machine learning.

Named to honor the work of the late Nobel Laureate and CMU Professor Herbert Simon, the faculty-led Simon Initiative will harness CMU’s decades of learning data and research. As part of the initiative, CMU will provide open access to this bank of educational technology data about how people learn and how effective learning software can be designed and deployed. The Simon Initiative Data Lab should become the largest source of empirical learning data where student and faculty alike can deposit and share their data.

Kamlet also made the Osher audience aware of the Global Learning Center, formed this past year. He predicted the GLC to become the best-practices resource for individuals, institutions, and organizations seeking to improve learning outcomes for all.

CMU has called on experts from academia, industry, and foundations to form the Global Learning Council. Leaders from the global academic, industrial, and nonprofit sectors, such as Google, Microsoft, and Gates Foundations, will improve communication and coordination, create standards, ethics, protocols, and practices that promote collaboration, increase the understanding of the role of technology in learning, and share strategies for action.

The Eberly Center, a bridge between learning research and teaching practice at CMU, works to build a community of innovative educators who create new modes of learning for their students and use data for improvement.

Kamlet mentioned a variety of ways that CMU students use online learning. From 30 different online courses offered to all university students, CMU freshmen must take at least one OLI (open-learning initiative) course. In blended-learning models, traditional classes can include an online interactive component. Students interact with user-friendly computers and practice active learning concepts over and over until they know and absorb material. Feedback is customized for students’ personalities and learning styles. There is evaluation, scientific testing, and empirical assessment.

A lively Q and A session provided a final interactive learning experience for the Osher audience.

Leslie Evans
A GLIMPSE INSIDE...

THE SHORT OF IT

“Without thinking, I made two cups.”
Could this possibly qualify as a short story? To my amazement that’s one of many things I’ve learned in Helen-Faye Rosenblum’s Short Story classes. Who would realize that in those six words are contained a setting, character, plot, and turning point, some of the necessary requisites?

In two back-to-back classes Helen-Faye guides her classes through the tight complexity of contemporary stories, peeling layer by layer until they are laid bare. “Why did you make us read this?” was the frequent lament of the late Saya Feldman. By the end of the two-hour session, she and we usually left enlightened and pleased.

Starting in the winter of 1993, when Osher (then A.L.L.) offered only four classes, and every year since, Helen-Faye figures she has covered about 800 stories, two per-class during six-week segments. Although not trained as a teacher, she was a published novelist and book reviewer when she started. She draws her material from the New Yorker, short-story collections, and literary journals and points with pride to the short story definitely coming into its own with the awarding this year of the Nobel Prize for literature to Canadian author Alice Munro, whose skill in compressing a world into relatively few pages has been finally accepted by literary snobs as a valid genre.

The process of careful parsing and thoughtful analysis is rare in these days of texting and tweets, but Helen-Faye finds Osher students “fearless about reading,” and eager to plunge. When she arrives 15 minutes early for her one o’clock class, the room is already mostly filled. And with people already in their “usual” seats actively engaged in discussion. She notes that “elder” students sometimes nod off, but when they open their eyes, they are right in tune with the discussion.

With a waiting list of about 40 and with so many repeaters, Helen-Faye always leaves room for newcomers.

What gives her particular pleasure is when, years later, a former student will approach her saying, “I’ve been thinking about that story we discussed.”

Joan Morse Gordon
OUR Osher CLASSROOMS…

Chances are, when exposed to contemporary classical music, it’s some of you and me who balk at hearing it. Well, according to Dr. Marilyn Taft Thomas in our class, “How to Listen to Contemporary Music,” we’ve been listening with 18th and 19th century ears.

Starting in the 11th century with the few notes Gregorian music provided, a wider range of notes in the 13th and 14th centuries, and further widening in the 18th and 19th centuries—think Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven—Dr. Thomas, who is professor of theory and composition in the Carnegie Mellon School of Music, stated that 20th century composers have moved forward to reflect the language of sounds of the times.

Dr. Thomas said that in addition to a receptive ear, we need to visualize what the composer is communicating. Visualizing in color also is part of learning new contemporary music. Herself a composer, she discussed the properties of sound: harmonic spectrum—timbre; frequency of pitch—high, low; amplitude—soft, medium, loud; duration—rhythmic. For example, the violin has strings which vibrate; the material of the instrument and the size of the aperture affect the frequency of pitch; amplitude has limits because of displacement by the vibration; and duration requires enough cycles to perceive the pitch and reverberation.

During this class we listened to music composed by Marilyn Taft Thomas played by five CMU School of Music students on the flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and piano. While listening, we saw on a large screen the visuals (Sonic Design) created by the live music. These visuals were produced by Graphic Tone, a group of students from CMU’s Entertainment Technology Center.

In experiencing contemporary music, Dr. Thomas told us to expect the melody to travel all over the place, expect sounds to be dissonant, and expect to hear sounds that we were not previously aware of. Contemporary music is expected to move forward.

I don't know about the other Osher students in the class, but since I'm now in the 21st century, I'm willing to give contemporary classical music a try.

Filomena Conti
Osher Leaders Meet with CMU President Suresh

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how technology might help with ongoing challenges such as the prospect list and the seasonal absences. He also looks forward to the time when he might have an opportunity to teach in our program.

Davis and Shirk had graciously allowed St. Clair to insert a three-minute sales pitch for her Olive project to preserve executable content (olivearchive.org). Dr. Suresh talked about his founding of the Global Research Council and his upcoming keynote speech for their meeting in Beijing. St. Clair noted that CMU is the main research group working on software preservation and that preserving software is essential both to the Simon Initiative and to the long-term preservation of scholarly publication and its attendant data sets.

President Suresh summarized the to-dos from the meeting:

- Under the umbrella of the Simon initiative, we need to think about the implications of technology for all of this K-grave learning.
- In the long haul, we all need to pull together globally to make sure that not just scientific information but all information is properly archived.
- For all kinds of learning and research, making sure that we are able to have long-term financial sustainability is critical.

Now that he knows who we are and what we do on campus, we expect that he will begin to seek our assistance in realizing his priorities. We definitely fit into his vision for learning all the way to the end.

Gloriana St. Clair

Osher Group Tours Consol Energy Center

In early April, close to 30 people gathered inside the Consol Energy Center for a tour of the Pittsburgh Penguins’ home. The tour, arranged by Luncheon Committee Chair Jayne Keffer and Co-chair Carole Wolsh, was absolutely delightful and very interesting. Our guide talked about spaces used by the Pens and by the visiting teams, about the use of the venue for concerts, and about the block of seats off Mario Lemieux’s Suite 66.

We walked around inside Suite 66 and then actually sat in the seats, which are to the right of the Pens’ bench (as you face the ice). We saw the door to the Pens’ locker room, but it was off limits to us. Our guide was fantastic, telling us many things about the Center and answering many questions—so many, in fact, that the tour went longer than originally planned. California University leased a suite, and the Lexus Club had a large suite, as did a number of other businesses in Pittsburgh.

We saw many displays of early hockey history in Pittsburgh, for example, Duquesne Gardens. The walls were decorated with portraits of current and past players. There was even an area where school teams were recognized.

The architecture, the memorabilia, and the pictures of our favorite players made for a fun-filled event, after which we had a delicious lunch at TGI Fridays nearby.

Susan Parker
Osher Leaders Share Ideas at National Conference

by Joe Shirk

Every 18 months the Osher Lifelong Learning Institutes hold a national conference. This year it was held April 28-30, soon after our own annual meeting, at the Park Hyatt Aviara Resort, Carlsbad, CA. Representatives from the 117 individual OLLIs gathered to share ideas and best practices and to exchange ideas to improve their individual organizations. Lyn Decker, our manager/registrar, and I represented Osher at CMU.

The conference was packed with meetings that discussed challenges common to all organizations: preparing strategic plans, raising funds, surveying members’ needs, planning administrators’ workshops, dealing with health issues of older adults, encouraging volunteer leadership, partnering with community groups, and many others.

In addition, lunch and coffee breaks offered opportunities to meet individually with leaders from other OLLIs and to share experiences about meeting challenges and developing new ideas in their groups back home.

Not only were we able to come back with new ideas to consider, such as the development of “interest group” activities (for example, hiking, biking, book clubs, dance, etc.) that are self-led under the local OLLI; group-community partnerships such as vegetable gardening in city property and the distribution of produce to soup kitchens; transformative education projects with art commissions, museums, libraries, and so forth.

We discovered that the National Resource Center has extensive expertise and resources in developing member surveys used to develop and improve services and to evaluate members’ satisfaction with the program and current offerings.

From a small survey of eight Osher programs, the following trends were noted:

- The highest number of members are in the 65-69 age range, followed by the 70-74 age range.
- Approximately 2/3 of the members are women.
- Over 50% completed a graduate program, and 86% graduated from college.
- iPads and Facebook use is over 60% for members aged 50-54, decreasing to 10% in those aged 90 and above.
- Of those between 70-74, 15% are working full time, part time, or are looking for work.
- The most popular topics (in order) were: History, Fine Arts, Current Affairs, Literature, Religion/Philosophy, and Health/Wellness.

During the presentations, it was noted that older members are increasing their use of Facebook to keep up with grandchildren—opening up the possibility of using Facebook to communicate OLLI’s current events with members.

In a highlight of the conference, Osher at CMU teamed up with the National Resource Center and gave a standing-room only presentation on how we use data in making decisions that impact our curriculum and improve our program. The presentation was well received by the audience, who asked many questions.

In general, the conference was a very positive experience—providing new ideas for our OLLI to ponder and strengthening our ties with other OLLIs as well as with the National Resource Center. We hope that we will be able to incorporate many new ideas and best practices into our program here at Carnegie Mellon.

Joe Shirk

Lyn Decker and Joe Shirk at the podium giving their presentation about using data for decision making in planning our Osher program to the OLLI National Conference in April
Study Leader Assistants: The Backbones of Osher At CMU

Study leader assistants, otherwise known as SLAs, provide support and assistance to the study leaders, class participants, the office, and the Curriculum Committee. Because of the support of our many dedicated study leader assistants, Osher at CMU has evolved into a prime continuing education program. It is a major program that is envied.

The major duties of the SLA are to make announcements, track attendance, distribute and collect evaluation forms, and act as the communicator between the classroom and the office. It is an important job, and we are grateful that we are able to secure an SLA for just about every course taught each term.

An often-asked question is “Why do we need to take attendance— isn’t it a bit juvenile? We are all adults.” The response is two-fold: 1) Taking attendance at each class provides the office and the organization with a method of insuring that only registered participants attend, and 2) taking attendance ensures a way to refill seats in the courses that have waiting lists. Unfortunately, too often people make other plans and forget to drop courses they have signed up for. Without the diligent SLA, we at the office often wouldn’t know about the drops, and members on the waiting list would not have the chance to fill the openings.

Another frequent question is “What happens to the evaluation forms we complete?” The forms are collected and summarized by a committee, and the results are then shared with the study leader, who is often very anxious to get the results of the evaluations.

Study leaders use the comments to modify their teaching methods or course contents in future courses. The Curriculum Committee uses the evaluations to determine whether a course should be rerun or whether a study leader should be invited to teach again. If evaluation forms are not turned in, both the Curriculum Committee and the study leaders are disappointed.

Because their tasks are important, we will recognize a study leader assistant every other week in the Weekly Essentials emailed newsletter. In conclusion, we want to thank all of you who have ever served as a study leader assistant. This organization would not be the organization it is without each and every one of you. Look forward to seeing our SLAs highlighted.

Thank you!

Lyn Decker, Registrar/Manager

SAVE THE DATE

Osher Member Picnic
Plan to join us Monday, August 25, 2014 from 5-8 pm for a picnic. Details to follow.
Meeting with Our Guardian Angel

By Gloriana St. Clair

In March, Osher President Jan Davis, Vice President Joe Shirk, and I, as Osher secretary and university liaison, met with our guardian angel—Provost Mark Kamlet, who has been actively on duty on behalf of our Osher Institute at Carnegie Mellon since our founding (as A.L.L.) by Gretchen Lankford and Steve Calvert. As the dean of the Heinz School, he took particular pride in Gretchen’s accomplishments and was eager to support the efforts to provide lifelong learning for CMU alums and the community. And as executive vice president he continued to help us accomplish our mission.

During our meeting we discussed Osher’s accomplishments and needs, for example, for more space, as our program expands. We gave him the brochure created for President Suresh and reviewed what we do for CMU—offer lifelong learning courses as a standalone non-profit, model lifelong learning for CMU’s other students, and provide a superb environment for teacher-student interaction.

Mark continues to be very pleased with our focus on quality, our handling of growth issues, and our financial solvency. At the end of June, he returned to his faculty position in Social and Decision Science. We will be glad to have him continue as an advocate for and participant in lifelong learning.

Let’s Help CMU’s Food Drive Again

Carnegie Mellon University will launch its 21st annual Food Drive on November 3, continuing through November 14. This is one of the largest private food drives in the area. Last year, a total of 8,284 pounds of food items and $7,558.90 in cash was contributed to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. Over the past several years, our Osher program has participated in the drive, with members generously donating non-perishable food items, paper products, toiletries, as well as cash.

This coming November, members may drop off their donations at three collection sites: the Osher office in the basement of the Hunt Library and classrooms 4707 and 4708 in Wean Hall. Cardboard cartons will be set up for collection at these sites. Watch for notices! Further, on November 5, members can participate in the One Day-One Can drive by dropping off donations at the University Center and receive a raffle ticket for a prize drawing.

Hopefully, with the continuing help of our Osher members, the university can exceed last year’s totals. Let’s help make the 21st annual food drive the best ever!

Joe Scorpion
Published once per trimester for members of Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at Carnegie Mellon

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